

Elders Council of Newcastle
Via email

Phone: 0191 211 5001
Email: pam.smith@newcastle.gov.uk
www.newcastle.gov.uk

Dear Elders Council of Newcastle,

Your response to our consultation on: A clean, green and inclusive city for all – our medium-term planning for 2022-23 to 2024-25

Following agreement of the budget for 2022-23 and the basis for planning to 2024-25 by City Council earlier this month, I wanted to write to you to in response to your written response to our consultation.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for taking the time to engage in our consultation process. This is really important to us, and we do not under-estimate the time this takes. Thank you.

Your feedback, alongside all feedback received, was analysed in detail and considered in finalising our budget plans. You can see a copy of our detailed consultation report, alongside the approved budget papers on our website at:
www.newcastle.gov.uk/budget2022

Thank you for your feedback on how our budget information is presented, we'll use this to help shape our approach for future years.

Your response included several points; asking pertinent questions in relation to our specific proposals and requesting further information. Colleagues have provided responses to these, which are set out below. As we have endeavoured to respond to all your points, this response is quite lengthy, but I hope it is useful.

Thank you for your support for our Being Well in Communities proposal and those in relation to the integration and co-ordination of care services. You also highlighted that you would welcome the involvement of family advocates in the monitoring of the impact of these changes. We will use a range of monitoring, evaluation and impact tools as we embed new commissioning models and are committed to having the voice of the person and their family integral to the Being Well model as it evolves.

Our relationship with our commissioned providers is similarly of the utmost importance and we will seek to liaise with them alongside other stakeholders to support continuous learning and look to explore how we might involve others in this process to better inform and shape the changing culture and provision.

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Thank you also for welcoming the concept of community neighbourhoods and for continuing to be actively involved in this work. Your learning and findings will contribute to our evolving programme to adopt an asset-based culture and system.

You set out that you would like to see the concept of 15/20 minute neighbourhoods be adopted in Newcastle, with a tighter definition of what we mean by neighbourhoods and investment in local amenities and community hubs. The [Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan](#) outlines the city's neighbourhoods, the services that should be accessible within them and the policies we have adopted to support the delivery of improvements in these areas. In addition, Cabinet approved a range of measures and initiatives for neighbourhoods to help ensure that people, rather than motor traffic, take priority on our residential streets – [see item 9 on the published Cabinet agenda](#).

We are committed as a system to supporting people to be discharged from hospital safely and ideally back home as soon as they are fit to do so. You highlighted the importance of funding being available to support this. The national Hospital Discharge Fund which supported implementation of the Discharge to Assess process will cease at the end of 2021-22. This has put additional pressure on systems across the country.

Locally, we are working together across Collaborative Newcastle to find alternative ways to resource the discharge to assess process from 2022-23 onwards. Our priority remains to ensure that people are supported in the right place, with the right support, and we will continue to ensure people are supported to be safely discharged from hospital.

You requested further information on the audit of direct payments and whether any underspend is because of people not being able to find the services they need. Services which provided care and support to people continued to function during the pandemic adapting and delivering different models of support where required. For some people who are in receipt of Direct Payments, underspend may have occurred because people were not able to spend money on community services and activities which would normally have been available to them, but which were impacted upon by COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns.

As you highlight, there remains limited clarity about how the £5.4 billion for adult social care will be invested in the sector, however we look forward to discussing this further together and jointly scoping out the opportunities for forthcoming reforms. Colleagues are working to confirm the date for a briefing and update on this.

You also said you would be interested in knowing more about our policy regarding the commissioning of care home places, with particular concern about whether we commission from companies external to the UK. You also asked for information on how we use our Social Value policy to commission locally.

Within a report to [Audit Committee](#) on 25 March 2022, we set out how financial assurance of the sector works and our role within this. Our priority is always to ensure that we maximise the amount of social value and quality that is delivered through our contracts, while at the same time ensuring the financial model enables a vibrant and sustainable market in the city. Our [Social Value pages](#) set out more information on how we use our social value commitment to commission for social value.

We welcome your comments on the work of the Care Homes Collaborative and thank you for your congratulations to partners on the recent HSJ award. We assure you that this work will continue. The pandemic has been incredibly challenging for people and organisations across health and social care, but it has also provided us with an opportunity to change how we work together, strengthen relationships and build more resilience across our teams. We

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will not only continue to embed this learning across our care homes teams, but we have already broadened out these lessons to inform how we work across other parts of the sector.

You expressed an interest in how we will address the tensions between 'more and better homes' and 'a clean, green and safe environment'. Policy CS19 of our [Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan](#) sets out our policy for protecting the Green Belt in accordance with national policy to:

1. Prevent the merging of settlements. For Newcastle with Ponteland, or Cramlington; the main built-up area with nearby villages; and villages with each other,
2. Safeguard the countryside from encroachment,
3. Check unrestricted urban sprawl, and
4. Assist in urban regeneration in the city-region by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

In addition, Policy DM30 protects and requires the provision of open space, sport facilities and recreations space for new residential schemes as they come forward.

We would like to assure you that attention is paid to the quality and affordability of new housing provided in the city. There are Local Plan policies which ensure the quality of housing stock including Policy DM6 which relates to accessible and adaptable units and Policy DM7 which requires units meet the Nationally Described Space Standards.

Policy CS11 also promotes a good choice of accommodation to meet the varied and changing needs of the city's population. This includes a requirement for 15% affordable housing on all developments of 15 or more dwellings subject to viability.

Your response also raised the question of improving current building stock. In 2011, the then government ended the annual £24 million Market Renewal Pathfinder, funding to improve existing private sector housing. Government also reduced funding to local authorities to meet the Decent Homes Standard within council housing.

We do, however, use other tools to improve standards in the private housing sector. For example, the seven Selective Licencing areas in the city, covering over 18,500 properties, require landlords to improve standards to make homes within their portfolio meet strict criteria – including property and management standards. This improves the living standards of tenants and has a positive impact on neighbourhoods.

Our Empty Homes Team identify empty private sector homes, work with property owners to find a remedy and offer grant assistance and advice to make them fit for habitation. The team help to bring approximately 500 homes back to occupation each year. In 2020-21, grant assistance from the council totalled £187,000, which was matched by £950,000 of investment from property owners.

In 2021-22, our residential climate change programme secured just over £10 million of external funding to deliver insulation and low carbon heating and power to homes across Newcastle. Through this almost 1,800 homes were helped to install a range of measures to reduce energy demand and carbon emissions. A further £4.2 million has been secured to continue to deliver the programme in 2022-23 onwards and we will bid for further funding.

For council owned housing, the money generated from rental income is applied to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and is then spent on managing and investing in council housing. Over £43 million was spent through this capital programme in 2021-22 on such

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things as new kitchens, bathrooms and structural upgrades and environmental and neighbourhood improvements.

We are reviewing our council owned housing stock, looking at condition, investment needed, levels of demand and turnover, as well as external additional demands. This is informing a new investment plan which will cover climate change, new build housing, restructuring and where we need to intervene to regenerate neighbourhoods. Standard investment such as replacement of kitchens, bathrooms and roofs will continue.

You also raised concerns about the provision of suitable housing for older citizens. Our Housing Delivery Plan 2018 -21 includes a programme of new housing suitable for older people. The plan was developed to:

- Increase choice for older people and encourage them to plan for their future housing care and support needs, including 'rightsizing'
- Provide alternative housing models with support (on site or floating) and so reduce the reliance on traditional models of long-term residential care
- Ensure the quality of existing sheltered housing is improved
- Provide a range of tenures to meet the housing needs of all older people
- Shift resources from long-term care beds into community-based housing models
- Meet the future needs and aspirations of older people

The plan aims to deliver 670 new units of specialist or level access housing including bungalows and sheltered housing schemes were set out. To date, 450 have been completed, with a further 120 due to complete by Summer 2022. We also have 20 sites approved for more affordable and specialist housing and are assessing other sites.

This plan is due for renewal later this year – the new plan will be longer-term, covering the next five years.

You also requested information about the government's further investment in Disabled Facilities Grants and how this has impacted on Care and Repair Newcastle. Adaptations can be made to both private sector housing, registered social landlord and council properties. We carry out adaptations to private and registered social landlord properties, funded from the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), for which clients are means tested. For clients living in council owned homes, adaptations are funded via the HRA and are managed by Your Homes Newcastle.

On average over the last three years, we carried out 400 cases of adaptation for private sector housing, and registered social landlord clients. By the end of this financial year YHN would have installed over 320 adaptations to council properties.

The delivery of adaptations was significantly impacted by the pandemic, especially during the first national 'lockdown' as customers were shielding or self-isolating. However, client contact was still maintained, with priority cases progressed where the client felt comfortable to do so and desktop assessments offered and carried out where requested. Though the pandemic has created a backlog of cases and increased waiting times, contractors have worked to clear this. By the end of 2020-21 the waiting list had returned to the levels prior to the pandemic.

We agree that support to make small repairs and practical support in the home can be an important factor in enabling people to live independently at home, alongside more substantial support such as DFG's and a broad range of housing and support models. Government has announced plans for a national small repairs service, and we await further details on this. The Minor Adaptions Service, which are low level interventions costing under

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£1,000, can also support older people to remain living independently at home and to prevent crisis.

You highlighted if the housing Annuity Leaseback Model is judged successful by all parties, it could be one route to expand the housing offer for older people. Our model is a useful way to add an additional supply of new council houses in addition to what can be funded using the HRA. It uses grant subsidy from Homes England, secured through a competitive bidding process, and a smaller element of council subsidy. It provides a competitive tendering process whereby council-owned land is leased to a development partner for new houses to be financed, designed and built to agreed standards. The new properties are then leased back to the council for an agreed period of time, at the end of which they become council-owned properties.

The programme will deliver around 350 new council homes for people who have mobility or support and care needs. This includes a mix of accessible and adaptable bungalows, Tyneside flats and apartments to support older people or people with a medical need to live independently for longer.

Your response also refers to proportion of the cost of Your Homes Newcastle within the HRA. Every year, we agree a set of key indicators with Your Homes Newcastle covering housing management, lettings, repairs and maintenance, void management and rent collection – these are reported on regularly. The management fee is based on our assessment of costs of running such services. It is reviewed annually and includes payments for additional services that are recovered through service charges.

Your response also refers to ‘digital by default’ and how access to face-to-face advice and support is still needed. While there were no specific ‘digital by default’ proposals within our medium-term planning, this will be inherent within some of the service improvement proposals. Our approach to service improvement is customer focused and we aim to understand what user needs are before developing any digital solution. In many cases, user needs are best met through digital solutions, meaning people have 24/7 access to interact with our services in the way that they do with other service providers. However, we recognise that for some people this isn’t their preferred approach and other ways of accessing services remain available.

We will continue to work closely with you to develop digital skills and confidence of older people, in line with the concerns raised in the Greater Manchester Combined Authority report. Your involvement and support in this are hugely appreciated. We have also recently launched a telephone helpline for people looking to access digital support and have worked with the voluntary and community sector to understand opportunities to signpost to more targeted provision.

Towards the end of your response, you enquire about funding from the North of Tyne Combined Authority and government’s Community Renewal Fund. There are very substantial benefits to the city, including funding, resulting from our membership of the Combined Authority, [more information about which can be found of their website](#). Government did not allocate any of the Community Renewal fund to projects related to Newcastle.

Finally, you also asked for more information about Parklife – [this can be found on our website](#).

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I hope that the above responds to your points and questions to your satisfaction. Please do let us know if you require any further information, I know officers would be more than happy to brief you further if that would be helpful.

I would like to thank you again for taking the time to provide your feedback and for raising such pertinent points.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "P. Smith".

Pam Smith
Chief Executive

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