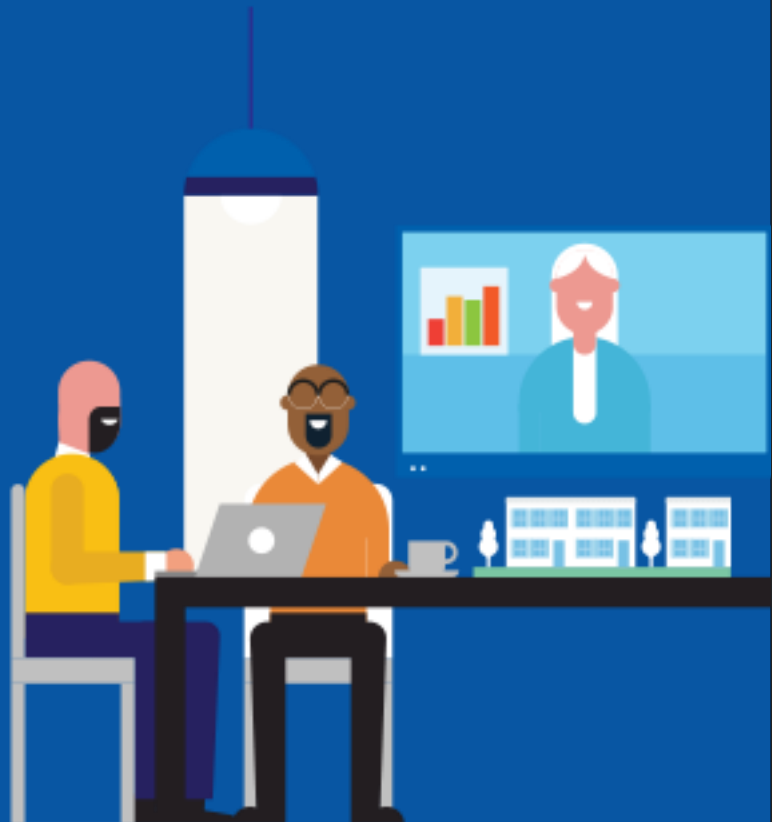


# Allocations and Lettings, and Strategic Tenancy Policy Review

Final Report

June 2021



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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Scope**

- 1.1 Emerging from the Covid pandemic, Gateshead Council is seeking to reshape its housing services to better align with and support delivery of its *Everybody Thrives* objectives, against a backdrop of significant local challenges and with limited resources. To support this re-alignment and as part of a strategic review of housing services provision, Campbell Tickell (CT) has been commissioned to undertake an assessment and review of Gateshead's:
- Allocations and Lettings policy and supporting processes, including a review of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme delivered through the Tyne and Wear Homes Partnership;
  - Strategic Tenancy Policy with a view to developing a new, broader tenancy strategy in collaboration with local strategic housing partners.
- 1.2 The outcomes sought from the review are a set of recommendations for change that ensure regulatory and statutory compliance, address local challenges and improve customer experience, whilst offering value-for money, particularly through innovation and digital transformation, in-line with sector best practice.

### **Context**

- 1.3 The Gateshead operating environment is challenging, and new thinking is needed to successfully address:
- Tackling unsustainable levels of demand for critical services, whilst supporting a significant number of vulnerable residents, often with multiple complex needs;
  - Meeting the need for low-cost homes and specialist accommodation provision, whilst investing in the current stock and a zero-carbon future;
  - Operating within the significant financial constraints resulting from a decade of austerity, the ongoing impact of Covid and the need to make significant annual savings to ensure the sustainability of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA);
  - The reframing and reintegration of the housing service around its core strengths to ensure compliance, improve the quality-of-service delivery and outcomes, and to realise efficiency savings;
  - Cohesion with commissioners and registered providers in a broader and more holistic housing solution.
- 1.4 Gateshead recognises that to best meet future needs within the means available, coordinated interventions are needed at civic, service and community levels, that shape housing provision, maximise the impact of core services, and that promote greater self-reliance and resilience within individuals and communities.

### **Where does Gateshead want to be in three years?**

- 1.5 The clear ambition of Gateshead stakeholders is to create a housing-centred model to underpin the *Thrive Agenda*, that will attract people to live in Gateshead and for every

resident to have access to a marketplace of affordable, high quality homes and accommodation solutions, closely matched to demand and support needs. Where early interventions and coordinated support pathways better enable those most in need.

- 1.6 To achieve this holistic approach, stand-alone services must be integrated, capability gaps closed, and operations streamlined to maximise the impact of the limited resources available. A *whole system* response centred around the provision of housing but encompassing support commissioners, registered providers, and private landlords, will develop into a Gateshead Housing Model, with:

- Policies and processes focused on delivering solely to meet the needs of Gateshead;
- A consolidated pool of housing (both general needs and specialist provision), modelled to meet future demand and need, and managed through a refreshed Allocations policy that will ensure the right home or accommodation solution is matched with those most in need or to a specific need;
- A digitally enabled *Marketplace* that will allow anyone with a housing need to explore their options within Gateshead, with a straightforward universal access pathway for all available solutions;
- A coordinated approach to assessing housing and support needs, commissioning and allocating solutions, with an open approach to sharing case information, that enables effective oversight of an individual as they their journey through Gateshead's services;
- Formalised partnership working steered through a new Strategic Tenancy policy, geared to improving the quality of homes provided in Gateshead and the security of tenure, in better absorbing demand whilst creating dynamic but well-balanced communities;
- Single Allocation Scheme (policy) within which registered providers and Gateshead work collaboratively to deliver a housing service to the community.

### **Baseline Assessment**

- 1.7 An assessment of the current policy framework and service model service the against the target service model outlined above reveals a number of significant gaps:

- Whilst Gateshead has a strong strategic vision, there are significant gaps in supporting strategies and there is no shared insight or understanding of the true nature of housing need, the shape of future demand and consequently supply priorities;
- Current policies are dated and a compliance risk. They no longer reflect the needs of Gateshead or prioritise support for the most vulnerable. They give rise to high levels of exceptions and workarounds, compounded by incomplete audit trails and casework;
- Service offers, access pathways and customer journeys through the service are unclear and fragmented, and don't provide coherent plans of support;
- The alignment of the void management process with that of allocations, lettings and tenancy management to provide effective delivery of an end-to-end process;

- The integrated delivery of lettings, voids and housing management processes is challenging, being delivered across two partially interfacing systems, impacting delivery quality, outcomes and efficiency;
- Based on track record, the ability of the Tyne and Wear Homes partnership to deliver exactly what Gateshead needs moving forward is limited, its intended direction of travel will exacerbate rather than alleviate the problems faced by Gateshead;
- New tenants are not adequately supported in establishing their tenancies, and lettings policy and practice is contributing to the growth of poorly balanced communities, with increased social issues, resulting in a perceived fall in communal ownership and pride;
- Service are siloed and delivery fragmented, with too many specialist support areas and roles, with no end-to-end oversight, resulting in a lack of ownership, momentum and innovation in tackling longstanding problems such as re-letting empty homes;

1.8 However, Gateshead is also starting from a position of relative strength in respect of:

- New governance and partner engagement arrangements will help build insight into what Gateshead needs and how to shape it;
- The Northgate platform is state-of the art and well implemented, it also has the functionality to deliver a *best-in-class* housing solution for Gateshead, including CBL, and extended self-service capability for both customers and partners, with a relatively modest level of additional investment;
- The opportunity to fundamentally restructure the service presented by the closure of the ALMO will enable a step-change in customer focus, service quality, efficiency and assurance, in turn opening-up innovative cross-working opportunities across Gateshead;
- Day-to-day working relationships with commissioners throughout the Council and with registered providers are good, and there are positive examples of innovative partnership working examples, however there is no formal partnership working framework in place.

### ***Delivering the Gateshead Housing Model***

1.9 Now is the moment to plan and launch a far-reaching and innovative housing offer for Gateshead, supported by a whole-system approach and integrated housing solution, delivered in full partnership with commissioners, registered providers and private landlords. A prioritised Roadmap is proposed:

1.10 **By April 2022:**

- Complete a systematic re-drafting of the Allocations and Strategic Tenancy policies, based on the findings of this report, aligned with parallel reviews of homelessness and specialist housing solutions, to create a holistic and sustainable housing offer;
- Map the provision of housing and related support solutions across Gateshead from which to develop a universal access pathway, coordinated housing and support needs assessments around an individual or family, and shared oversight of their delivery;

- Develop a business case for withdrawal from the TWH partnership, creating a Gateshead CBL scheme, with RPs as full partners, operating within a Common Housing Register;
- Develop a blueprint for the full implementation and reengineering of processes within Northgate, to deliver compliance assurance and digitally driven efficiency.

**1.11 By March 2023:**

- Launch a digital a *Housing Marketplace* through which all Gateshead residents can resolve their housing needs;
- Develop partnership arrangements with RPs and commissioners that will deliver seamless support solutions.

**1.12 By March 2024+:**

- Extend the *Housing Marketplace* offer across the private rental sector, in conjunction with formalised partnership working;
- Deliver specialist and move-on accommodation solutions that provide a stepping-stone and maximises independence.

1.13 Consultation with stakeholders indicates a broad level of commitment to working within formalised partnership arrangements, to deliver shared aims and in maximising the effectiveness of housing and support solutions available to Gateshead residents.

## 2. SCOPE AND APPROACH

### *Scope*

- 2.1 As part of a strategic review of housing services, Gateshead Council has commissioned Campbell Tickell (CT) to undertake an external assessment and review of its:
- Allocations and Lettings Policy and supporting processes, including a review of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, delivered through the Tyne and Wear Homes partnership;
  - Strategic Tenancy Policy, to develop a new, broader tenancy strategy in collaboration with local strategic housing partners.
- 2.2 The outcomes sought from the review are a set of recommendations for change that ensure regulatory and statutory compliance, address local challenges and improve customer experience, whilst offering value-for money, particularly through innovation and digital transformation, in-line with sector best practice. Specifically to provide:
- Support, advice and guidance in developing a new *Allocations Policy*, with focused guidance regarding areas such as Homelessness, Armed Forces and Mental Health;
  - Support, advice and guidance in developing a new *Strategic Tenancy Policy*, with focused guidance regarding areas such as the responsibilities of external providers i.e. nominations.

### *Approach*

- 2.3 CT has undertaken a systematic review of the current policy framework and operating model, through:
- A desktop review of Gateshead strategies, policies, plans and performance metrics;
  - A review of customer access and customer journeys, as-is processes, supporting business systems and management oversight, conducted through workshops with frontline staff;
  - Stakeholder consultation, with Members, senior manager and operational managers, Registered Providers (RP) and commissioning partners;
  - A digital survey of recent service users.

### *Report Structure*

- 2.4 The resulting report is structured into the following sections:

**Strategic and Operating Context:** A review of the strategic priorities and local challenges that shape policy and operational delivery;

**Defining a Housing Model for Gateshead:** Setting out a *whole system* approach for creating a policy and delivery framework within a target *Gateshead Housing Model*;

**Baseline Assessment:** A detailed assessment of the current policy framework and operational practice against a best practice target operating model for Gateshead;

**Delivering a Housing Model for Gateshead:** A prioritised plan outlining the delivery steps of a Gateshead Housing Model;

**Recommendations and Conclusions:** A summary of the review and key actions proposed.

### 3. STRATEGIC AND OPERATING CONTEXT

- 3.1 This section considers the alignment between Gateshead's overarching strategic objectives and the characteristics and challenges of the local operating environment, with respect to shaping and delivering applicable, high quality and affordable housing solutions for all.

#### ***Making Gateshead Thrive***

- 3.2 The strategic vision for Gateshead – *A Place Where Everyone Thrives* is targeted at reducing inequality and in better enabling the 50% of households recognised as 'just coping' or being in a vulnerable situations. However, operating with limited resources and with increasingly unsustainable levels of demand for and expectations of services, it is recognised that Gateshead cannot continue to offer and deliver services in the way they have been.
- 3.3 Moving forward, the role of the Council will increasingly become that of a facilitator, partner and co-producer, working to ensure that prevention and early intervention strategies reduce the level of demand and dependency on critical services, and the need for intensive, high-cost specialist interventions.

#### ***A Housing Centred Approach***

- 3.4 Access to affordable, high quality housing solutions is recognised as a catalyst in achieving Gateshead's strategic aims of driving economic regrowth, improving health and wellbeing, and raising the level of educational attainment. To achieve this, The *Gateshead Housing Strategy (2019-2030)* is focused on preventing and tackling the root causes of homelessness, reducing social and financial exclusion, and building better neighbourhoods and environments for future generations. Specifically through:
- 3.5 **Housing Supply:** Ensuring the right mix of housing (tenure and type) in the right location, whilst making best use of existing and assets, and supplying 11,000 new homes by 2030;
- 3.6 **Housing Standards:** Driving-up housing standards across Gateshead, to ensure homes are safe and healthy, well-managed and fit for the future, and sustainable, capable of reducing inequality in healthy life expectancy and to ensure housing market stability;
- 3.7 **Support:** Ensuring appropriate and effective housing related support is available to prevent homelessness, sustain tenancies, and to promote lifelong independence and wellbeing.

#### ***A New Vision for the Housing Service***

- 3.8 Following a review of the housing delivery model and the tenant endorsed decision to re-integrate housing services delivered by The Gateshead Housing Company (TGHC), back into the Council, a *New Vision for Housing Services in Gateshead (2020)* has been agreed, to create a joined-up, tenure-blind housing service, that has a strong identity within the Council and will be the catalyst for securing wider change as an effective strategic enabling force.

#### ***Strengthened Oversight***

- 3.9 In response to a breach of the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Home Standard, an increasingly robust regulatory regime, and the restructuring of the housing service, Gateshead



has strengthened and broadened the governance and oversight structure for housing, through a new formal advisory committee and two new informal partnership groups:

**Strategic Housing Board:** To oversee housing strategy, homelessness, independent living and residential growth. It will facilitate tenant-led scrutiny and ensure high levels of assurance;

**Housing Providers Partnership:** To seek partnership commitments in realising strategic objectives and identify opportunities for greater service collaboration and resource pooling;

**Private Landlords Forum:** To build positive relationships with private landlords.

### ***Financial Imperative***

- 3.10 Gateshead has operated under intense financial pressure for the last decade, with a reduction in spending of £170m and a headcount reduction of 2,000 employees, the ongoing financial impact of Covid will result in a financial shortfall of £58m over the next five years. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan projects that the minimum allowable balance of £3m will be breached by 2025/26, and that if left unchecked will result in deficit balance of £924m by 2050. However, annual savings of £2.4m defined as part of returning the service to the Council, which if delivered in full will restore an HRA balance of £144m by 2050.
- 3.11 To deliver enduring financial stability, a fundamental shift in the balance of the relationship between Gateshead and its residents is needed, reflected in the size and shape of the service offer, and complemented by a step-change in service efficiency and innovation. In short, a *whole system* approach is required.

### ***The local operating environment***

- 3.12 The *Housing* and *Health and Wellbeing* strategies highlight a significant level of vulnerability within Gateshead the local factors that shape the provision of services, with 40% of residents in vulnerable, or very vulnerable situation, with a further 29% just coping:
- 3,000 people needed support and advice to prevent or deal with homelessness in 2019, and 75% of people accessing temporary accommodation have multiple needs, relating to mental health, drug or alcohol dependency or offending;
  - Domestic abuse and sexual exploitation are becoming increasingly common occurrences;
  - Families with complex intergenerational needs are becoming increasingly prevalent, with needs often stemming from unresolved childhood trauma ;
  - 3,800 adults live with a learning disability and by 2035, 1,000 will be aged over 65;
  - Comparatively low and unsecure levels of income, and potentially long periods of worklessness impact financial stability (68% of Council tenants are in receipt of benefits);
  - 22,000 people provide unpaid care, including 1,680 Young Carers (aged under 25).
- 3.13 Gateshead recognises that to meet future needs, interventions are needed at civic, service and community levels, that shape housing provision, maximise the impact of core services, and that promote self-reliance and increases the resilience of individuals and communities.

**Gateshead Housing Market**

- 3.14 Gateshead has a total housing stock of approximately 94,400 homes, with a higher percentage of social-rental sector homes (27%) and a lower percentage of owner-occupied homes (50%) than either the regional or national average:

**Social-rented Sector:** Comprising the Council's 19,300 homes and 6,200 RP homes. The stock of lettable social homes is being eroded by Right-to-Buy sales and a high level of void homes, off-set by a modest growth in Registered Provider (RP) stock, particular in specialist housing;

**Private-rented Sector:** Approximately 23% of homes (22,000) are in the private-rented sector (PRS), which has seen significant growth over the past two decades (13% in 2011), driven by buy-to-let investment and a decline in home ownership affordability. These homes tend to be older properties, which suffer disproportionately higher levels of disrepair, with lower levels of energy efficiency, and management standards. They also house a high proportion of Gateshead's most vulnerable residents.

**Owner-occupation:** Home ownership has fallen by almost 10 percentage points since 2011, reflecting a fall in household income driven by reduced employment security.

- 3.15 The *Local Plan* and *Market Position Statement* identify the need to provide approximately 11,000 new homes by 2030, to reflect projected changes in population and household dynamics, to meet support needs and enable healthy independent lives. Particularly:
- Family-sized homes;
  - A range of affordable and intermediate market housing;
  - Choice and supply of accessible and adaptable homes;
  - Greater choice to meet the needs of older people, including homes for retirement living with a mix of bungalow and high quality apartment provision;
  - Specialist housing to meet the requirements of specific groups, including older people, people with disabilities, children requiring care, young people leaving care, and people with mental ill-health and multiple and complex needs.
- 3.16 The prevailing market conditions faced by Gateshead in delivering additional homes are challenging. The cost of developing on brownfield land is high and there is significant competition from private sector developers and other local authorities in assembling schemes. Reconfiguration, redevelopment and regeneration will therefore be critical components in the delivery of the Gateshead supply strategy.
- 3.17 There is a significant level of under-occupation within the Gateshead stock, with an estimated 73% of home (64,000) being under-occupied (having at least one more room than the statutory standards require). Whilst lower than the national average, 6.2% of households are classified as overcrowded in terms of number of rooms in a home.
- 3.18 A large number of people live in non-secure accommodation or are sofa surfing. Hidden sharing is prevalent and a growing concern, particularly for single women, who are open to exploitation whilst living in inappropriate accommodation.

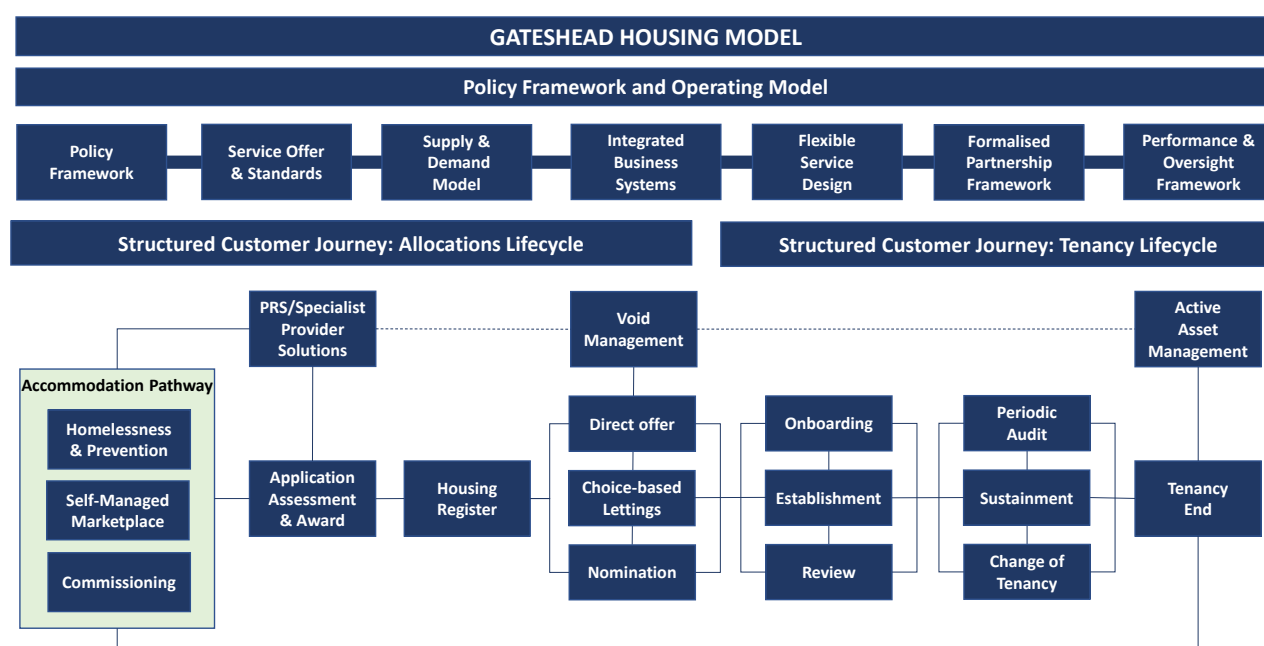
## 4. DEFINING A HOUSING MODEL FOR GATESHEAD

### *Where does Gateshead want to be in three years?*

- 4.1 The clear ambition of Gateshead stakeholders is to create a housing-centred model to underpin the *Thrive Agenda*, that will attract people to live in Gateshead and for every resident to have access to a marketplace of affordable, high quality homes and accommodation solutions, closely matched to demand and support needs. Where early interventions and coordinated support pathways better enable those most in need.
- 4.2 To achieve this holistic approach, stand-alone services must be integrated, capability gaps closed and operations streamlined to maximise the impact of the limited resources available. A *whole system* response centred around the provision of housing but encompassing support commissioners, registered providers, and private landlords, will develop into a Gateshead Housing Model.

### *Gateshead Housing Model*

- 4.3 The schematic below outlines a proposed Housing Model for Gateshead, that is highly innovative and can develop as a *best in class* exemplar of housing service delivery:



- 4.4 Key components of the proposed model are:

### *Policy Framework*

- 4.5 An integrated policy framework must ensure ongoing regulatory compliance, address local needs, raise standards and rapidly improve outcomes:

### *Allocations Policy*

- 4.6 An allocations policy must be clear and legally complaint, with fair and transparent assessment of customer circumstances, that optimises the allocation of available homes. It will:

- Improve the means by which local people gain access to social rented housing by providing a modern and easy to understand allocation system, which allows choice and is fair, transparent and accountable;
- Improve the way reduced preference is addressed under the terms of the legislation;
- Ensure the lettings service embraces equality and diversity by being open and fully accessible to all individuals and to provide support to customers where needed;
- Meet the legal obligations of Gateshead by providing appropriate priority to customers who fall within the Housing Act “reasonable preference” categories;
- Make the best use of the housing stock within the scheme and to increase the availability of move-on accommodation to prevent blockages in supported housing schemes;
- Reduce the use of housing stock as temporary accommodation for homeless applicants and to assist with prevention by making customers aware of their potential housing choices and the alternative options available e.g. private sector, low cost home ownership;
- Increase opportunities for tenant mobility between the region and other areas of the country. In accordance with the Right to Move statutory guidance on housing allocations for local housing authorities in England (issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2015) a target of at least 5% of allocations has been set for people moving to a different District for employment purposes;
- Attract residents to areas of low demand and reduce void times on ‘hard to let’ properties;
- Formalise partnership working with landlords within a Common Housing Register (CHR) arrangement, creating an equal partnership between stock holding and non-stock holding partners that will accommodate both landlord and applicant issues.

4.7 The structure of a model Allocations Policy is set-out in Appendix 1.

### **Strategic Tenancy Policy**

4.8 A strategic tenancy policy will enable the Council to fulfil its strategic housing role to guide and support all landlords offering social housing in meeting local housing needs and priorities, and to ensure their tenancy policies are transparent and equitable, and open to all housing applicants. A clear tenancy management framework and enforcement measures will address:

4.9 **The type and length of tenancy granted:** Where the Council would expect to have nomination rights to let to households in need, with introductory tenancies to establish tenancies. Where fixed-term tenancies are used they are for an extended period (ten years), and with tenancies of longer duration offered to vulnerable households, including those fleeing domestic abuse.

4.10 **Fixed term tenancy renewal:** Where an expectation is set that tenancies are renewed as default, and that fixed-term tenancies do not detract from maintaining stable communities, as tenants with longer tenancies are more likely to invest in and contribute to their communities.

4.11 **Non-renewal of fixed term tenancies:** Where tenancies are not renewed for breach of tenancy that support is provided to help households find alternative accommodation, with sufficient time allowed for tenancy reviews and appeals.

**Setting affordable rent levels:** Where a balance is struck between ensuring that housing is affordable to all, particularly to those on low income, and maximising income to enable the development of more affordable housing.

- 4.12 The structure of a model Strategic Tenancy Policy is set-out in Appendix 1.

### ***Service Offer and Standards***

- 4.13 A coherent and comprehensive *Service Offer* is required to set-out from a customer perspective the scope and quality of service they can expect when accessing housing services, whether seeking advice or exploring housing options, having their housing needs assessed, or are provided with any form of temporary accommodation, supported accommodation or a full social housing tenancy.
- 4.14 An aspirational *Rental Home* service standard should be developed covering every home or specialist accommodation unit offered for rent in Gateshead, whether by the Council directly, through a register provider or through the private rented sector, to ensure it is let in a safe condition, at a fair rent, and through a fair tenancy, enabling tenants to establish a home for the duration needed by them, without fear of eviction.

### ***Accommodation Pathway***

- 4.15 An *Accommodation Pathway* provides universal service access, open to all with a housing need. A self-service Marketplace would enable the majority of households to resolve their accommodation needs before reaching a point of crisis and requiring service intervention. Where this is not possible the service would proactively work to prevent homelessness and where this cannot be avoided provide suitable emergency accommodation, with support provided to enable individuals to build resilience, and secure and sustain long-term accommodation solutions and to break cycles of homelessness or eviction.

### ***Structured Customer Journeys***

- 4.16 Rethinking access to services, the role of business functions and process steps from the perspective of a customer into a *Customer Journey* can quickly create a seamless and more effective experience for someone approaching and navigating the service, and will also remove the unsustainable additional workload and waste associated with operating processes in isolation from each other. The housing customer journey has two main lifecycles, *Allocations* and *Tenancy*.

### ***Allocations Lifecycle***

- 4.17 High quality on-line advice and guidance, self-referral and self-service pathways, with assistance provided, will enable every customer to access all available housing solutions:
- Structure high quality advice and support that leads customers towards the applicable self-referral access pathway;
  - Identify and provide additional support (Assisted Choice) throughout to those who will find it difficult to navigate the customer journey;
  - Support self-service and personalisation throughout the registration, waiting list management and lettings process.

Structured Customer Journey – Allocations Lifecycle				
Marketplace Advice & Guidance	Application & Assessment	Waiting list Management	Allocation Offer	Lettings
TA ,Social, Private, Specialist, Low-cost Home Ownership	On-line Assessment & Triage	Self-managed Application	Nominations	Resulting Offer
Self-service Advice & Guidance	Personalised Applications	Change of Circumstance	Choice-based Lettings	Resulting Application
Self-referral Pathway	Validation & Verification Framework	Automated Notifications and Reminders	Sensitive Lets	Multiple & Assisted Viewings
Assisted Choice	Support Services Referral	Scheduled Reviews	Targeted Advertising	Hard to Lets

4.18 This key components of the structured *Allocations* customer journey are:

**Advice and Guidance:** Enabling customers to explore available housing options and to self-refer for social housing registration, with assisted support available for people who will need help to navigate the process;

4.19 **Application and Assessment:** Combining customer self-service and tailored registration processes with rules-driven process automation to improve accuracy and reduce risk of challenge, whilst triggering support referrals for people in need early in the process;

4.20 **Housing Register Management:** Supporting customer self-service, automated status updates to reduce enquiries, and scheduled reviews to keep the Register current;

4.21 **Allocation Offer:** Applying nominations and Choice-based Lettings offer rules fairly and transparently, whilst ensuring ensure that homes are let quickly.

4.22 **Lettings:** Ensuring homes are let as quickly as possible, to the right person, in a fair and auditable way.

### Tenancy Lifecycle

4.23 Enable a tenant of whatever tenure type to secure, establish and sustain a tenancy for the long term, with the level of support needed to ensure they do not become homeless:

- Ensuring a new tenant has a clear understanding of how their tenancy and home operates and what is expected of them;
- Providing tenancy management services that support the tenant whilst protecting investment in the housing asset;
- Providing support to enable them to establish and sustain a tenancy, and to move-on to more secure home wherever possible.

Structured Customer Journey – Tenancy Lifecycle			
Onboarding	Tenancy Management	Sustainment	End of Tenancy
Induction & Move-in	Periodic Review & Tenancy Audit	Sustainment & Support	Alternative Accommodation Provision
Settling in & Establishment	Change of Tenancy	Joint Solution Provision	Move-on
Sustainment Support	Rent & Income Maximisation	Lifetime Home	Enforcement
End of Probation Review	Community & Neighbourhood	Migration Review	Void Management

4.24 This key components of the structured *Lettings* customer journey are:

**Onboarding:** Setting-up a tenancy to succeed with whatever degree of support or intervention is needed;

**Tenancy Management:** Ensuring compliance with Regulatory standards, and the ongoing management of the tenancy;

**Sustainment:** Enabling a household to remain in their home as long as it meets their needs and is suitable to do so, acting as an advocate for broader support interventions;

**End of Tenancy:** Ensuring a tenant is able to secure new accommodation, whatever the circumstance of the tenancy ending and efficiently evaluating and recycling the home for the next tenant

### ***Supply and Demand Model***

4.25 A robust Supply and Demand Model is an essential tool in enabling Gateshead to build and commission in partner the volume, type, configuration and location that is needed over the short term (year ahead) and the longer term (three to five years):

- The accuracy and usefulness of the model will be dependent on the quality of data output from the Housing Register;
- The model will underpin the creation of Annual Lettings Plans. It will provide a baseline for all partners to track demand and needs trends accurately over longer planning horizons and to build, acquire or reconfigure stock holding with a higher level of confidence.

4.26 The components of a *Supply and Demand Model* would be :





**Annual Register Review:** The discipline of undertaking an annual review of a well-maintained Housing Register will provide an accurate view of applications within the system and build a picture of demand and needs trends over time;

**Annual Lettings Plan:** Predicts for any one year the type of accommodation needed, the areas where it is most needed, its configuration and specialist requirement needs;

**Informed build programme:** Provides a detailed level of analysis to support capital investment decisions as to when and where to build new homes, to cluster and sustain communities;

**Published model:** The *Model* will be published to all service partners to provide a common partnership and understand of strategy direction and working model

### ***Integrated Business Systems***

- 4.27 An open, fully integrated digital housing management platform is a pre-requisite to unlocking high quality customer experience and outcomes, whilst maximising process efficiency and oversight. Key elements are

**Customer self-service:** Supporting a significant level of transactional self-service, application and tenancy self-management, with alternative assistance channels available on demand;

**Best-practice module configuration:** Building customer integrated customer journeys into core functionality;

**Customer Relationship Management (CRM):** Creating a single view of an individual or household, a complete picture of their circumstances and case history;

**Workflow:** linking processes in a standardised and time-bounded way, with end-to-end oversight to ensure compliance with standards, whilst triggering.

**Case management:** Enabling a holistic approach to supporting an individual or household across service pathways and support partnerships;

**Real-time management and insight:** Enabling upstream intervention and rigorous compliance assurance;

**Partnership integration:** Supporting cross-organisational workflow and information sharing.

### ***Flexible Service Design***

- 4.28 Establish an organisational model that can deliver strategic objectives, appropriate levels of oversight and assurance, and service delivered to the agreed quality, where resources are deployed where they add most value, with:

- Clear leadership, frontline management and staff responsibilities, underpinned by standardised skills-based role profiles
- Flexible resource deployment to meet operational objectives and react to circumstances;
- An empowering and risk enabling culture that supports high performance and the delivery of shared organisational goals;
- Capability building in areas of strategic and operational focus to support the target operating model



**Formalised Partnership Framework**

4.29 Formalising the management arrangements between the Councils and partner landlords will elevate what is currently in the main a case-by-case into strategic partnership relationships, they will:

- Ensure the Allocations Policy is correctly and fairly applied, whilst providing flexibility to landlords through Local Lettings Agreements;
- Optimise the lettings process by making it largely self-service via a digital *Partnership Hub*;
- Turn what is currently largely a hand-off process into a hand-holding relationship that will support more vulnerable customers to establish their new home (particularly younger people), enabling them to build capacity in home management and consequently be less likely to fail in their tenancy and to present as homeless.

Formalised Partnership Arrangements			
Waiting list Management	Allocation Offer	Lettings	Sustainment
Waiting List Protocol	Allocations Protocol	Resulting Offer	New Tenancy Management
Joint Management	Application Verification	Resulting Application	Joint Solution Provision
List Management	System Delegated Authority	Multiple & Assisted Viewings	Tenancy Sustainment
Data Sharing Protocol	Bypass Verification	Hard to Lets	Migration Review

4.30 The key elements of new formalised partnership arrangements would be:

**Waiting List Management:** Adopting a joint management and deeper data sharing approach that will support a better matching of applicant to potential new home;

**Allocation Offer:** Enabling landlords to verify applicants quickly and to resolve their own tenancy management issues within the allocations policy;

**Lettings:** Optimising the process to minimise void loss (multiple viewings, hard to lets) whilst ensuring the most vulnerable are supported;

**Sustainment:** Providing wrap-around support that reduces risk over time and tracks move-on outcomes.

***Sustainment and Reducing the Risk of Tenancy Failure***

4.31 There is an opportunity to work with commissioners and landlords to develop a broader partnership-based approach to helping households establish and sustain their tenancies, by sharing and jointly managing risk of failure, by providing wraparound support that enables an individual to build capacity and self-reliance as they move through emergency, short-term and

starter lets into secure longer-term accommodation solutions. Building on the frontloaded model of advice and signposting, approaches outlined are to:

- Share financial risk through rent deposit or guarantee schemes, that will enable individuals with a history of debt problems to get restarted;
- Build support packages sensitive to an individual's needs and provide continuity of caseworking support through the letting, start-up and probationary period of a tenancy, building a level of trust with the most vulnerable and hard to communicate with;
- Agree criteria and triggers levels for wider interventions (level of debt, seriousness of ASB etc.) so that support can be provided, within the capacity of the broader system to do so;
- Develop tracking mechanisms that enable individuals to demonstrate skills and capacity building over a period of time;
- Share systems and sensitive information more widely between supporting parties to ensure issues are spotted and tackled quickly;
- Develop a flexible hierarchy of accommodation that support move-on from short-term licences to start tenancies, including the use of *training house* settings.

### ***Developing Support Partnerships***

- 4.32 Work with commissioners of Adults and Children's services, and other specialist support providers who are interested in developing housing-led solutions that are person-centred and that enable an individual to avoid or move away from a point of crisis to one of self-sufficiency. Front-loaded advice services are essential tools to communicate and cross-signpost benefits, employment, education, housing, and other support in relation to the nature of an individual's needs.
- 4.33 Opportunities for jointly commissioning housing-based solutions in which people can receive care (mental health and learning difficulties support for example) need to be explored, as do the development of protocols with social services, mental health units and probation services.
- 4.34 Similarly, there is considerable scope for jointly undertaking strategic planning, share insight and operational data at a much deeper level, for joining-up capital resources. assets and moving beyond individual organisational budgets to agree whole system funding envelopes.
- 4.35 More broadly there is the potential to unlock a wealth community assets and volunteering initiatives within a collaborative framework accessed through social prescribing (the level of community response to supporting the vulnerable during the Covid lockdowns has been inspiring and needs to be continued).
- 4.36 Work with commissioners and service partners to identify vulnerable groups to whom tailored accommodation and support solutions could be targeted:
- Street homeless with the aim of providing alternatives to a return to sleeping rough;
  - Single people with limited access to core homelessness interventions who are now disproportionately presenting as homeless;
  - People being released from prison and on ex-offender programmes, particularly the placement of high risk ex-offenders;

- People living with mental health conditions, with autism or with learning difficulties;
- Young people, particularly care leavers who lack life-skills and who are not well equipped to sustain a first home;
- People leaving hospital or acute mental health wards discharged into care settings;
- Survivors of domestic abuse (large increase in number of presentations during lockdown, in an area with a higher than average incidence);
- People with no recourse to public funds.

### ***Performance and Oversight Framework***

4.37 A comprehensive *Performance Framework* will ensure compliance, drive-up performance and demonstrate the value of the *Gateshead Housing Model* in delivering key objectives:

- Customers receive a compliant, high quality service that enables them to resolve their housing needs in a fair and transparent manner;
- Self-service solutions and process automation are reducing demand and increasing efficiency, optimising the supply and cost of short term accommodation solutions;
- Driving wider service outcomes that reduce future dependency on core services.

Gateshead Housing Model Performance Framework					
Compliance	Council Statutory Reporting	Landlord Statutory Reporting	Policy Application	Process & Evidence Audit	Information Compliance Audit
Service Performance	Service Access	Housing Register Management	TA Management	Allocations & Lettings Management	Partnership Management
Sustainable Outcomes	Customer Outcomes	Business Outcomes	Partnership Outcomes	TA Supply & Demand Model	Housing Supply & Demand Model

4.38 The *Performance Model* would consist of a suite of performance indicators that measure:

**Compliance:** The level of assurance that housing services are compliant and meet statutory obligations, are delivered to the terms of core policies, and that full audit trails are in place that will withstand challenge and scrutiny;

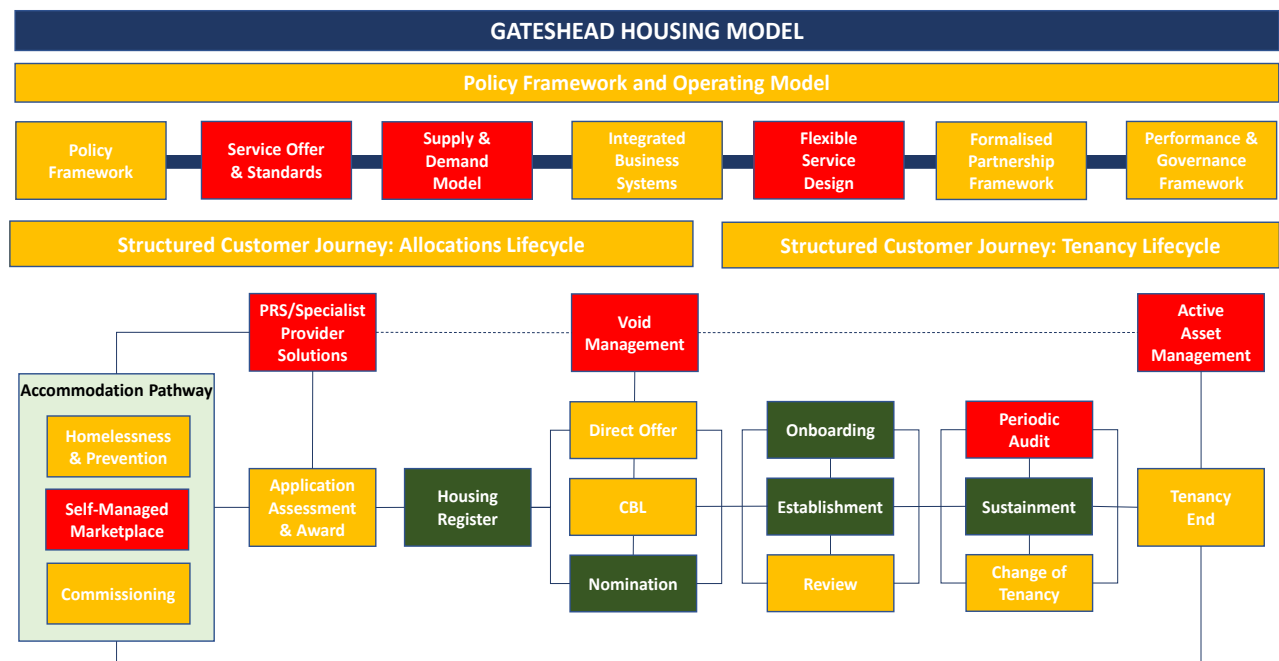
**Service Performance:** The quality of service delivered to customers and level of contentment with their experience, the efficiency of processes, the effective utilisation of resources, and the performance of partner relationships;

**Sustainable Outcomes:** The impact and value-add the *Gateshead Housing Model* will deliver to customers lives, in meeting the business objectives of the Council, other landlords and service partners. Also ensuring the long-term sustainability of the model through evidenced-based demand and supply models.

## 5. BASELINE ASSESSMENT

### *A Risk based View*

- 5.1 This section presents a *Baseline Assessment* of the current policy framework, operating model and working practices of Gateshead against the target model outlined in the previous section. It is a gap analysis rather than a rounded view of the performance of the service, but the RAG-rated context diagram below enables a risk-based approach to prioritising change, based on an externally validated evidence base.



- 5.2 The risk-based classification is based on:

**Red:** A significant capability gap or weakness that requires prioritised attention;

**Amber:** An approach or service element that requires detailed review and transformation;

**Green:** A relative strength from which broader service transformation can be based.

### **Structured Customer Journey: Allocations Lifecycle**

- 5.3 The *Allocations Lifecycle* covers the journey taken by people with a housing need, from their initial approach to the service as they explore their housing options, the assessment of their need with respect to the housing solutions available, and the process of being allocated a home. Most of these critical interactions are currently managed through processes supported by the Tyne and Wear Homes (TWH) partnership.

#### ***Tyne and Wear Homes Partnership***

- 5.4 Gateshead has been a full partner in TWH since its launch in 2012, along with Newcastle, North Tyneside and South Tyneside Councils. TWH provides lettings services for the 100,000 homes of the four partner and for those of over twenty registered providers. Each Local Authority currently maintains its own allocations policy, but there is a common waiting list, with Gateshead applicants comprising 30% of the list.

- 5.5 A Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Portal enables applicants to register and bid for available homes across the four local authority areas. Each local authority partner £10K per annum to finance TWH, with RPs paying a fee of £30 per let. The constitutional and operational structures of TWH have remained in place since its launch:
- Executive Board:** Directs the work of TWH and shape the broader housing agenda;
- Management Board:** Overseeing the operation of TWH, with a lead partner (rotated every three years) responsible for coordinating the two Boards and provide financial management support;
- Project officer:** Supporting day-to-day service delivery by the individual services;
- Sub-groups:** Consisting of four thematic working groups - Strategy and Finance, Operations, Stakeholders, Registered Provider and Private Landlords.
- 5.6 TWH commissioned a strategic review of the partnership from arc<sup>4</sup> in 2019, which concluded that the Executive Board had over time become just a virtual function, meeting annually to appoint officers and set budgets. Consequently, decision making processes had become extended, to the detriment of the service, compromising the role of the Project Officer in delivering changes needed.
- 5.7 The report concluded that opportunities for regional housing market analysis and innovation were not full developed, and of the thematic sub-groups, only the RP Working Group still functioned, and had successfully broadened its remit to that of a forum for social landlords to discuss housing management related issues and opportunities for joint working.
- 5.8 The report developed a business case for a strengthening of the partnership, by:
- Reconstituting the Management Board as a Programme Board to oversee the projects required to move TWH forward, with a Programme Manager hired to shape and drive change, and to oversee the work of an operational Partnerships Officer;
  - Creating a central processing team of 10 full time equivalent officers, potentially yielding savings of £600K p.a. to the partnership;
  - Reforming the RP group as a Social Housing Forum to focus on issues such as the demand for affordable housing and collaboration opportunities.
- 5.9 Specific report recommendations such as the appointment of a Programme Manager have already been adopted and are proving effective. The full recommendations of the report are currently being considered by partners, and in Gateshead forms part of this review. The operation of the CBL scheme is reviewed in detail below.

### ***Access Pathways***

- 5.10 There are multiple access pathways into the housing service, often obscured from each other. Despite a detailed review of service documents and interviews with frontline staff it has been difficult to establish the full service offer and access processes for those approaching the service from a range of perspectives. For example, someone who is:
- Researching their housing options to move into or within Gateshead;
  - Being supported in leaving care, hospital, the armed-forces, or prison;

- In need of a housing solution and support framework to mitigate the impact of mental health or learning difficulties, dependency, fleeing domestic abuse, or resettlement;
- Approaching the point of homelessness, or already at crisis point;
- Living in short-turn or turn-around accommodation and looking to move-on to longer-term accommodation;
- Currently adequately housed but has experienced a change in circumstance that requires support to remain in their home or access to a suitable home.

5.11 Multiple access pathways with their own bespoke customer journeys seem to serve existing tenants and those in the know best, potentially at the expense of the most vulnerable.

5.12 The extent of information and support toolkits available digitally is limited, although access to the service is primarily on-line. Follow-up contact is usually over the telephone directly with service teams, as there is no universal customer contact centre or service hub in place to absorb day-to-day enquiries (600 general enquiries are currently awaiting a response).

### **Homelessness**

5.13 A review of homelessness services has been commissioned to run alongside this review and will examine how Gateshead delivers against its statutory obligations, existing accommodation and support provision, customer journeys and ways of working, to develop a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan, a Homelessness Charter, and a plan for change. Homelessness access and delivery processes are not therefore examined further here, however the findings of an analysis of Gateshead homeless data, comparing 2018/19 with 2019/20, and benchmarking against nationwide (England) and regional (North East) averages are highlighted below.

### **Presentation and Assessment**

5.14 Gateshead assessed 2,277 households for statutory homelessness duties in 2019/20, with Covid driving an increase in the number of presentations by 566 compared with 2018/19. Of these households, 71% were awarded a prevention duty and 21% were awarded a relief duty. In spite of Covid, the number of relief duties fell by almost two hundred cases on the previous year, suggesting that the prevention and early intervention strategies adopted by Gateshead are working, and also in preventing other negative outcomes of homelessness for households. This compares favourably against both nationwide (46%) and regional average (45%) for relief duty awards.

### **Reasons for Homelessness**

5.15 Domestic abuse is the most common reason cited for the loss (or threat of loss) of a settled home in Gateshead, with 475 households owed a duty for this reason in 2019/20 (almost double the figure for 2018/19), driven by the lockdown caused by the Covid pandemic. However, the 25% of households presenting for this reason compares with a national average of 10% and a regional average of 14%. This may suggest a greater domestic abuse problem within Gateshead, but also a relatively more successful approach to reporting it. More broadly, violence and harassment is also a significantly greater factor in presentation than is the case nationally (10% compared with 2-3%).

- 5.16 The number of rough sleeping households owed a duty is comparatively low, with 26 households in 2018/19 owed a duty, and only 20 in 2019/20. However, in reality the number of rough sleepers is likely to be far greater than the data captured suggests.
- 5.17 Reflecting the depressed level of economic prosperity, 57% of those owed a duty are registered as unemployed, compared with 38% nationally.

**Support Needs**

- 5.18 An average of 377 households per quarter present with one and increasingly commonly with two or more support needs. A history of mental health problems is a prevalent support need in households owed a duty, affecting a third of households (compared with a quarter nationally). An average of 50 households per quarter require support for drug dependency and 33 households for alcohol dependency (both these figures are slightly higher than the national average). The total proportion of households with support needs owed a duty is higher in Gateshead (average 68% each quarter) than the average in England (49%) and the North East (59%)..

**Accommodation Solutions Secured**

- 5.19 Gateshead secured accommodation of 6+ months duration for three times as many households in 2019/20 than in 2018/19, with 805 units for households owed a prevention duty and 251 units for homeless households. Housing provision for these households is overwhelmingly secured through Gateshead and RP housing stock,

**Repeat Homelessness**

- 5.20 A point of optimism is that the proportion of those owed a duty with support needs due to a history of repeat homelessness in Gateshead is the same as the national average at 7%, and is lower than the North East average of 11%, reflecting the success of a preventative approach to homelessness.

**Duty to Refer**

- 5.21 Only half of households accessing the service are assessed as a result of Duty to Refer in Gateshead, where another public service initially identifies the risk of homelessness and triggers an automated referral. This is low when compared with the national average of 60% and against 90% achieved by North Tyneside and 95% achieved by South Tyneside. This suggests that Gateshead can strengthen interfaces with referring bodies such as prisons, commissioners, job centres and the NHS, to identify households for targeting prevention.

***Self-managed marketplace***

- 5.22 There is currently little structured information or advice that a household can access to understand and compare what solutions maybe open to them, beyond applying for inclusion on the housing register, particularly in respect of the type of offer available from registered providers or private landlords.



**Commissioning**

- 5.23 Interviews with service commissioners and frontline staff within Gateshead Children's and Adult Social Care functions have revealed a complex network of approaches and solutions to providing accommodation and support solutions, which run alongside, frequently touching but without fully integrating with housing services. The customer journeys of specific client groups supported are outlined below.

**Children**

- 5.24 The housing needs of children with physical disabilities, autism or learning difficulties for example are met through the provision of homecare and community outreach within the family home, based on a Childhood Needs Assessment. If home-based care and support is needed this is met through direct payment to enable a family to develop their own support package, or is commissioned by Gateshead with an approved provider.

**Young people**

- 5.25 Children with learning difficulties, behavioural challenges or autism are supported by a Transition Team as they become adults, and if Care Act criteria are met, are placed in directly commissioned learning disability and mental health supported accommodation.
- 5.26 As young people in care approach adulthood their needs are assessed by a homeless prevention worker and their personal advisor (who they have access to up to the age of 21), with accommodation commissioned through a block contract.
- 5.27 Homeless young people aged between 16 and 25 are supported through a jointly commissioned Supported and Independent Living Service (SAILS) pathway, a floating support service by the housing service. Initial assessments of need are made at Eslington House, 20 bed unit managed by Changing Lives, which offers flexible housing-related, financial inclusion and wellbeing support. As individual move along a risk-assessed pathway, they are offered a 'taster flat', provided on a spot basis by Gateshead and Home Group, which can then be 'flipped' to become a full tenancy through the allocations process.

**Vulnerable adults**

- 5.28 For adults between the ages of 25 and 55, particularly those without a statutory care or support need (as defined by the Care Act), there is little coordinated service provision or suitable accommodation options. There are no formal support pathways, oversight, or structured interfaces between commissioning and housing services, other than through working relationships, with the lettings process not configured to promote the needs of these individuals.
- 5.29 There is a shortage of crisis support accommodation and wraparound support for those in temporary accommodation. Single persons accommodation solutions are recognised as being poor, often provided in areas that exacerbate their vulnerabilities and fail to promote wellbeing, with groups of people with mixed and often incompatible vulnerabilities are grouped in large, shared home settings, when semi-independent living is really what is needed. Whilst there is some work ongoing with RPs, there are a limited number of solutions



in supporting people with mental health needs, drug and alcohol dependency, victims of domestic abuse and those with complex needs.

- 5.30 Complexity of need is significant and most often driven by persistent offending, drug and alcohol addiction, financial exploitation and long-term debt, with no provision to help change the situation in which they have become stuck. Gateshead is however using the adult social care outcomes toolkit (ASCOT) to help define an outcomes-based pathway that moves individuals from intensive and high-cost care and support settings toward relative self-sufficient settings, with their own tenancy and with help at hand if needed.

### **Reablement and rehabilitation**

- 5.31 A team of social workers assess the ongoing care and accommodation needs of people due to leave primary care, mental health or specialist hospitals. There are two small step-down units in place and good links with Gateshead Housing to provide longer-term accommodation solutions beyond.
- 5.32 Intermediate care is provided through three Promoting Independence Centres (Eastwood, Southernwood and Shadon House) to support reablement, rehabilitation and recuperation, with a wide range of conditions such as mental health, physical and learning disabilities, with individuals staying for up to six weeks.

### **Extra Care**

- 5.33 Whilst Gateshead has invested significantly in older-persons extra care, there is concern that accommodation is increasingly used to support younger people with mental health needs. The nominations process for placement at Angel Court is viewed as being particularly cumbersome.

### **Resettlement**

- 5.34 Gateshead is a partner in the *Refugee Resettlement Programme* and has provided homes and support to a number of Syrian refugees. Additionally, as part of the Asylum Dispersal Programme, 66 properties have been let to Mears, who sub-let them to households awaiting a decision on residency.

### **Commissioning and managing in partnership**

- 5.35 Commissioning staff have little awareness of the allocations policy and broader lettings process across Gateshead. The processes and systems that support *care* and *housing* operate in isolation and there are no formal information/data sharing agreements in-place, and limited management data is currently available from Northgate to provide insight into the outcomes of placements. There is a lack of shared awareness of where specialist knowledge sits, and accessing the housing solutions available; frontline staff say they spend a lot of time ironing-out small issues, such as placing someone with a cat.
- 5.36 Moving forward It is critical that a fully integrated map of specialist care and supported housing supply across Gateshead is produced, to which needs can be mapped and future investment planned, particularly in the areas of mental health provision and supporting complex needs.

- 5.37 Processes need to be recentred on the individual, focused on early intervention across services, with signal driven triggers and shared approaches to support people such as hoarders, placing housing options into equation from the start of any intervention. Enabling people to break-out of a cycle of long-term debt and start afresh is also a priority.
- 5.38 A single panel driven process would enable people to be directly placed into the most appropriate accommodation available to meet their needs, with wraparound support organised to follow them through reablement and rehabilitation, ultimately promoting the effective establishment and sustainment of a tenancy, with ongoing outcomes focused assessments to minimise the risk of tenancy failure.

***Application, Assessment and Award***

- 5.39 Applications for housing are primarily made on-line using the Abris portal (or via a paper form loaded by staff), which provides a satisfactory but basic user experience, with little additional information and support around potential options other than basic sign-posting:
- Applicants cannot self-manage their account credentials, which creates work for the lettings team and is a barrier to channel shift;
  - Applications are indexed by National Insurance Number, which requires manual intervention if households split further down the line;
  - The application questionnaire screens are reasonably straightforward and capture mandatory information, but not local connection, unless the applicant is applying from out of borough;
  - Eligibility and qualification documentation can be uploaded into the portal for processing;
  - Applications are processed in load order and acknowledged within 10 working days.
- 5.40 Whilst making an application, tracking its progress, and reflecting changes of circumstance can all be done on-line, there is little promotion of digital shift, with most applicants following-up on enquiries via the telephone, support channels such as chat are only now being taken-up.
- 5.41 The absence of any demand filtering on the lettings process means it is administratively intensive, with applications running at 100 per week in 2019/20. Applications are fully validated upon receipt, leading to almost 5,000 reference and identity checks being undertaken. Over 2,500 change of circumstance notifications need some form of staff intervention or checking. Shifting the process of full verification to the point of offer would save a lot of rework and ensure an accurate picture of household circumstances is captured;
- 5.42 The current organisation of the service means that the full workload is processed by the core lettings team, as there is no customer contact or service hub to absorb straightforward enquiries or follow-up contacts. The lettings team therefore is a process support team addressing high levels of low level enquiries, rather than adding real value to help people resolve their housing options.
- 5.43 Applicants can update changes of circumstance on-line (new family members, address change etc.), by either updating the existing application or creating a new from if changes are complex. There is no automated notification or workflow associated with the process and

there is no interface to transfer data to the Northgate system, which means it is a Labour intensive process to keep the two systems aligned.

### **Assessment**

- 5.44 Assessing the grounds for why people may be housed:
- 5.45 **Under-occupancy:** Whilst a downsizing award of £500 for relocation and a further £500 for improvement works is in place, this is poorly publicised and in reality this level of award is unlikely to encourage many people to move to a smaller home.
- 5.46 **Overcrowding:** An emerging issue for resolution is 'purposely overcrowding', where members of a family move back to a family home, creating an overcrowding situation. The absence of embedded regular tenancy audits is exacerbating this problem.
- 5.47 **Medical grounds:** Over 500 medical assessments are undertaken by Gateshead staff annually, with a cultural issue limiting referral to external specialist medical advice, which is not best practice, as it puts undue pressure on unqualified staff to understand potentially complex medical circumstances and in turn drives a high level of challenge. The team does however have three specialist qualified occupational therapists in place.
- 5.48 **Armed forces:** Whilst the current allocations policy has a commitment to housing former armed-services personnel, this needs converting to a full covenant. No local connection is needed and applications will be back-dated to the date the household left their home, and an award made, with additional assistance provided to households undergoing breakdown.
- 5.49 **Carers:** A significant number of applications come from family members (from within and outside the Borough) seeking to move closer to a family member to care for them. However, it is recognised that the needs of the person needing care must be addressed first. The medical questionnaire is not well structured for carers and needs to be clearer. A significant number of requests also come from people with disabilities who want to move closer to their carer.
- 5.50 **Resettlement:** There is a need to map the complex customer journeys for asylum seekers granted leave to remain (presenting as homeless) and those not, with no recourse to public funds. 230 assessments are made annually and future demand and support need implications must be understood. The licences and notice conditions offered by RPs also need review.
- 5.51 **Child of tenant:** Gateshead offers a one-bed unit to 18 year olds.

### **Award**

- 5.52 The Gateshead schemes has four needs defined bands and as of March 2020 there were 6,793 applicants registered:
- Critical:** 2 applicants (medical need, hospital discharge, unsuitable home)
- Urgent:** 466 applicants (medical need, mobility risk, unable to make full use of home)
- Substantial:** 567 applicants (overcrowding, medical need, general level of need or risk)
- General:** 5,785 applicants (no qualifying additional need)
- 5.53 At that time, 15% of applicants have a *Priority* need, whilst those with an *Urgent* need included 48 applicants with a domestic abuse priority.

- 5.54 A review of banding definitions is required to improve the visibility and position of homeless applicants and to address the excessively high number of people within the General Band;

***Reduced Preference***

- 5.55 Over 1,100 applications have a reduced preference status on the Housing Register, primarily due to perpetration of high-level ASB (court action or conviction for a tenant or household member), not maintaining their home in accordance with the tenancy agreement, or for rent arrears. The threshold for rent arrears is £250 or 10 weeks rent owed, or a debt of £3,000 for single households or £5,500 for couples. Rent arrears can often be longstanding (10 to 15 years). Medical awards will not apply in cases of demotion.
- 5.56 Staff consider the approach to reduced preference in the lettings policy, and operational practice as in need of review, to ensure people with clear circumstances of need can be supported, regardless of historical issues. Also, Demotion legislation is not used effectively to manage registration expectations of potentially adequately housed tenants.

***Reviews, Appeals and Exceptional Circumstances***

- 5.57 The core allocations and letting process appears to operate with a highly questionable level of exceptions, with a perception gained of an ailing system, that applicants in the know can too easily play. Processes clearly need overhauling to ensure the highest level of assurance regarding transparency, fairness and compliance:
- The *Review* process needs remodelling to include due diligence, report management, intervention and panel decisions, which are too often circumvented. There is also a need to separate complaints out from reviews, and to measure low-level complaints more rigorously. 50% of reviews are upheld, which is indicative of an ailing process, where suitable offers are not being made, based on incorrect or unverified circumstances. Also, there is no reference to judicial review in the current policy or processes.
  - The *Appeals* process is not robust or independent and it is unlikely that policy is correctly applied, as there is no Panel in place or independence of review process. Suitability of the property is the main reason for appeal, with 50% of appeals subsequently upheld. Again, raising issues regarding service consistency and impartial policy implementation;
  - The *Exceptional Circumstances* process is overused and reflects a lack of rigour and checking of individual circumstances upstream, and evidence-based casework, suggesting it is used to ease the burden on more onerous CBL processes;
- 5.58 Delivery of these processes is inconsistent, fragmented across systems and spreadsheets, with multiple workarounds in place, reflecting the age of current policies. Clarity of policy should be a starting point to centralise processes and to introduce the level of rigor required to drive consistency. With the arms-length relationship of Council and ALMO no longer in place, it is important to maintain a level of independent scrutiny within target structures.

**Housing Register**

- 5.59 Medical awards are reviewed three to four times a year, but as offer cycle is short and so aged offers are not an issue. An annual review of the housing register is undertaken by Lettings team prompted by a basic workflow, again, the offer cycle for *Urgent* and *Substantial* awards is also short, so cases are not overlooked. Whilst the system flags review dates for each application, it is a manual process to send an informing email to the applicant.

**Lettings**

- 5.60 An average of 1,500 lets are made each year, but there is no evidence of target driven allocations, through an Annual Lettings Plan or any form of Local Lettings Plan. The lets made require almost 5,000 offers, with over 3,000 offers refused; there are currently no penalties for not-bidding or for refusals. Almost 25% of lets are made to existing tenants.

**Choice-based lettings**

- 5.61 Ready to let voids are collated within the Northgate *Test Manager* to create an *Edition* and transferred overnight to Abritas, with attributes relating to property configuration and access for example passed across. Attributes relating to adaptations are often incorrect and need changing manually; floor level and EPC data is also added manually from the Keystone Asset Management System.
- 5.62 Property adverts are fairly basic and include property and area detail (including photographs). Properties may be advertised with preference to particular applicant groups, in accordance with the lettings policy.
- 5.63 Applicants are able to bids for up to three homes each week with the bidding cycle which runs from Thursday midnight until Monday midnight. Whilst applicants can track the relative position of their bid, the search facility is poor, and also generates customer contact, when an applicant's position diminishes as more people bid. Applicants are not informed by text when a bid is closed.
- 5.64 Homes can also be advertised as *Available Now*, and therefore not subject to the bidding cycle, with applicants able to bid at any time. In 2019, 16% of homes in Gateshead were advertised and subsequently let in this way (across all landlords).

**Direct lets**

- 5.65 The Direct let process for homeless applicants is undertaken in Northgate (although the TWH implementation of Abritas has that capability), and the relatively high proportion of direct lets made is anecdotally a reflection of a more straightforward process. Homeless reviews are however managed outside the system, as supporting workflow has yet to be created. Direct lets accounted for up to 56% of the total lets made during the Covid lockdown, but are made only in specific circumstances during normal times.

**Nominations**

- 5.66 Whilst there are technically nomination agreements in place with the providers operating in Gateshead, these are dated, and staff operating lettings processes largely unaware of them. Providers generally offer either 50% or 100% nomination rights for existing stock and for new

build homes to Gateshead. All have their own letting policies and allocations criteria, which provides the flexibility to undertake high priority management moves and to make best use of their stock.

- 5.67 The providers consulted indicate they accept homeless applicants (both families and single people), which contradicts the Gateshead service perception that they do not accept more challenging cases. However, this highlights the need for a common lettings policy for Gateshead.

### ***Offers***

- 5.68 Offers are made by the lettings team, within the bounds of the current policy, but without specific reference to the long-term sustainability of the tenancy within the context of the local community, which would seem to be an opportunity lost in helping to ensure the right person is placed in the right home and that communities remain in balance and acceptant of new members. Written offers are not systematically made, which means there is no audit trail or legal premise established.

### ***Viewings***

- 5.69 A list of the top five applicants for each CBL let is sent to the Viewings team by email, a process not supported by workflow within the Abritas system. Viewings are undertaken by the central team with no or limited input from local housing officers. This would again seem to be an opportunity lost, in helping to establish relationships with local support team from the outset, in helping to establish a tenancy and enabling it and the community it sits within to flourish. Gateshead do not use multiple viewings, which could help to streamline the process and close lettings more quickly.

### ***Resulting the Offer***

- 5.70 Resulting the offer is a manual process within Abritas, with a complete offer audit loaded, which is also emailed to local housing staff, the key handover process is not workflowed. Most RPs do not consistently update shortlists or Result the Offer in Abritas, making the tracking of outcomes more difficult. Sign-up should be undertaken by the a Neighbourhoods team officer, helping to establish a strong relationship from the outset.

## **PRS and specialist provider solutions**

### ***Temporary Accommodation Provision and Management***

- 5.71 Gateshead's provision of temporary accommodation (80 properties) is met entirely from within the Council's stock. Emerging from the pandemic, there are currently 70 households in TA. Six households are currently accommodated in bed and breakfast, although none of these are families. Households tend to spend 10-11 weeks in TA before they move into permanent accommodation.
- 5.72 ASB perpetration is an issue with TA tenants and its detrimental impact on the host community recognised, and also on the acceptance of subsequent TA tenants. Disjointed tenancy management and support offers result in high failure rates. 99% of tenants are on benefits, and arrears collection doesn't progress beyond issuing letters. Review of TA tenancies are rare and used as a last option.

- 5.73 There is currently no dispersed provision within the RP or PRS sectors, but as there are no support package available, providers and private landlords are unlikely to accept responsibility for sharing the load of provision.
- 5.74 A domestic abuse refuge is run by The Home Group, but more capacity is needed as demand is growing.
- 5.75 TA provision needs to reflect where people want to live, be a service offered by a range of providers across the borough, with wraparound support packages that offer tenancy training that will help to build sustainable communities.

### ***Supported Housing Management***

- 5.76 There are 160 units of supported housing accommodation within Gateshead, commissioned from RSLs. There is a lack of strategic alignment and prioritisation, management processes are disjointed, monitoring and oversight is weak, resulting in Gateshead not being best served, as providers are able to choose who is placed, often resulting in those in most need being placed in temporary accommodation, rather than in a specialist unit, and perpetuating the circumstances that underly their vulnerability.
- 5.77 A full profile of supported stock by type and by landlord is needed to support signposting and planning provision.

### ***Private Rental Sector Management***

- 5.78 Gateshead is seeing an increasing level of homelessness emerging from the private sector, as accidental or casual landlords in particular, who offer unofficial tenancies and opaque management of rent accounts come under pressure.
- 5.79 Many private rental households, particularly older residents live in unsuitable and poor standard homes. A particular issues is where vulnerable people are taken advantage of by sofa-surfers, who are reluctant to engage and for whom it is difficult to provide support.
- 5.80 Moving forward the PRS must become a full and viable component of the housing options model, as a significant source of supply, but with a level of quality and tenure security overseen by Gateshead.

## **Structured Customer Journeys – Tenancy Lifecycle**

### ***Sign-up (hand-off from lettings to Neighbourhood Management)***

- 5.81 Tenancy sign-up is undertaken by the New Tenancy Team (with local teams undertaking transfer sign-ups), with the emphasis placed on ensuring tenancy sustainability. As with offer and viewings process, the opportunity is lost to create a strong relationship with the on-the-ground team in quickly and effectively establishing a tenancy, and addressing problems before they become a full-blown sustainment issue. The quality of the onboarding process also needs to be reviewed to ensure tenants fully understand their commitments, and those of the Council, how their home operates and how they can quickly access local support networks.



***Move-in & Establishment***

- 5.82 The quality and preparedness of the home offered to new residents needs to be reviewed, expectation management is clearly an issue leading to increasing numbers of requests for rent credits due to compensate for promised or incomplete repairs, disconnected utilities, or gardens).
- 5.83 It has been reported to us that issues with building management and safety, ASB and limited enforcement on estates is driving turnover, particularly in high-rise blocks, which creates instability and weakens the sense of ownership within the immediate neighbourhood. Young single people are the least likely to sustain a tenancy as they are financially excluded and are often isolated, with few links into the communities in which they are placed, and are equally susceptible to exploitation.

***Probationary Review***

- 5.84 The introductory tenancy review path is weak, reviews are not systematically undertaken and there is little evidence of the success of failure recorded, or level of churn. Introductory tenancy reviews therefore require a robust process, with early intervention and decision making tailored to the needs of the individual. Introductory tenancy review and decision points are frequently missed and a default tenancy position results. A robust review process is needed, with actions scheduled and undertaken on time, with tenants provided with support and every chance to rectify issues, and protocols for extension with clear terms and conditions.

***Tenancy Management and Sustainment***

- 5.85 Core *Change of Tenancy* processes such as assignments and successions appear to be undertaken effectively, but would benefit from greater scrutiny of record keeping. However, practice around discretionary succession rights needs further review.
- 5.86 Tenancy audits do not routinely take place, so Gateshead is unaware of who lives in a particular home or of any change in circumstances. Business systems are not yet set-up to proactively signal issues or trigger intervention workflows.
- 5.87 The absence of a strategic tenancy policy weakens the delivery of balanced communities, place-shaping, and coordinated enforcement and sustainment activity across Gateshead. A high concentration of short-term, move-on and temporary accommodation in the central area of Gateshead, has consequently led to inexperienced and in the main highly vulnerable new tenants finding it hard to integrate successfully where they have limited support, with existing tenants equally unhappy with the resultant impact on levels of social disturbance and ASB. A locality based approach is needed, with lettings plans geared to support the most vulnerable, living multi-storeys accommodation and to help create blocks and neighbourhoods with a sense of community, that people feel safe in, take pride in, and feel happy to call home.
- 5.88 Neighbourhood team use Northgate to manage ASB, supported by Microsoft Power BI reports. The role of these teams need review, as whilst acting as front-door and advocates across all Council services, frontline staff are frustrated with the volume of low level queries, that deflect from delivering agreed workplans. The service needs to be turned around, to



become one of proactive engagement and support, balanced with enforcement, working within a partnership of locality-based enabling and support solutions.

### **Void Management**

- 5.89 Optimising the configuration to meet market needs and maximising the income from the stock portfolio has been a significant challenge for Gateshead over many years, with 679 homes empty (3%+ of stock) in March 2021, equating to an annual loss of £5m in lost rent and service charges, on average, over 30% of voids are empty for more than 6 months. Of the voids in March 2021, 194 were ready to but not let, and a further 41 held for strategic review.
- 5.90 A fundamental review of the asset management aspects of the voids process overseen by Pennington Choices, is currently delivering an action plan that includes reducing the backlog of voids in-year through use of outside contractors; re-classifying and reprioritising new voids into four new workstreams; and reviewing end-to-end processes.
- 5.91 Without recovering the ground of the voids review, from our observations and feedback provided, it is clear that:
- There is a complete lack of visibility of the processes managing the voids, allocations and lettings pathways, which are fragmented over multiple systems and lines of responsibility, with staff involved in individual stages of the process being unaware of the delivery process. The management of TA and refugee project allocated stock also need to dovetail.
  - There is no clear critical path embedded within the process: - pre inspection, pre allocation, pre-viewing or pre sign-up activity that can shorten the void period or ensure a successful let. Target turnaround dates need to be set for each pathway and performance driven towards meeting them;
  - A clear *Unavailable to Let Protocol* with quick and predetermined decision making is required to route a void definitively, with voids unavailable to let over the long term treated as 'off-rent';
  - Voids within blocks being considered for or are due for demolition, sale, major works or regeneration should be let on a shortlife arrangement to generate a continuing return;
  - Low demand is often cited as the reason for the number of empty homes and slow void turnaround (the root-cause of which is actually is the number of homes under void repair). However, with innovation and creativity in marketing and letting properties, this can be changed, and by offering using third party short-term lettings agents to fill the least marketable units;
  - Alternative marketing methods such as social media or using agencies such as MovingSoon could be explored to accelerate lettings.
- 5.92 Gateshead would benefit from a tightly controlled void management environment achieved by administering a prescribed void management process, capable of coping with every type of void. Alongside a robust process is the need for:
- A business understanding and protocol on void loss management for units that are to be removed from the letting pool;
  - Void targets for each classification of void;

- Void classification for each void type;
- An arrangement for voids which are due to be sold, demolished or renovated, where the Council is not yet ready to action this;
- A hard to let protocol for clearly defined difficult units;
- An underpinning tenancy strategy around permanent lets, temporary lets and interim use of void units;
- A decant policy and process which dovetails with the void management process;
- A mutual exchange process which dovetails with the void management process;
- A void standard for each void classification;
- Incentives for people in hardship, hard to lets and under occupation which dovetail with the void management process;
- A void management module which is pre-programmed for each void path by classification.

## **Policy Framework and Operating Model**

### ***Policy Framework***

#### **Allocations and Lettings Policy**

5.93 The Gateshead Lettings Policy was approved by Cabinet in 2012, but no-longer reflects the operating model and does not reflect the roles of registered providers. Key observations from a desktop review of the current policy are:

- Whilst core sections of the policy covering eligibility and qualification, application and assessment, allocations and lettings are reasonably complete, there are significant gaps covering joint applicants, change of circumstances, child of tenant policy, viewings and resulting the offer, all of which will impact the day to day delivery of the policy;
- The approach to appeals, complaints, decisions and reviews lack clarity and needs strengthening to demonstrate greater transparency and compliance with the policy;
- Improved management of reduced preference circumstances is required;
- The process for managing direct lets lacks the independence and transparency of a Panel-based review;
- Updating is needed to comply with statutory and regulatory requirements, particularly in relation to data protection and equalities access and monitoring.

5.94 A detailed RAG-rated review of the policy is presented in Appendix 2.

#### **Strategic Tenancy Policy**

5.95 The Gateshead Strategic Tenancy and Tenancy policy was approved by Cabinet in 2014, but it has been confirmed that it has not been implemented. Gateshead is therefore in urgent need of a refreshed policy which once approved is fully implemented across key council functions and landlord partnerships. Key observations from a desktop review of the current policy are:

- The aspiration to create fair, long-term tenures across all tenure types is not adequately covered and the document focuses solely on Council-owned stock;
- There is no section setting out expectations of landlords regarding transparent tenancy conditions in compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards;
- No expectation is set regarding sustaining tenancies and using eviction as a last resort to minimise repeat homelessness;
- Redrafting is needed to comply with statutory and regulatory requirements, particularly in relation to data protection and equalities access and monitoring.

A detailed RAG-rated review of the policy is presented in Appendix 2.

### ***Supply and Demand Modelling***

5.96 Detailed understanding of need, demand and supply is under-developed, and the level of foresight in setting year ahead or informing longer-term strategic planning and focus:

- Limited extent of strategic market assessment - where do people want to live (no insight through current CBL process) or property type needed (1/3 bed). Limited understanding of specialist housing or move-on accommodation needs;
- Limited insight into 'big picture' demand drivers - hospital discharge, age and support related need, and responding to resettlement programmes;
- Limited insight into the quality and long-term sustainability of HRA stock. The Asset Management Strategy is embryonic and limited use is made of active asset management techniques to identify under-performing assets.

### ***Integrated Business Systems***

5.97 The processes that deliver the allocations and lettings, and the tenancy management lifecycles are split across two core systems (Abitas and Northgate) and supported by a number of other specialist systems and multiple management spreadsheets. Consequently, there is no lifecycle visibility of end-to-end processes.

### ***Abitas CBL***

5.98 Abitas was developed as a specialist allocations management system, but has since been incorporated into the Civica Cx platform, and has supported the TWH letting partnership since launch. Whilst a fit for purpose waiting list management solution, as implemented, it currently lacks the depth of functionality, workflow or performance monitoring to fully support the management of end-to-end customer journeys:

- Digital application processes works well in respect of validation and provision of proofs, but the customer experience as implemented could be far more supportive;
- Workflow and process automation is limited with process triggers;
- Real-time performance monitoring is limited and therefore end-to-end process oversight;
- Integration with Northgate is through a series of data snapshots rather than through full synchronisation, with a clear audit trail in place.

- 5.99 Over time, the TWH partnership has struggled to define, agree and implement changes to the system that accommodate the needs and priorities of each partner. This has clearly hampered Gateshead in meeting its specific needs in creating a tailored customer experience and optimising an efficient delivery model.

### **Northgate**

- 5.100 Northgate is a market-leading housing management platform which has clearly been effectively implemented and supported in Gateshead. However, it is not yet fully embedded in the business and to drive service performance improvements and customer outcomes:
- Most core modules have been implemented but value-driving capabilities such as CRM, workflow and case management are at an early stage of roll-out and adoption;
  - further investigation is needed into the management of homeless customer journeys within the system, recording prevention activities in particular, but in any case, management processes still sit outside the system;
  - Digital communication capabilities including email and SMS notifications are not fully exploited, which would keep customers better informed and reduce contact demand;
  - There is no end-to-end view of the *Void Pathway*, as it is split across systems, and difficult to create through either Microsoft Power Builder or Business Objects;
  - Real-time dashboard and business analytics functionality is not fully exploited or in some cases not yet embedded in management processes.
- 5.101 Operating critical processes across two systems is proving challenging in the delivery of a high quality service and leading to avoidable duplication and manual effort. Operating within an integrated platform would enable:
- Accelerated digital shift and the creation of a broader digital service offer, enabling any Gateshead resident (or potential resident) to explore their housing solutions;
  - Seamless customer journeys to be created, with exception and needs-based triggers, real-time management oversight, improved controls and real-time performance management;
  - Integrated customer and asset data management, insight gathering and reporting;
  - Significant service efficiencies with frontline staff able to work more flexibly and to be with a far greater level of empowerment, but within clear structures and controls.
- 5.102 The Northgate *Housing On-line* portal could support a universal approach to housing options and comprehensive digital application management. Similarly, deploying the Partner Portal would enable RPs to advertise homes and manage nominations through the platform.

### ***Flexible organisational Design***

- 5.103 The service is traditionally organised in a deeply hierarchical and siloed structure, supporting parallel customer pathways and fragmented service delivery, this has been compounded by the nature of the arms-length clienting model over time, resulting in:
- A lack of ownership and weak end-to-end process oversight, with delegated authority operating outside line management arrangements;

- A significant number of specialist roles operating in isolation, that struggle to build a full case management picture of needs and actions;
- A perceived 'command and control' culture with staff often feeling unable to make the best decision on behalf of a customer, which can be addressed within the realigned housing service model, with redefined levels of responsibility and accountability.

5.104 The ongoing review and restructuring of the service provides a golden opportunity to rethink the service to ensure flexibility of approach, greater customer focus, to inject the new level innovation needed, and most importantly accountability.

### **Customer Experience**

- 5.105 To gauge the accessibility, quality of service provided and outcomes from a customer perspective, an online survey was sent to tenants of Gateshead who have been housed in a Council home within the last year. Whilst Covid will undoubtedly have skewed some aspects of service delivery and experience, it is hoped that the survey has still captured a representative snapshot of what it is like to be a customer of the service. The survey seeks to understand the customer experience at key stages of the lettings journey, such as the experience in applying, waiting, being offered a home, and the experience of living in that home. The experiences of 95 recently households who responded to the survey are summarised below. A more detailed analysis is provided in Appendix 4.
- 5.106 Almost 80% of households found it easy to apply using the TWH choice-based lettings system, 15% found no particular problems, with 5% finding it difficult. Half of households say they were offered help to complete the process. When making the application, 8% of households were homeless, with a further 5% in non-secure accommodation, 41% of applicants were already a tenant of Gateshead, and of the remainder, 14% were housing association tenants and 20% were in private tenancies. The four main reasons cited for applying for a new home were being homeless (21%), having a medical need (20%), overcrowding (16%) and fleeing violence (10%). Also, nine respondents were seeking to move because their home was too big for them.
- 5.107 Satisfaction with the application assessment process was relatively high, with 80% of households reporting that their assessment was accurate, and similarly that their needs were accurately understood. Special circumstances were less likely to be seen as captured accurately, with 73% of households satisfied.
- 5.108 19 of the 95 households chose to have their assessment reviewed, with the key reasons for review being the priority, size or suitability of home awarded, with a resultant 75% of reviews being upheld.
- 5.109 Whilst on the waiting list, approximately 50% of households contacted the service (including 27% who contacted Gateshead more than five times), regarding their position on the waiting list (40%), a change of circumstance (33%). Just over half of households felt their query was dealt with effectively at the first point of contact, and 15% that their query was not dealt with effectively. 10% of households raised a complaint whilst on the waiting list. 60% of households were rehoused within 12 months (including 33% within six months), almost a quarter of households spent more than two years on the waiting list.

- 5.110 63% of households bid for homes on the CBL portal, with the remainder receiving direct offers. The majority of households (70%) accepted the first home offered and a further 13% the second. 10% of households received three or more offers before accepting one. 69 of the 95 households felt Gateshead had taken their views into consideration when making an offer of a property with 25 feeling that their views and wishes were not considered. The main reasons for dissatisfaction being the area the home was located in (40%) or that the home was not suitable (37%).
- 5.111 When moving in, most households found their home to be safe and secure, with safety locks for external doors (97%) and locks for windows (89%), that there was working electricity (92%) and two sets of keys (91%) However, a proportion of households had issues with property cleanliness (25%), uncapped gas (24%), hot water (31%) and heating (33%).
- 5.112 As new tenants, just under 50% of households received a welcome visit in person (although under Covid restrictions, the vast majority reported receiving a phone call). At these sessions 43 households raised issues with repairs, with a small number raising issues regarding rent or ASB. 21 households still consider the issues raised to be unresolved.
- 5.113 When asked whether there have been any material changes to their needs during the tenancy so far, 17 households report the need to reflect an intended change in joint tenancy arrangement, and 19 have already applied for a transfer or mutual exchange. 25 households report having someone in the household who now needs support.

### **Partnership Working Experience**

- 5.114 Delivery partnerships have weakened over time and need reinvigorating, with shared objectives, roles and outcomes renegotiated, built upon successful initiatives such as the resettlement of Syrian refugees, the 'everyone in' response, and a bespoke homelessness needs prototype delivering day-to-day solutions through a multi-disciplinary team.
- 5.115 Two housing markets have emerged in Gateshead, with the RPs focused on development and less so on management relationships, leaving Gateshead to manage statutory homelessness, complex and hardship cases. Nomination agreements are dated, with scrutiny eroded, and weak controls. The TWH CBL model compounds the problem as RPs can apply affordability criteria they choose, do not result offers consistently, and therefore override the audit controls in place.

### **Registered Provider Perspective**

- 5.116 As part of this review, senior operational managers from Bernicia, Karbon Homes, Home Group, Places for People and Thirteen Group have been interviewed to understand the perspectives of the main providers of the strategic and local operating environment within Gateshead.
- 5.117 Whilst all provides interviewed report good working relationships with Gateshead, there is little awareness of the current Gateshead lettings policy, as they operate directly through TWH. All currently operate within a patchwork of policies and allocations schemes across the North East and views are divided as to the relative merits of sub-regional and Local Authority

specific schemes; in reality they work as effectively as they can with whatever scheme is in place.

- 5.118 Providers have mixed views of the effectiveness of the TWH partnership and service model. They are not full partners as they are elsewhere in the country, and this creates a feeling of being a 'second-class citizen', and operationally without full access to critical applicant data and case notes.
- 5.119 The general quality of nominations coming through the TWH CBL process is regarded as being at best mixed, reflecting a lack of verification at the point offer, and resulting in multiple iterations of the shortlisting process. A particular problem highlighted is that waiting list applicants simply do not respond to calls from lettings teams. This problem is invisible to Gateshead and there are no penalties in place for not bidding or engaging with the process. Providers would therefore like to see homes readvertised for a second time on a first-come-first-served basis to reduce void loss. There has also been problems with the applicability of shortlists provided for allocating to new build schemes, where sensitivity is needed on mixed tenure estates.
- 5.120 Where there are difficulties in letting a home through TWH, providers are quick to use alternative marketing channels such as social media, commercial lettings portals such as RightMove and Zoopla, and MovingSoon, which specialises in marketing affordable housing. National advertising has proved an effective tool for providers in attracting people to move to the North East from other part of the country. Thirteen Group has developed its own lettings portal (MyThirteen), which delivers a high quality user experience, with users able to view homes with minimal upfront registration and quickly search and save *favourite* homes and locations.
- 5.121 Providers also report that it is often difficult to manage expectations, with a significant number of refusals where the home is deemed not suitable, isn't carpeted or decorated, or the garden is not maintained. Thirteen Group has attempted to address this by adopting a higher voids standard, through carpeting and decorating homes prior to let and the limited provision of white goods. This has not only resulted in fewer refusals and better sustainability and lower arrears, based on a *Good Product Good Start* approach.
- 5.122 Providers confirm that strategic engagement has weakened and become limited over time. This is typified by the lack of process integration and continuity of support between social care commissioning and lettings processes, with multiple access pathways (and portals), minimal oversight of referrals and the inability to track the customer journey of an individual through the system.
- 5.123 There is also a perceived gap between specialist and general needs housing provision, with tenancies often failing when individuals are placed into general needs accommodation without any form of wraparound support. There is concern regarding placements to sheltered housing and the operation of the accessible housing register.
- 5.124 Providers agree that a hub and spoke model is needed, that will allow step-down into general needs accommodation, with outcomes built around the individual. Most providers operate some form of age specific or specialist provision within Gateshead. Home Group is currently



building 50 units in Gateshead to operate this model, which will offer intensive housing management support for directly referred individuals.

- 5.125 Providers are open to restarting a strategic dialogue with Gateshead, which they view as a strategic growth area, with unmet demand. Adopting formalised partnership working arrangements, as equal partners, would also be welcomed, with a common housing policy, setting-out a shared set of objectives for offering applicants choice across a portfolio of homes and accommodation solutions, to best meet both needs and demand.
- 5.126 A common allocations pathway is viewed as an essential prerequisite (whether operated within or across boroughs), to ensure all partner providers are on the same page, with no policy, operational or process barriers. Eligibility, qualification and local lettings criteria need to be harmonised and overseen by local lettings plans
- 5.127 More broadly, providers want their offer to be seen as part of a Gateshead housing solutions marketplace, alongside that of Gateshead, which is currently the only rehousing option residents see.
- 5.128 Moving forward, formalised partnership arrangements need to reflect a partnership of equals, with a single pool of housing resource, with clear management protocols and exceptions, set by the allocations policy. Partnership solutions are equally a priority to support those currently excluded, and to help alleviate hardship which is prevalent, to ensure support is in place from the outset of an intervention or tenancy of whatever type, to ensure sustainability.

### **Baseline Assessment Summary**

- 5.129 Gateshead is at a pivotal moment when it can rethink, reset and renew its housing offer and service delivery model to enable residents to achieve lasting outcomes.

#### ***Strategic Framework***

- 5.130 Gateshead has a strong sense of purpose in driving ambitious renewal outcomes. An overarching Housing Strategy and oversight framework is now in place, but there are significant gaps in underpinning strategies, including homelessness, rough-sleeping and asset management. The impact of Covid notwithstanding, Gateshead has struggled to make strategic plans an operational reality, and there is a financial imperative to reshape demand and to maximise efficiency; the HRA is not sustainable without significant intervention.
- 5.131 Closure of ALMO provides a unique opportunity to realign services to realise a step-change in outcomes and efficiency, through the review of current delivery arrangements and partnerships. Registered providers do not form part of the strategic delivery picture and the housing market in Gateshead is fragmented, with opportunities for partnership and interventions in the private rental sector largely uncoordinated and scrutiny limited.

#### ***Policy Framework***

- 5.132 A full overhaul of policy and working practice is required, as the key Allocations and lettings policies are dated and not reflective of current and emerging needs. There is no Annual Lettings Plan to shape prioritisation and drive delivery, whilst high levels of appeals and



exceptions distort the delivery. Certain aspects of the scheme create the wrong incentives such as not penalising applicants for not-bidding or refusing offers.

- 5.133 The current allocations policy drives and its embedded working practices drive intensive levels of demand, and administration, audit trails and supporting casework management are incomplete, which leaves Gateshead at risk of a regulatory breach.
- 5.134 There is a lack of insight to drive strategic housing needs and market assessment, RPs operate in isolation and operate to their own agendas, with a largely piecemeal approach to market enabling, resulting in unbalanced communities and responsibility for helping those most in need to find housing solutions resting solely with Gateshead.

#### ***Service Offer, Access Pathways and Customer Journeys***

- 5.135 The housing service offer to Gateshead residents (or potential residents) is unclear, whether they are exploring their housing options, have reached a point of housing crisis, are housed in short-term accommodation, are leaving the armed-forces, hospital or prison, or are an adequately housed tenant with a change of circumstance.
- 5.136 Service access pathways are siloed with parallel customer journeys, and seem to be built around the needs of the service rather than the customer, often enabling those 'in the know' to work the system too easily, potentially at the expense of others more in need. Whilst some processes are self-service enabled, there is limited information and toolsets for residents to make choice for themselves or self-manage their housing options.
- 5.137 The current processes for lettings and tenancy management do not represent best practice with respect to establishing, for providing wrap-around support, for managing move-on and ultimately sustaining people in a long-term home.

#### ***Service Design and Organisation***

- 5.138 Reflecting on the interviews with stakeholders it is clear that the service is siloed and processes are disjointed. The core housing management system is well implemented and supported, but the 'glue' provided by CRM, workflow and case management functionality has not yet created an integrated business system, capable of supporting end-to-end customer journeys. A lack of process ownership, too many off-system processes and workarounds driven by aged policies, and under-utilised real-time management capability makes it hard for managers to see the 'wood for the trees'. Investment is needed to complete the full roll-out of Northgate and to bring all housing operational and management processes together.

#### ***Tyne and Wear Homes Partnership***

- 5.139 The TWH Partnership was set-up to provide housing choice to residents across the region, to deliver a level of process efficiency that could not be achieved as an individual authority, and to provide a platform to foster and deliver wider strategic housing initiatives.
- 5.140 Whilst a proportion of residents do seek to access housing across the sub-region, the overwhelming majority of Gateshead residents are seeking local housing solutions, and the shared access pathways currently in place are disjointed and unclear. Although the allocations policy is correctly administered through the CBL system, which in its own right is fit for

purpose, wider opportunities for providing alternative housing solutions and for helping new tenants to establish and sustain their tenancies are potentially lost.

- 5.141 Operating across two business systems and operating with aged policies has resulted in a sub-optimised customer experience and disjointed processes, characterised by high levels of manual intervention and workarounds. The incremental development of the system is not sufficient for Gateshead to drive through the step-change it is seeking. The preferred direction of travel for the partnership to create a centralised processing team, could exacerbate the disjointed nature of the service, rather than reconnecting it.
- 5.142 The partnership model has unconsciously enabled RPs to offer homes in a way that does not meet the strategic needs of Gateshead and there is limited oversight or challenge to their allocations and tenancy policies. There is limited evidence of the partnership having fulfilled its remit of progressing the strategic housing agenda.

***A Whole-system approach***

- 5.143 Gateshead should consider developing a whole-system housing solution, fully engaging with the Registered Provider and Private landlords within a *Gateshead Housing Model*, to provide high quality, low cost homes, enabling the creation of a *Housing Marketplace* for all Gateshead residents. The Northgate platform on which to create such a model is already in-place, which would offer a much improved customer experience and potential outcomes, whilst realising significant operational efficiencies, that would more than offset any loss of resident choice or sub-regional cross-working.

## 6. DELIVERING THE GATESHEAD HOUSING MODEL

### A Risk-Based Delivery Roadmap

6.1 The Delivery Roadmap outlined below is structured to enable Gateshead to rethink, reset and renew its housing offer and to create a partnership-based service delivery model, by:

- Updating the policy framework and aligning it to deliver *Thrive* objectives, reframing the service offer and realigning expectations;
- Creating a seamless delivery model that is fully customer facing service that enables every resident to explore and progress their housing needs;
- Building a strong partnerships that support the most vulnerable to sustain their homes over the long-term, within balanced, resilient communities;
- Delivering strategic and operational change in a structured way through a *Blueprint* and *Business Case*, that reduces risk whilst maintaining an accelerated pace of delivery and outcomes realisation.

GATESHEAD HOUSING MODEL: DELIVERY ROADMAP			
DELIVERY TIMEFRAME	SHORT TERM 6-12 months	MEDIUM TERM 12-24 months	LONGER TERM 24-36 months
FOCUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Alignment</li> <li>• Service &amp; Locality</li> <li>• Core Service Redesign</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships Building</li> <li>• RPs &amp; Commissioners</li> <li>• Holistic Solutions Design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Strategy</li> <li>• PRS Solutions</li> <li>• Market Enabling</li> </ul>
DELIVERABLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocations Policy</li> <li>• Strategic Tenancy Policy</li> <li>• Annual Lettings Plan</li> <li>• Gateshead CBL Model</li> <li>• Offer &amp; Service Redesign</li> <li>• Compliance &amp; Assurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Options Marketplace</li> <li>• Sustainment &amp; Enabling</li> <li>• E2E Customer Journeys</li> <li>• Empty Homes Solutions</li> <li>• Performance &amp; Insight</li> <li>• Stock &amp; Supply Solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PRS Offer &amp; Partnership</li> <li>• Cross-Working Solutions</li> <li>• Social Lettings Agency</li> <li>• Move-on Solutions</li> <li>• Specialist Solutions</li> <li>• Regeneration Solutions</li> </ul>
STRUCTURE	Blueprint		Business Case

### Short Term (6-12 months)

6.2 The focus of the next twelve months should be on refreshing policies and aligning completed strategies with *Thrive* outcomes, building an integrated service platform, and building insight into tenancy and neighbourhood sustainment, with key deliverables being to:

- Develop robust Allocations and Strategic Tenancy policies with stakeholders and partners, that enable those most in need within Gateshead;
- Use the *Baseline Analysis* to create a detailed *Blueprint* for the transformation of service offer and standards, the specification for a Gateshead CBL, and a streamlined service model, built around customer journeys and targeted early intervention;

- Create an assurance model to ensure full ongoing Regulatory compliance.

***Medium Term (12-24 months)***

6.3 Focused on building partnership and developing holistic housing-based support models with commissioners and RPs, with key deliverables being to:

- Develop a cross-tenure *Marketplace* where anyone can resolve their housing needs;
- Link together sustainment and enabling solutions that enable people to access, move through and become independent of the service;
- Employ active asset management and case-by-case needs assessments to target investment (or divestment) in individual homes with the aim of sustaining a tenancy.

***Longer Term (24-36 months)***

6.4 Focused on developing a full portfolio of housing solutions within Gateshead through partnership with the Private Rental Sector and rebuilding regional partnership strategies and solutions, with key deliverables being to:

- Develop a PRS partnership offer and potentially a Social Lettings Agency to maximise the available pool of high quality homes to let within the Gateshead *Marketplace*;
- Build a fully integrated model for specialist housing support and move-on accommodation, with supply matched to demand and needs;
- Develop a model for maintaining the long-term sustainability of Gateshead stock, with replacement and regeneration programmes to meet carbon neutral, wellbeing and economic growth commitments.

***Building a Business Case***

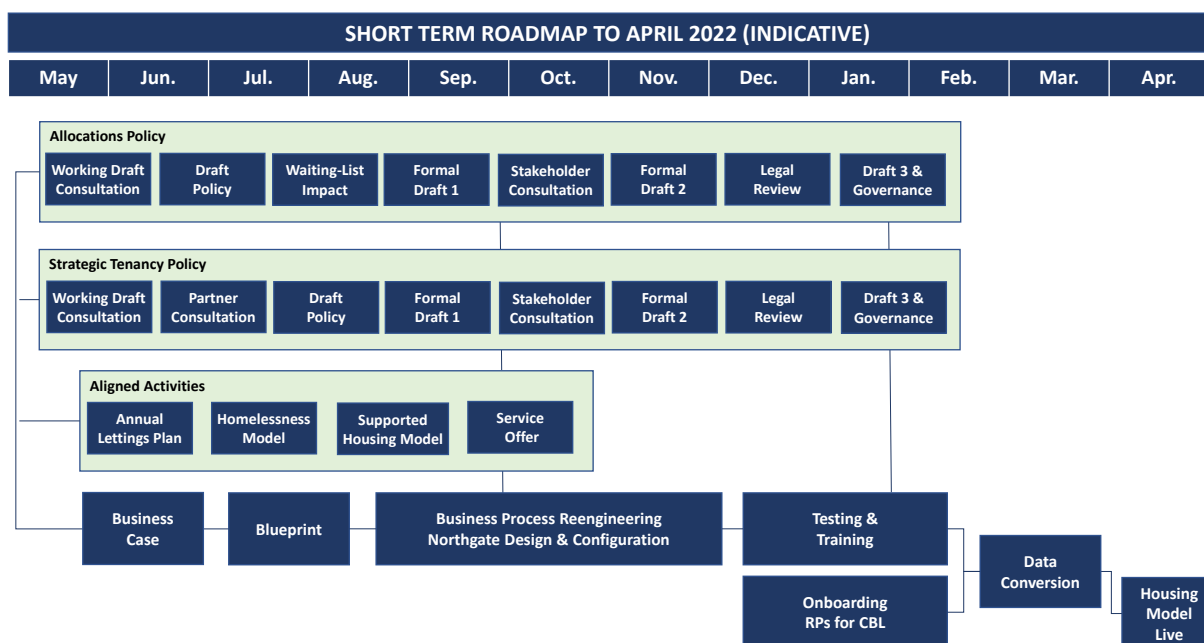
6.5 Investment in process, systems, people and partnerships will be needed to deliver the *Roadmap* proposed above. However, from the analysis undertaken, an *invest-to-save* based case can readily be made based on:

- Channel shift, self-service and self-management, and influencing customer behaviours that result in reduced demand or being able to support customers at a lower cost;
- Restructuring and streamlining the service around coordinated service paths, that optimise void loss and tenancy sustainability;
- Improved strategic alignment and making best use of resources;
- Whole system cost reduction through early intervention, structured case management and targeted support, that breaks the cycle of homelessness and short term accommodation.

6.6 To avoid duplication and double counting of costs and savings, it is suggested that the business case forms an element of the Housing Service Review business case, which will also ensure service changes are not developed in isolation.

**Indicative Short Term Roadmap to April 2022**

- 6.7 The schematic below sets out an indicative plan for delivering the Short Term priorities by April 2022, with both the Allocations and Strategic Tenancy policies in operational use, and with a Gateshead CBL offer in place.



- 6.8 A detailed Roadmap for the delivery of each Policy is set-out in Appendix 4.

**Delivering the Change**

- 6.9 Delivering the *Roadmap* will require drive and sustained commitment, with:
- A clear vision, fully endorsed by Members, executive stakeholders and partners, with a clear narrative to ensure staff buy-in and commitment to the change;
  - Executive focus and drive to mobilise and execute the change;
  - Careful planning, resource commitment and workstream coordination achieved through focused programme management and governance;
  - Building and sustaining momentum through the rapid and ongoing delivery of outcomes.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

- 7.1 Emerging from the Covid pandemic, Gateshead is seeking to reshape its housing service to better align with and deliver a broad set of *Everybody Thrives* outcomes, against significant local challenges and with limited resources. An assessment of the current policy framework and service model service the against the target service model outlined above reveals a number of significant gaps:
- Whilst Gateshead has a strong strategic vision, there are significant gaps in supporting strategies and there is no shared insight or understanding of the true nature of housing need, the shape of future demand and consequently supply priorities;
  - Current policies are dated and a compliance risk. They no longer reflect the needs of Gateshead or prioritise support for the most vulnerable. They give rise to high levels of exceptions and workarounds, compounded by incomplete audit trails and casework;
  - Service offers, access pathways and customer journeys through the service are unclear and fragmented, and don't provide coherent plans of support;
  - The integrated delivery of lettings, voids and housing management processes is challenging, being delivered across two partially interfacing systems, impacting delivery quality, outcomes and efficiency.
  - Based on track record, the ability of the Tyne and Wear Homes partnership to deliver exactly what Gateshead needs moving forward is limited, its intended direction of travel will exacerbate rather than alleviate the problems faced by Gateshead;
  - New tenants are not adequately supported in establishing their tenancies, and lettings policy and practice is contributing to the growth of poorly balanced communities, with increased social issues, resulting in a perceived fall in communal ownership and pride;
  - Service are siloed and delivery fragmented, with too many specialist support areas and roles, with no end-to-end oversight, resulting in a lack of ownership, momentum and innovation in tackling longstanding problems such as re-letting empty homes;
- 7.2 However, Gateshead is also starting from a position of relative strength in respect of:
- New governance and partner engagement arrangements will help build insight into what Gateshead needs and how to shape it;
  - The Northgate platform is state-of the art and well implemented, it also has the functionality to deliver a *best in class* housing solution for Gateshead, including CBL, and extended self-service capability for both customers and partners, with a relatively modest level of additional investment;
  - The opportunity to fundamentally restructure the service presented by the closure of the ALMO will enable a step-change in customer focus, service quality, efficiency and assurance, in turn opening-up innovative cross-working opportunities across Gateshead;

- Day-to-day working relationships with commissioners throughout the Council and with registered providers are good, and there are positive examples of innovative partnership working examples, however there is no formal partnership working framework in place.

### ***Delivering the Gateshead Housing Model***

7.3 Now is the moment to plan and launch a far-reaching and innovative housing offer for Gateshead, supported by a whole-system approach and integrated housing solution, delivered in full partnership with commissioners, registered providers and private landlords. A prioritised Roadmap is proposed:

7.4 **By April 2022:**

- Complete a systematic re-drafting of the Allocations and Strategic Tenancy policies, based on the findings of this report, aligned with parallel reviews of homelessness and specialist housing solutions, to create a holistic and sustainable housing offer;
- Map the provision of housing and related support solutions across Gateshead from which to develop a universal access pathway, coordinated housing and support needs assessments around an individual or family, and shared oversight of their delivery;
- Develop a business case for withdrawal from the TWH partnership, creating a Gateshead CBL scheme, with RPs as full partners, operating within a Common Housing Register;
- Develop a blueprint for the full implementation and reengineering of processes within Northgate, to deliver compliance assurance and digitally driven efficiency.

7.5 **By March 2023:**

- Launch a digital *Housing Marketplace* through which all Gateshead residents can resolve their housing needs;
- Develop partnership arrangements with RPs and commissioners that will deliver seamless support solutions.

7.6 **By March 2024+:**

- Extend the *Housing Marketplace* offer across the private rental sector, in conjunction with formalised partnership working;
- Deliver specialist and move-on accommodation solutions that provide a stepping-stone and maximises independence.

7.7 Consultation with stakeholders indicates a broad level of commitment to working within formalised partnership arrangements, to deliver shared aims and in maximising the effectiveness of housing and support solutions available to Gateshead residents.



**APPENDIX 1: POLICY FRAMEWORKS****1. Contents of an Allocations Policy (Scheme)**

<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
1.1	The Allocation Scheme
1.2	The Legal Framework
1.3	Right to Move
1.4	Allocation of a Tenancy
1.5	Data Protection
1.6	Equalities, Access and Monitoring
1.7	Force Majeure
1.8	Changes to the Allocation Scheme
1.9	Statement on Choice
<b>Part 2</b>	<b>Delivery Model</b>
2.1	Gateshead Path
2.2	Tyne and Wear Homes
2.3	Partnership Framework with Registered Providers
<b>Part 3</b>	<b>Eligibility and Qualification</b>
3.1	Eligibility
3.1.1	Special Arrangements for 16-18-year olds
3.1.2	Persons from Abroad
3.2	Qualification Rules
3.3	Armed Forces Covenant
3.4	Non-Qualification Rules
3.5	Exceptional or Mitigating Circumstances
3.6	Reassessment of Applicants who have not Qualified
3.7	Safe Surrender Agreements
<b>Part 4</b>	<b>Applications and Assessments</b>
4.1	The Application Process
4.2	Submission
4.2.1	<i>Applicants without a fixed address</i>
4.2.2	<i>Joint Applicants</i>
4.3	Verification
4.3.1	<i>Proof Required</i>
4.3.2	<i>Household Splits</i>
4.3.3	<i>False Information</i>
4.4	Assessment
4.4.1	<i>Assessment of Housing Need</i>
4.4.2	<i>Homeless Assessments</i>
4.4.3	<i>Reduced Preference</i>
4.4.4	<i>Transfer Assessments</i>
4.4.5	<i>Child of Tenant</i>

4.4.6	<i>Priority on Health Grounds</i>
4.4.7	<i>Carers</i>
4.4.8	<i>Care Leavers</i>
4.4.9	<i>Move On</i>
4.4.10	<i>Elected Members or Employees</i>
4.4.11	<i>Pitches for Gypsies and Travellers</i>
4.4.12	<i>Housing Priority Bands</i>
4.4.13	<i>Determination of Effective Band Date</i>
4.4.14	<i>Household Type and Property Size Allowed</i>
4.5	Notification
4.6	Cancellation of Applications
4.7	Change in Circumstance
4.8	Deliberate or Worsening Circumstances
<b>Part 5</b>	<b>Allocations and Lettings</b>
5.1	The Allocation Process
5.1.1	<i>Blended Allocations</i>
5.1.2	<i>Predicting Properties</i>
5.2	Property Identification
5.2.1	<i>Direct Lets</i>
5.2.2	<i>Choice Based Lettings</i>
5.2.3	<i>Advertising the Property</i>
5.2.4	<i>Rent Regimes</i>
5.2.5	<i>Property Description</i>
5.2.6	<i>Local Letting Provision</i>
5.2.7	<i>Hard to Lets</i>
5.2.8	<i>Sensitive Lets</i>
5.2.9	<i>Housing with Support and Care</i>
5.3	Expressions of Interest
5.3.1	<i>Bidding for a Property</i>
5.3.2	<i>Assisted Bidding (Auto Bidding)</i>
5.3.3	<i>Grouped Bids</i>
5.3.4	<i>Retrospective Bids</i>
5.3.5	<i>Shortlisting</i>
5.3.6	<i>Direct Offers</i>
5.4	Lettings
5.4.1	<i>Offer of Accommodation</i>
5.4.2	<i>Limited Offers</i>
5.4.3	<i>Viewing</i>
5.4.4	<i>Resulting the Offer</i>
5.4.5	<i>Publicising Lettings</i>
5.5	Tenancy Sustainment
<b>Part 6</b>	<b>Appeals, Complaints, Decisions and Reviews</b>
6.1	Decisions
6.2	Complaints

6.3	Reviews
6.3.1	<i>Housing Register Review</i>
6.3.2	<i>Statutory Right of Review</i>
6.3.3	<i>Judicial Review</i>
6.4	Appeals
<b>Appendices</b>	
A1	Lettings outside of the Allocation Scheme
A2	Allocation by Bedsize
A3	Terms of Reference: Allocation Scheme Panel

## 2. Contents of a Strategic Tenancy Policy

<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
1.1	Strategic Aim
1.2	The Legal Framework
1.3	Data Protection
1.4	Equalities, Access and Monitoring
1.5	Changes to the Strategic Tenancy Policy
<b>Part 2</b>	<b>Delivery Model</b>
2.1	Gateshead Council
2.2	Registered Providers
<b>Part 3</b>	<b>Tenancy Creation</b>
3.1	Tenancy Start Date
3.2	Rent and Debit Frequencies
3.3	Review Dates
3.4	Household Composition
3.5	Key Information
3.6	New Tenant Visits
<b>Part 4</b>	<b>Tenure Type</b>
4.1	Licenses
4.2	Introductory Tenancies
4.3	Fixed Term Tenancies
4.4	Secure Tenancies
<b>Part 5</b>	<b>Tenancy Conditions</b>
5.1	Rent Payment
5.2	Safety of the Home
5.3	Maintenance of the Home
5.4	Acceptable Behaviour
5.5	Getting Involved
5.6	Customer Service Standards

<b>Part 6</b>	<b>Tenancy Changes</b>
6.1	Sole to Joint
6.2	Joint to Sole
6.3	Assignments
6.4	Successions
6.5	Right to Buy
6.2	Right to Transfer
<b>Part 7</b>	<b>Tenancy Sustainment</b>
7.1	Vulnerable Residents
7.2	Support
7.3	Extra Care
7.4	Supported Housing
7.5	Safe Surrender Agreements
<b>Part 8</b>	<b>Tenancy Enforcement</b>
8.1	Tenancy Audits
8.2	Demotion
8.3	Possession
6.4	Successions
<b>Part 9</b>	<b>Tenancy Termination</b>
9.1	Tenancy End Date
9.2	Former Tenant Debt
9.3	Transferring Debt
9.4	Tenancy Records
<b>Appendices</b>	
A1	Licence
A2	Introductory Tenancy (Secure)
A3	Assured Shorthold Tenancy
A4	Secure Tenancy
A5	Deed of Assignment
A6	Safe Surrender Agreement
A7	Notice to Quit
A8	Notice of Seeking Possession
A9	Section 21
A10	Other Notices

**APPENDIX 2: CURRENT POLICY REVIEW**

- 2.1 An assessment of the current Gateshead Lettings and Strategic Tenancy policies against the required components of a model policy is set out below. An indicative RAG rating is given to each section, reflecting whether the section is present in the current policies and whether the content is satisfactory.

	Included and satisfactory or with greater clarity provided
	Included but requires improvement
	Not included or included with a high degree of improvement required.

- 2.2 The RAG rating is complimented with a commentary as to the reason for the rating, and with an outline of proposed improvements.

**Gateshead Council Lettings Policy December 2012**

Part	Criteria	RAG	Assessment Commentary
<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>		The policy needs a definite introduction which needs to be strengthened with the missing sections.
1.1	The Allocation Scheme		This is covered but will need to be amended for the future operational model.
1.2	The Legal Framework		This section is not covered
1.3	Right to Move		This section is not covered
1.4	Allocation of a Tenancy		This is covered but will need to be amended so it aligns with the new strategic tenancy policy.
1.5	Data Protection		This section is not covered
1.6	Equalities, Access and Monitoring		This section is not covered
1.7	Force Majeure		This section is not covered
1.8	Changes to the Allocation Scheme		This section is not covered
1.9	Statement on Choice		This section is not covered
<b>Part 2</b>	<b>Delivery Model</b>		This is covered under the current Tyne and Wear Homes Partnership but does not represent, Gateshead's current operating model.
2.1	Gateshead Path		The pure Gateshead path is not currently covered, with the adoption of a new model this section will need to be introduced.
2.2	Tyne and Wear Homes		Tyne and Wear is covered, and the future arrangements will need to be captured in the new draft.

Part	Criteria	RAG	Assessment Commentary
2.3	Partnership Framework with Registered Providers		Gateshead is not currently in direct partnership with its RP, this is an area of improvement recommended under the new model.
<b>Part 3</b>	<b>Eligibility and Qualification</b>		Most of the sections below are covered but will need reconciliation with new ways of working, the housing offer, the Gateshead model, post Covid19 regulatory changes, industry practice and regulatory standards.
3.1	Eligibility		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
3.1.1	Special Arrangements for 16-18-year-olds		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
3.1.2	Persons from Abroad		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
3.2	Qualification Rules		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
3.3	Armed Forces Covenant		This area needs to be strengthened into a covenant.
3.4	Non-Qualification Rules		This section is not covered
3.5	Exceptional or Mitigating Circumstances		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
3.6	Reassessment of Applicants who have not Qualified		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
3.7	Safe Surrender Agreements		This section is not covered
<b>Part 4</b>	<b>Applications and Assessments</b>		Many of the sections below are covered but will need reconciliation with new ways of working, the housing offer, the Gateshead model, post Covid19 regulatory changes, industry practice and regulatory standards.
4.1	The Application Process		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.2	Submission		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.2.1	<i>Applicants without a fixed address</i>		This section is not covered
4.2.2	<i>Joint Applicants</i>		This section is not covered
4.3	Verification		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.3.1	<i>Proof Required</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner

Part	Criteria	RAG	Assessment Commentary
4.3.2	<i>Household Splits</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.3.3	<i>False Information</i>	Red	This section is not covered
4.4	Assessment	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.4.1	<i>Assessment of Housing Need</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.4.2	<i>Homeless Assessments</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.4.3	<i>Reduced Preference</i>	Yellow	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner. Currently referred as demotions which in the legal context are demotions of a secure tenancy not the application.
4.4.4	<i>Transfer Assessments</i>	Red	This section is not covered
4.4.5	<i>Child of Tenant</i>	Red	This section is not covered
4.4.6	<i>Priority on Health Grounds</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.4.7	<i>Carers</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.4.8	<i>Care Leavers</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.4.9	<i>Move On</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.4.10	<i>Elected Members or Employees</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.4.11	<i>Pitches for Gypsies and Travellers</i>	Red	This section is not covered; garages is and need to be clear whether two areas need to be included and what the operating model will be.
4.4.12	<i>Housing Priority Bands</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.4.13	<i>Determination of Effective Band Date</i>	Yellow	Needs to be made explicit and user friendly
4.4.14	<i>Household Type and Property Size Allowed</i>	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.5	Notification	Yellow	Needs to be made explicit
4.6	Cancellation of Applications	Green	Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
4.7	Change in Circumstance	Red	This section is not covered
4.8	Deliberate or Worsening Circumstances	Red	This section is not covered
<b>Part 5</b>	<b>Allocations and Lettings</b>	Yellow	Many of the sections below are not covered but will need to be included.



Part	Criteria	RAG	Assessment Commentary
			Those present will need to be reconciled with new ways of working, the housing offer, the Gateshead model, post Covid19 regulatory changes, industry practice and regulatory standards.
5.1	The Allocation Process		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.1.1	<i>Blended Allocations</i>		This section is not covered
5.1.2	<i>Predicting Properties</i>		This section is not covered
5.2	Property Identification		This section is not covered
5.2.1	<i>Direct Lets</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.2.2	<i>Choice Based Lettings</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.2.3	<i>Advertising the Property</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.2.4	<i>Rent Regimes</i>		This section is not covered
5.2.5	<i>Property Description</i>		This section is not covered
5.2.6	<i>Local Letting Provision</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.2.7	<i>Hard to Lets</i>		This section is not covered
5.2.8	<i>Sensitive Lets</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.2.9	<i>Housing with Support and Care</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.3	Expressions of Interest		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.3.1	<i>Bidding for a Property</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.3.2	<i>Assisted Bidding (Auto Bidding)</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.3.3	<i>Grouped Bids</i>		This section is not covered
5.3.4	<i>Retrospective Bids</i>		This section is not covered
5.3.5	<i>Shortlisting</i>		Mixed in with bidding and but not a distinct section
5.3.6	<i>Direct Offers</i>		Offers are weakened by a lack of legal contract
5.4	Lettings		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.4.1	<i>Offer of Accommodation</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
5.4.2	<i>Limited Offers</i>		This section is not covered
5.4.3	<i>Viewing</i>		This section is not covered
5.4.4	<i>Resulting the Offer</i>		This section is not covered
5.4.5	<i>Publicising Lettings</i>		This section is not covered

Part	Criteria	RAG	Assessment Commentary
5.5	Tenancy Sustainment		This section is not covered
<b>Part 6</b>	<b>Appeals, Complaints, Decisions and Reviews</b>		This whole area would benefit from a distinct section. Currently it is scattered throughout the document, lacks clarity and needs to be strengthened to show a greater degree of transparency in order to demonstrate compliance with legislation.
6.1	Decisions		This section is not covered
6.2	Complaints		This section is not covered
6.3	Reviews		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
6.3.1	<i>Housing Register Review</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
6.3.2	<i>Statutory Right of Review</i>		Covered but needs strengthening and defining in a clearer manner
6.3.3	<i>Judicial Review</i>		This section is not covered
6.4	Appeals		Greater control is required in the handling of appeals and this is best done by a panel to show a level of independence.
<b>Appendices</b>			The policy does contain appendices, but these do not correspond to the sections listed below
A1	Lettings outside of the Allocation Scheme		Covered in the main document only; but it needs to be expanded to show a complete set of scenarios in which they are outside of the lettings policy. Some of these are shown in the current exclusions section.
A2	Allocation by Bed size		Covered in the main document only, some of this is best placed in the appendix
A3	Terms of Reference: Allocation Scheme Panel		Gateshead have no panels presently and they are recommended under the new model with partnership working.

#### Gateshead Council Strategic Tenancy and Tenancy Policy May 2014

Part	Criteria	RAG	Assessment Commentary
<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>		The policy introduction is strong and sets out the context.
1.1	Strategic Aim		The strategic aim is set out well but is limited to Council tenancies alone with no mention of registered providers.
1.2	The Legal Framework		This is set out well and covers the elements of the various acts. It does

			need to go further in relation to tenancy law and legal arrangements around statute in relation assignments and succession and standards in relation to rent setting.
1.3	Data Protection		This is not covered
1.4	Equalities, Access and Monitoring		An equality impact assessment was undertaken for the policy. The policy itself does not contain a section on equality or access. There is reference to equality in the issuing of lifetime tenancies.
1.5	Changes to the Strategic Tenancy Policy		There is a section on monitoring of the tenancy policy.
<b>Part 2</b>	<b>Delivery Model</b>		There is no specific section, but it is implied by a prevalent theme running through the document.
2.1	Gateshead Council		This document is dedicated to tenancies within Gateshead Council stock. However the model is not clear enough as the following sections demonstrate.
2.2	Registered Providers		Registered providers are not covered.
<b>Part 3</b>	<b>Tenancy Creation</b>		This section is not clearly defined. The sub sections are missing from the policy document with the exception of rents.
3.1	Tenancy Start Date		There is no section on tenancy start dates in the policy.
3.2	Rents and Debit Frequencies		The document makes reference to social rents and affordable rents. The social rents are in fact subject to fair rent protection as the lifetime tenancies are secure and this is not covered in any level of detail. Debit frequencies and advance rent payments are not covered.
3.3	Review Dates		Review dates for fixed term tenancies are not covered. Reviews for introductory or fixed term tenancies are not covered.
3.4	Household Composition		This is not covered
3.5	Key Information		This is not covered
3.6	New Tenant Visits		This is not covered
<b>Part 4</b>	<b>Tenure Type</b>		Tenure types are covered with the exceptions of licences. However even the sections are covered could be strengthened to cover applicants who

			moving from registered stock to council stock.
4.1	Licenses		Licences are issued in temporary accommodation and these are not covered
4.2	Introductory Tenancies		This is covered for applicants who have never held a tenancy before.
4.3	Fixed Term Tenancies		This is covered, issued for certain types of stock only.
4.4	Secure Tenancies		This is covered, issued for existing tenants transferring to another council property.
<b>Part 5</b>	<b>Tenancy Conditions</b>		This section is not covered.
5.1	Rent Payment		This section is not covered.
5.2	Safety of the Home		This section is not covered.
5.3	Maintenance of the Home		This section is not covered.
5.4	Acceptable Behaviour		This section is not covered.
5.5	Getting Involved		This section is not covered.
5.6	Customer Service Standards		This section is not covered.
<b>Part 6</b>	<b>Tenancy Changes</b>		This section is not covered.
6.1	Sole to Joint		This section is not covered.
6.2	Joint to Sole		This section is not covered.
6.3	Assignments		This section is not covered.
6.4	Successions		Discretionary successions are covered but are not compared to statutory successions
6.5	Right to Buy		This section is not covered.
6.2	Right to Transfer		How to join the register and exclusions is covered in several places throughout the document
<b>Part 7</b>	<b>Tenancy Sustainment</b>		Sustainment is covered in relation to debt advice and a general offer of support but the who section requires strengthening.
7.1	Vulnerable Residents		Covered in the appendix and not the body of the document
7.2	Support		Offered but could be strengthened to cover how to approach, outreach by the Council and other types of assistant.
7.3	Extra Care		This section is not covered.
7.4	Supported Housing		This section is not covered.
7.5	Safe Surrender Agreements		This section is not covered.

<b>Part 8</b>	<b>Tenancy Enforcement</b>		Tenancy fraud is covered
8.1	Tenancy Audits		This section is not covered.
8.2	Demotion		This is not covered. Demotions are only mentioned in context with existing applications.
8.3	Possession		Enforcement and possession is not covered
6.4	Successions		Nothing is covered where a succession takes place, and the occupant is under occupying.
<b>Part 9</b>	<b>Tenancy Termination</b>		This section is not covered.
9.1	Tenancy End Date		This section is not covered.
9.2	Former Tenant Debt		This section is not covered.
9.3	Transferring Debt		This section is not covered.
9.4	Tenancy Records		This section is not covered.
<b>Appendices</b>			There are appendices which largely contain the Vulnerable Tenant Protocol and support contact details.
A1	Licence		This section is not covered.
A2	Introductory Tenancy (Secure)		This section is not covered.
A3	Assured Shorthold Tenancy		This section is not covered.
A4	Secure Tenancy		This section is not covered.
A5	Deed of Assignment		This section is not covered.
A6	Safe Surrender Agreement		This section is not covered.
A7	Notice to Quit		This section is not covered.
A8	Notice of Seeking Possession		This section is not covered.
A9	Section 21		This section is not covered.
A10	Other Notices		This section is not covered.

**APPENDIX 3: CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE SURVEY**

An online survey was sent to tenants of Gateshead Council who had recently been housed in council stock and had been living in their home for no more than a year. The aim of the survey was to understand their journey and experience at key stages of being housed by Gateshead such as their experience in applying, waiting, once they were offered a home, and their experiences now living in that home.

The survey was open for two weeks and received 95 responses from tenants.

***Experience during application and assessment letter***

Overall 79% of respondents felt it was either easy or very easy when applying to join the waiting list (46% easy and 33% very easy) and only 5% found it difficult.

	When you applied to join the waiting list, how easy was it?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Very Easy</b>	33.0%	31
<b>Easy</b>	45.7%	43
<b>Not that easy</b>	16.0%	15
<b>Difficult</b>	5.3%	5

Just under half the respondents were offered help with their application.

	Were you offered help with your application?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Yes</b>	46.3%	44
<b>No</b>	53.7%	51

At the time of application 41% of respondents were already in housing owned by Gateshead Council, 20% had private landlords, 15% were in Housing Associations and 8% were homeless, the rest either lived with family or friends.

	Who was your landlord at that time?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Gateshead Council</b>	41.1%	39
<b>Housing Association</b>	14.7%	14
<b>Private landlord</b>	20.0%	19
<b>Living at home</b>	3.2%	3
<b>Staying with a friend</b>	2.1%	2
<b>Homeless</b>	8.4%	8
<b>Other (please specify):</b>	10.5%	10

At the time of application 21% of respondents applied for housing due to being homeless, 20% applied due to medical reasons and 16% applied due to their previous property being too small.

A further 11% of respondents selected fleeing violence as the main reason for applying for housing with the council. Amongst the 19 respondents that selected “other”, an additional four respondents specified other types of violence such as domestic abuse, threat of an ex-partner, harassment and anti-social behaviour at last property as the reason for applying for housing.

Other reasons for applying for housing included demolition of previous council home (3 respondents), wanting to move back to Gateshead (3 respondents), financial reasons (2 respondents) and wanting to move out of family home (2 respondents).

	What was your main reason for applying for housing?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
Gateshead transfer	6.3%	6
Housing Association transfer	1.1%	1
Homeless	21.1%	20
Property too small	15.8%	15
Property too big	8.4%	8
Disrepair	6.3%	6
Fleeing violence	10.5%	10
Medical	20.0%	19
Leaving care	1.1%	1
Other (please specify):	20.0%	19

Out of 95 respondents, 31 were on the waiting list for less than 6 months (32%) and 26 were on the waiting list for under a year (27.4%). Therefore, from those who responded over a half were rehoused within 12 months.

However nearly a quarter of respondents were on the waiting list for more than two years (23%) and 16 respondents were on the waiting list for between 12-18 months.

	How long were you on the waiting list?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
Less than 6 months	32.6%	31
6 – 12 months	27.4%	26
12 – 18 months	16.8%	16



<b>More than 2 years</b>	23.2%	22
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44% of respondents were asked to renew their housing application whereas 56% were not asked to renew their application ever year. The slightly lower number of applicants asked to renew their application could be due to a higher proportion of respondents being on the waiting list for less than a year and therefore not requiring to renew their application.

Were you contacted every year and invited to renew your application?		
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Yes</b>	43.6%	41
<b>No</b>	56.4%	53

Across the different areas (i.e., applicants priority, property need, area of choice) on average 79% of respondents selected yes when asked if their assessment letter was accurate. Responses were overwhelmingly positive with only a small proportion of respondents stating inaccuracy in their assessment letter.

85% of respondents felt their assessment letter accurately explained what happens next, 80% felt the letter was accurate in stating their priority, the type of property they needed and provided them with guidance on what to do if they needed more information.

Area of choice stated in the assessment letter (75%) and mention of special circumstances (73%) had slightly more respondents stating inaccuracy. Overall, the majority of respondents felt the assessment letters were accurate.

	When you received your assessment letter, was it accurate for the following?	
	Yes	No
<b>Your priority</b>	74	19
<b>The property you needed (no. of bedrooms, floor level, sheltered etc.)</b>	74	19
<b>Your areas of choice</b>	69	23
<b>Special circumstances you mentioned on the form</b>	68	25
<b>Did it explain what happens next</b>	79	14
<b>Did it tell you what to do if you needed more information</b>	73	18

### ***Experience on the waiting list***

Half the respondents did not need to contact the service while they were on the waiting list.

Amongst the remaining 50% which did need to contact the council, the majority only contacted the service once (45%, 35 respondents). Only 6 respondents contacted the service more than 10 times.

Did you need to contact the service while you were on the waiting list?		
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Yes</b>	49.5%	47
<b>No</b>	50.5%	48

Describe the frequency below by ticking the relevant box		
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Once</b>	44.9%	35
<b>1 – 5 times</b>	26.9%	21
<b>5 – 10 times</b>	20.5%	16
<b>More than 10 times</b>	7.7%	6

The majority of respondents contacted the service about their position on the waiting list (40%), a further 33% contacted the services due to a change of circumstances and 26% contacted due to a query related to an offer.

Only 12% (9 respondents) contacted the service to make a complaint.

What reasons did you need to contact the service about?		
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Change of circumstance</b>	32.9%	25
<b>Position on waiting list</b>	40.8%	31
<b>Query with an advert</b>	9.2%	7
<b>Query with an offer</b>	26.3%	20
<b>Annual renewal of your application</b>	11.8%	9
<b>Complaint</b>	11.8%	9
<b>Review</b>	14.5%	11
<b>Appeal</b>	7.9%	6
<b>Other (please specify):</b>	5.3%	4

A high proportion of respondents felt their query was resolved each time they had contacted the service (54%, 42 respondents). Only 15% (12 respondents) felt that none of their queries were resolved.

**Did they resolve your query each time?**

	Response Percent	Response Total
Every time	53.8%	42
Some of the time	30.8%	24
None of the time	15.4%	12

### ***Review of application and appeals***

The majority of respondents did not ask for a review of their application (70 respondents), only 19 respondents had asked for a review of their application.

	Did you have to ask for a review of your application?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
Yes	21.3%	19
No	78.7%	70

Overall the majority of respondents outcome of review had been upheld. A high number of respondents (57) selected Priority Assessment as a reason for review, of which 75% of respondents reason for review had been upheld.

	Please list each review reason and the outcome below.		
	Upheld	Denied	Response Total
Priority Assessment	43	14	57
Size of allocated property	41	13	54
Floor level	41	13	54
Suitability of offer	42	12	54
Other (please specify):			3

56 out of 95 respondents did not have to ask for an appeal after their reviews were denied, only 11 respondents asked for an appeal after their review was denied.

	If any of the reviews were denied, did you have to ask for an appeal?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
Yes	16.4%	11
No	83.6%	56

Amongst the respondents who appealed the decision of their review, the majority of appeals were upheld (71%) while 29% were denied.

	What was the outcome of the appeal?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Upheld</b>	70.7%	29
<b>Denied</b>	29.3%	12

***Experience at offer stage***

The majority of respondents had accepted their first offer (70%), 11 respondents had accepted their second offer and only 2 had more than five previous offers, none had more than 10.

Number of offers	How many offers have you had before you accepted this one?
<b>1</b>	51
<b>2</b>	11
<b>3</b>	4
<b>4</b>	4
<b>5-10</b>	2
<b>More than 10</b>	0

Positively a majority of respondents felt the council took their views into consideration when making an offer of a property (69 respondents). Only 25 out of 94 respondents felt their views and wishes were not considered by the council.

	Did you feel the Council took your views and wishes into consideration when making an offer of a property?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Yes</b>	73.4%	69
<b>No</b>	26.6%	25

The majority of respondents refused a previous offer due to the area of the property or the property being unsuitable.

	If you had a previous offer, why did you refuse it?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Too small</b>	11.7%	7
<b>Too big</b>	3.3%	2
<b>Area</b>	40.0%	24
<b>Property not suitable</b>	36.7%	22
<b>Medical</b>	11.7%	7
<b>At risk in the area</b>	6.7%	4
<b>Other (please specify):</b>	26.7%	16

93% of respondents felt they were not penalised for refusing the property (66 respondents), only 5 respondents felt they were penalised for refusing the property.

Were you penalised for refusing the property?		
	Response Percent	Response Total
Yes	7.0%	5
No	93.0%	66

Over half of respondents bid for their property (63%).

Did you bid for your property?		
	Response Percent	Response Total
Yes	62.8%	59
No	37.2%	35

81 out of 87 stated they were informed of the tenancy type for the property. would be once offer was accepted. The majority of respondents were given the opportunity to view the property (89%), and were informed of the type of property (86%) and of rent and service charge (90%).

A slightly smaller number were told what number they were on the shortlist (62%), whether their special circumstances were met (72%), and whether it was out of area (74%).

	When you received your offer letter or you bid for a property did you get the following?		
	Yes	No	Response Total
Told you had been shortlisted or nominated and what number you were on the list?	54	33	87
The type of property (no of bedrooms, floor level, sheltered etc.)	74	12	86
Was it in one of your areas of choice	65	22	87
If you had special circumstances, were they met	53	20	73
Told the rent and service charge	78	8	86
Told what tenancy type you would be on if you accepted	81	6	87
Given the opportunity to view once it was ready	79	9	88
Advised that you would have a financial assessment to see if you could afford it	66	18	84
Did it explain what happens next	72	13	85
Did it tell you what to do if you needed more information	70	14	84

91% of respondents (83) viewed their current property, only 8 respondents did not.

	Did you view this property?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Yes</b>	91.2%	83
<b>No</b>	8.8%	8

The majority signed the tenancy agreement either once accepting in 3-5 days (54%) or in more than a week (20%). Only 11 people signed the same day and 14 signed the next day.

	Once you accepted this property; how long before you signed your tenancy agreement?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Same day</b>	11.6%	11
<b>Next day</b>	14.7%	14
<b>3-5 days</b>	53.7%	51
<b>More than 1 week</b>	20.0%	19

Upon moving in most of the tenants found the property had safety locks for external doors (97) and locks for windows (89%), that there was working electricity (92%) and two sets of keys (91%).

Slightly more respondents had issues with property cleanliness (25%), uncapped gas (24%), hot water (31%) and heating (33%).

Nearly half of the respondents did not have instructions for appliances.

	When you moved in, what did you find?		
	Yes	No	Response Total
<b>Was it clean</b>	69	24	93
<b>Was there work outstanding</b>	55	35	90
<b>Did the windows have locks and could they be secured</b>	83	10	93
<b>Did the external doors have locks and could they be secured</b>	91	2	93
<b>Was the gas capped off, did the Council get it uncapped quickly</b>	66	23	89
<b>Did you have hot water</b>	64	29	93
<b>Did you have heating</b>	62	31	93
<b>Did you have electricity</b>	87	7	94
<b>Were there instructions for any appliances such as the boiler etc</b>	50	42	92
<b>Were you given at least 2 sets of keys</b>	85	8	93

<b>Were you advised of bin collection day</b>	51	40	91
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### ***Experience at the start of tenancy agreement and experience living in property***

Once tenancy their new tenancy began, 48% of respondents did get a welcome visit, while 52% did not.

At the welcome visit 43 out of 95 respondents raised issues with repairs. Only a small number of respondents raised issues with voids, rent and ASB.

Amongst the 15 respondents who selected “other” the majority explained specific repairs issues such as gas supply, problems with boiler and general decor of the property.

The majority of those who left a comment also stated that their welcome visit did not go ahead due to the pandemic and some stated they received a welcome phone call instead. This could explain why over half of the respondents recently rehoused did not get a welcome visit.

	<b>Did you get a welcome visit within 6 weeks of your new tenancy?</b>	
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
<b>Yes</b>	48.4%	45
<b>No</b>	51.6%	48

	<b>If so, what issues did you raise.</b>	
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
<b>Repairs</b>	76.8%	43
<b>Void works</b>	5.4%	3
<b>Rent</b>	7.1%	4
<b>ASB</b>	3.6%	2
<b>Getting Involved</b>	5.4%	3
<b>Other (please specify):</b>	26.8%	15

28 respondents reported repairs and allowed access to the council’s contractors. Other issues included paying for rent and getting on with neighbours but this was only 10 respondents out of 95.

	<b>List issues that have come up at the Welcome Visit</b>	
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
<b>Reporting repairs and allowing access to the Council’s contractors</b>	59.6%	28
<b>Paying your rent</b>	21.3%	10



<b>Getting on with your neighbours</b>	21.3%	10
<b>Support and help with managing your tenancy</b>	10.6%	5
<b>Getting involved</b>	8.5%	4
<b>Other (please specify):</b>	21.3%	10

18 respondents received an action plan following the list of issues that had come up in their welcome visit.

	<b>Did they make an action plan with you?</b>	
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
<b>Yes</b>	24.7%	18
<b>No</b>	75.3%	55

43% of those had fully resolved the issue that came up in their welcome visit, while 41% still had not yet resolved the issue. However the actual numbers of respondents who chose “not yet resolved” was low at only 21 out of 95.

	<b>What was the outcome?</b>	
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
<b>Fully resolved</b>	43.1%	22
<b>Partially resolved</b>	15.7%	8
<b>Not yet resolved</b>	41.2%	21

Since the start of their tenancy the majority had not had changes to their tenancy. The highest number of change was in tenancy being assigned and changes in household support needs.

	<b>Have there been any changes to your tenancy since it started?</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
<b>Have the number of people living in your home changed</b>	12	81	93
<b>Is your tenancy now joint when previously sole</b>	9	81	90
<b>Is your tenancy now sole when previously joint</b>	8	78	86
<b>Have you applied for a transfer</b>	13	78	91
<b>Have you applied for a mutual exchange</b>	6	85	91
<b>Has the tenancy been assigned</b>	21	54	75
<b>Does anyone in your household now need support</b>	25	63	88
<b>Have you inherited the tenancy from the previous tenant</b>	6	84	90
<b>Other (please specify):</b>			5

Over half did not inform the council of the changes to their tenancy, only 23 respondents informed the council.

	Have you informed the Council	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Yes</b>	38.3%	23
<b>No</b>	61.7%	37

Half of those who informed the council fully resolved their issues while the other half had not yet resolved their issue.

Further comments were mainly about experiencing problems with repairs, parking and the lack of street signs. A respondent also mentioned that the “bidding system is ideal” and others stated they were satisfied with their home and had no complaints about the council. never had complaints and satisfied.

	What was the outcome?	
	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Fully resolved</b>	48.6%	18
<b>Partially resolved</b>	5.4%	2
<b>Not yet resolved</b>	45.9%	17

**APPENDIX 4: POLICY ROADMAPS****1. Allocations Policy**

Key Milestone		Description	Requirements
1	<b>Issue Collation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy Assessment (Gap Analysis)</li> <li>Review: This can be gathered as part of the current project through interviews, stakeholder engagement, staff workshops and desktop reviews. The Gap Analysis and underpinning process mapping is ideally suited to this.</li> <li>Initial Policy Brainstorm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy</li> <li>Review notes (CT)</li> <li>Review Report (CT)</li> <li>Names for working group</li> <li>Initial meeting</li> <li>Timeline</li> <li>Decision on TWH</li> </ul>
2	<b>Policies Draft 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The allocation policy is a complex and detailed 7 part (8 if we attach homelessness). Each part requires 1 day to draft detailed document each between 4 and 10 pages in size.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gateshead Policy Template</li> <li>Gateshead DPIA</li> <li>Gateshead EIA</li> </ul>
3	<b>Member Consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We can pick up much of it in 3 workshops if we do this as we have done elsewhere. However, any more than 3 and we need to allow an additional day per session to prepare the material and deliver the presentation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 workshops to be planned</li> </ul>
4	<b>Partner Consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We can pick this up in our partner engagement sessions as part of the current project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete</li> </ul>
5	<b>Staff Consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocations Policy v1 consultation will require a meeting plus adjustments to the document following. 1.5 days should cover both.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocations WG</li> <li>Project Team</li> </ul>

Key Milestone		Description	Requirements
6	<b>Impact to Waiting List</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will measure the impact to the existing Gateshead register. The project will assess the data extract capabilities and the integrity of that data. CT will specify the data set.</li> <li>Gateshead will need to provide an internal resource for data analysis and migration.</li> <li>We will then need to do an in-depth analysis on the data. With 7000 applicants this is likely to take between 2 to 5 extra days.</li> <li>An EIA on the migration of applicants will be required.</li> <li>A DPIA on the migration of applicants will be required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data set</li> <li>Migration exercise</li> <li>Impact assessment</li> <li>EIA</li> <li>DPIA</li> </ul>
6	<b>V2 consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will be done via email</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocations WG</li> <li>Project Team</li> <li>Housing</li> </ul>
7	<b>Formal Draft 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following all the preceding steps we arrive at formal draft 1</li> </ul>	
8	<b>Stakeholder consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waiting List Applicants via a digital survey platform will require 0.5 days to draft the questionnaire, 1 day to set up the survey, 1 day to analyse the results and 0.5 days to make any necessary policy adjustments.</li> <li>Key Agencies can be done via an email survey</li> <li>Partners would be best done by attending a main forum and capturing all by an email survey as well. We will need to prepare a presentation.</li> <li>Members can be done formally by members services and Gateshead.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scope each lane</li> </ul>

Key Milestone		Description	Requirements
9	Formal Draft 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following all the preceding steps we arrive at formal draft 2</li> </ul>	
10	Legal Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is essential for both documents as they have with stand legal challenge and scrutiny.</li> <li>This can be undertaken either with the borough solicitor or a specialist solicitor such as Devonshires or Trowers and Hamlin.</li> <li>It requires send them the document plus the results of the EIA and DPIA.</li> <li>Obtaining input/advice via a report</li> <li>Occasionally a meeting is required but this is rare. Further clarification is a possibility though.</li> <li>Feeding that into the document to make the necessary policy changes to both documents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirmation of legal route</li> </ul>
11	Formal Draft 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At this point this goes into Gateshead governance cycle</li> <li>Lead Member</li> <li>Housing Strategy Group</li> <li>Committee(s)</li> <li>Cabinet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentations and the document for each one identified</li> </ul>

## 2. Strategic Tenancy Policy

Key Milestone		Description	Requirements
1	<b>Issue collation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy Assessment (Gap Analysis)</li> <li>Review: This can be gathered as part of the current project through interviews, stakeholder engagement, staff workshops and desktop reviews. The Gap Analysis and underpinning process mapping is ideally suited to this.</li> <li>Initial Policy Brainstorm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy</li> <li>Review notes (CT)</li> <li>Review Report (CT)</li> <li>Working Group names</li> <li>Initial meeting</li> <li>Timeline</li> <li>Decision on TWH</li> </ul>
2	<b>Policies Draft 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The tenancy policy is likely to be a 3–4-page statement of intent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gateshead Policy Template</li> <li>Gateshead DPIA</li> <li>Gateshead EIA</li> </ul>
3	<b>Member Consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We can pick up much of it in 3 workshops if we do this as we have done elsewhere. However, any more than 3 and we need to allow an additional day per session to prepare the material and deliver the presentation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part of 3 workshops need to be planned for allocations policy</li> </ul>
4	<b>Partner Consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We can pick this up in our partner engagement sessions as part of the current project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete</li> </ul>
5	<b>Staff Consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocations Policy v1 consultation will require a meeting plus adjustments to the document following. 1.5 days should cover both.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocations WG</li> <li>Project Team</li> </ul>
6	<b>V2 consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will be done via email</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocations WG</li> <li>Project Team</li> <li>Housing</li> </ul>
7	<b>Formal Draft 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following all the preceding steps we arrive at a formal draft 1</li> </ul>	

	Key Milestone	Description	Requirements
8	<b>Stakeholder consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenancy Policy will need to be scoped to look at existing resident platforms for consultation either withing Gateshead or with their key partners. We can only fully scope this following an initial. If we anticipate 5 forum attendances plus preparation of the material and adjustments to the policy.</li> <li>• Key Agencies via an email survey</li> <li>• Partners would be best done by attending a main forum and capturing all by an email survey as well. We will need to prepare a presentation.</li> <li>• Members formally by Members Services and Gateshead.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope each lane</li> </ul>
9	<b>Formal Draft 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following all the preceding steps we arrive at a formal draft 2</li> </ul>	
10	<b>Legal Check</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essential for both documents as they must withstand legal challenge and scrutiny.</li> <li>• This can be undertaken either by the borough solicitor or specialist solicitors such as Devonshires or Trowers and Hamlin.</li> <li>• It requires send them the document plus the results of the EIA and DPIA.</li> <li>• Obtaining input/advice via a report</li> <li>• A meeting may be is required but this is rare. Further clarification is a possibility though.</li> <li>• Feeding that into the document to make the necessary policy changes to both documents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation of legal route</li> </ul>

Key Milestone		Description	Requirements
11	<b>Formal Draft 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• At this point this goes into Gateshead governance cycle</li><li>• Lead Member</li><li>• Housing Strategy Group</li><li>• Committee(s)</li><li>• Cabinet</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presentations and the document for each one identified</li></ul>



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