



Annual Report  
2015/2016



Derwentside  
Homes

# Welcome to our 2015/16 Annual Report



Welcome to Derwentside Homes' annual report for 2015 - 16. It is a showcase of our key achievements from the year as well as giving an overview of the local projects that we are involved with.

2015-16 has been a challenging year. In June last year we said goodbye to 34 long serving employees who took up the offer of voluntary redundancy and early retirement as part of our efficiency review and restructuring to make sure our repairs and maintenance services remain value for money and fit for purpose in the future.

In the July, the new government announced a 1% cut to housing association rents for the next 4 years thereby reducing Derwentside Homes' income by £8.5 million over this period and we have managed to identify £11 million efficiency savings without impacting on services to our customers. We have continued to support those tenants who have

been adversely affected by welfare reforms and our Welfare Advice team have successfully helped tenants reclaim over £4 million in benefits.

Despite these difficult times our staff have worked hard to maintain services and achieve top performance as you will see throughout this report. We built 98 new homes last year and our subsidiary Prince Bishops Homes now has 400 Rent then Buy homes and will build 400 more new homes over the next 2 years.

As a company we aim to be industry leaders and are continually looking to grow the group and enhance what we provide to our customers, all done whilst making our services more efficient and not losing any of the quality.

**Geraldine Kay**  
Chief Executive



This year has brought many challenges to our sector and it has tested our abilities to continue performing to the highest standards. We have embraced this challenge and have put into place interventions to support Derwentside Homes in moving forward with a clear vision for the future.

We are continuing to maintain our promises and are investing in properties through the building of new homes and through investment in our existing properties with £5.3million spent on modernising our homes this year alone and over £25million earmarked for improvements over the next four years.

We know that the future will continue to be very uncertain and challenging with new local political structures though Devolution and the continued threat to our income from reduced rents and changes benefits.

As we complete our 10th year, the Board is determined to secure the best financial future for Derwentside Homes and our tenants in the long run and will therefore continue to investigate opportunities that secure and safeguard our business.

**Sebert Cox OBE**  
Chairman





Your homes  
**£5.4m**

invested in improving your homes



Your repairs  
**99.4%**

of emergency repairs were carried out within one day



Your community  
**159**

customers helped into employment



Your rents  
**£5m**

claimed in benefits for our tenants over the least 5 years



Delivering excellence  
**87%**

of tenants are satisfied with their home



Our people  
**13**

new apprentices, trainees and undergraduates joined Derwentside Homes

# YOUR HOMES



## Number of Homes

The Derwentside Homes Group owned **7,064 homes on the 31st March 2016, an increase of 85 from 1st April 2015.**

This figure includes 5 Intermediate Rent homes, 2 Community Houses, 19 homes rented on a long term lease and 377 Market Rental homes.

Average Rent For Property Type excluding service charges and water rates	Social Rent (6,304 Homes)	Affordable Rent (362 homes)
Bungalows	£73.56	£90.12
Flats	£65.38	£93.61
Houses	£72.73	£98.57
Maisonettes	£82.21	N/A



# New Homes to Buy and Rent

**Prince Bishops Homes (PBH) is a non-charitable subsidiary of Derwentside Homes and the main development vehicle for the Group. During 2015/16 PBH added a further 72 homes to its existing range of superb homes to buy or rent.**

PBH is currently developing a range of exciting new homes on a number of sites across the region. Its first show home was at Spinners Croft, a development of 34 two and three bedroom homes at Crook, County Durham. All of the homes were reserved within six weeks of being released under the Prince Bishops Homes' 'Moving on Up' model.

The 'Moving on Up' model allows customers to purchase their home after renting for four years and they are advised to save for a mortgage

deposit with PBH sharing any increase in equity that is achieved during the four year period.

PBH actively supports its tenants into home ownership by:

- promoting the Government's Help to Buy ISA; and by
- providing tailored support and advice to ensure that they are mortgage-ready when the time comes to buy.

PBH has secured funding, land and development schemes to achieve up to 1000 homes across the North East over the next three years and will continue to work with local suppliers and developers to provide much needed affordable homes and home ownership opportunities across the region. For further information please visit PBH's website [www.princebishops homes.co.uk](http://www.princebishops homes.co.uk)



# Improving your homes

We have continued with our major programme of improvements to bring our tenants' homes up to a locally determined standard, the 'Derwentside Homes Standard,' and keep them at that level thereafter.

We are continually looking to improve our homes. So far, we have invested nearly £130million in capital improvements to our homes. During 2015/16 we invested £5.4m on our homes and we will invest a further £23million over the next five financial years.

Improving the energy efficiency and environmental performance of our tenants' homes is a priority for our organisation.

**65**  
major and **330**  
minor adaptations  
to homes

**736**  
external works  
improvements

**317**  
heating upgrades

**53**  
bathroom  
replacements

**60**  
kitchen  
replacements

The energy efficiency rating of our homes is measured using the Standard Assessment Procedure 2009 (SAP) whereby the higher the number the lower the expected energy costs. The average SAP rating for Derwentside Homes was 69.9 on March 31st 2016 compared with a national average for home owners and private landlords of 59.7. This means that our homes are 17% more energy efficient than the national average.

We will continue to assist our tenants in saving money and over the next 5 years we will invest £6million on measures to tackle fuel poverty.



# Allocating our homes

## Homes Let 2015/16

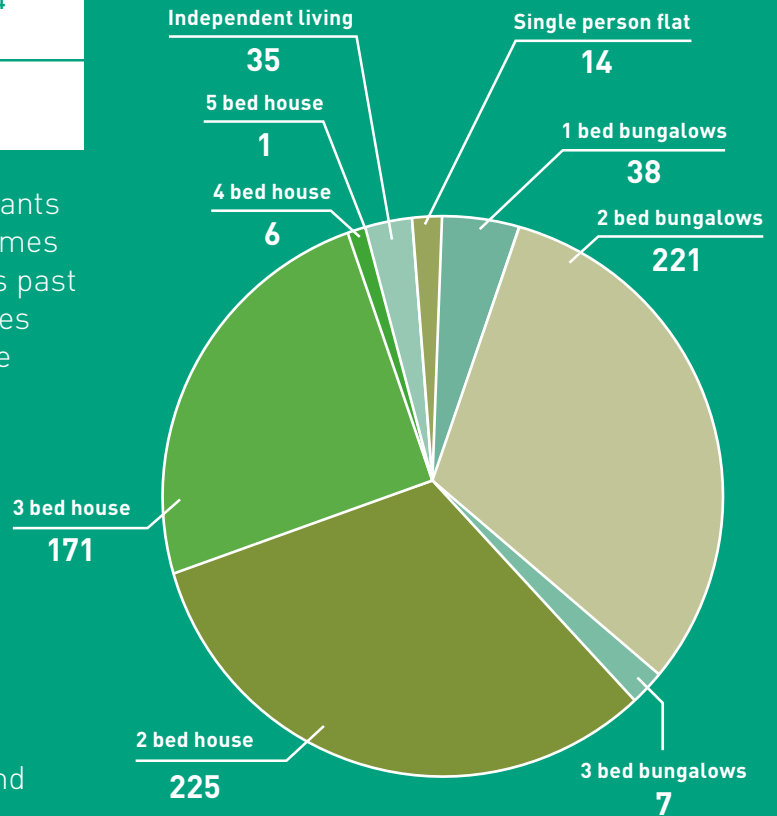
As can be seen it is two bedroom houses and bungalows which have the highest number of relets which also make up the highest proportion of our housing stock.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Movement
Number of homes let	811	757	718	-93
Average number of days taken to let	34.8	23.9	22.4	-12.4
% of homes let to new tenants	75.2	83.2	82.8	+7.6

Our aim is to relet our homes quickly to help tenants move into them and we do this by advertising homes as soon as we know they are coming empty. This past year has seen a reduction in the number of homes available and again we have reduced the average number of days it takes to relet a home.

We make sure that before a customer accepts a tenancy that we:

- encourage them to use our affordability checker which is on our website;
- help them to claim any benefits to which they are entitled;
- make them aware of their tenancy obligations;
- advise them about the rent, service charges and water rates for their new home; and
- signpost them to relevant support agencies.



## 2015/16 Who we let to

We had 718 homes become available throughout the year which were advertised through the Durham Key Options, Choice Based Lettings scheme. This scheme allows applicants to see for themselves the homes that are available and gives them the opportunity if they want to move, to bid for them.

All applicants are banded depending on their needs and this past year we have relet 82% of our empty homes to new tenants.

For further information about the Durham Key Options scheme, please visit: [www.durhamkeyoptions.co.uk](http://www.durhamkeyoptions.co.uk)



# YOUR REPAIRS

## Repairing & Maintaining Your Homes

You have told us that the repairs and maintenance of your homes is one of your key priorities and during 2015/16 our average Customer Satisfaction rating for our responsive repairs service was 9.7 out of 10.

Our performance	2015/16
Percentage of emergency repairs completed within target	99.4%
Percentage of routine repairs completed within target	96%
Average time taken to complete responsive repairs	7.05 Days
Percentage of repairs where an appointment was made and kept	98.8%

Repair categories	
Type of repair	Timescale for completion
Emergency	Same Day
Appointment	To suit tenant
Planned	90 Days

At the end of 2015/16 all tenants' homes had a valid Gas Safety Certificate. Remember, it is a legal responsibility for you to allow access for a gas service and failing to do so puts you and your family's safety at risk.





During 2015/16 we spent £4.25million on maintaining our tenants' homes; this included completing the following repairs:

Repairs	Number carried out
Bricklaying and Plastering	2,887
Electrical Works	7,208
Gas	12,879
Glazing	256
Handy Van	89
Joinery	7,064
Painting	448
Plumbing	7,220
Roofing	1,410

# YOUR RENTS

## Rents collected

**Your rent pays for the services we provide and it is very important that we collect this rent and any arrears to sustain tenancies, prevent evictions and maintain an income for the business.**

During 2015/16 we increased the amount we collected and reduced the rent arrears owed. We give help and support to tenants to prevent arrears and help them manage any debts in a number of ways.

Rents Collected	2014/15	2015/16	Movement
% Rent Collected	98.71%	99.37%	+0.66%
Current tenant arrears as % of rent due	2.37%	2.24%	-0.13%
Number of evictions due to rent arrears	29	33	+4







Our Welfare Rights and Money Advice team have helped our tenants claim over £5,000,000 in benefits over the last three years. The main benefits that they have claimed are:

- Housing Benefit;
- Personal Independence Payments;
- Employment Support Allowance;
- Discretionary Housing Allowance; and
- Attendance Allowance.

During 2015/16 we assisted 842 tenants in receiving Discretionary Housing Payments to cover the bedroom tax, opened 118 money advice cases, whilst also negotiating lower debt payments for 90 tenants and helped 3 tenants to have over £32k of debt written off.

For further details on Welfare Reforms or the Welfare team please visit: **[www.derwentsidehomes.co.uk/welfare-rights](http://www.derwentsidehomes.co.uk/welfare-rights)**

# YOUR COMMUNITY

## Anti-social behaviour

Throughout 2015/16 our Tenancy Enforcement Team opened and closed 320 anti social behaviour cases, a near 50% increase on the previous year's 217 cases. This increase in reported activity is because we continue to work jointly with the police on cases involving our tenants.

The key results for 2015/16 were:

- 94% of reported cases were resolved to the customers satisfaction;
- the average time taken to successfully resolve a case was 39 days; and
- we served 17 Notices of Seeking Possession for breaches of tenancy conditions.

We are committed to supporting the communities in which we work; during 2015/16 we carried out 153 formal and informal estate inspections, some with tenants, police and Durham County Council.

For further details about anti-social behaviour please visit: [www.derwentsidehomes.co.uk/your-home/anti-social-behaviour-and-domestic-abuse](http://www.derwentsidehomes.co.uk/your-home/anti-social-behaviour-and-domestic-abuse)

Type of Anti-Social Behaviour Complaint	2016
Verbal abuse / harassment / intimidation / threatening behaviour	30%
Noise	26%
Breach of tenancy	7%
Untidy gardens	11%
Vandalism and damage to property	7%
Other	19%



Number of evictions for ASB	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Movement
Number of evictions due to ASB	2	7	10	Increasing
Number of demotions of tenancies	0	1	2	Increasing



# Community Engagement and Support

Our engagement work includes;  
**Brighter Futures / Learning Hive Shed**  
**Enterprise Durham Partnership**  
**Foundation of Light**  
**Involving You Scrutiny Panel**  
**Silver Talk**  
**Sure Living**  
**DigitAL**

Partnerships;  
**Managing Money Better**  
**Smarterbuys Store**





# Brighter Futures/ Learning Hive

Through our Brighter Futures Service, we assist customers on their journey into employment by offering them a holistic service to support them into education, training and employment based on their needs. The service delivers tailored outreach support, bespoke training courses, job brokerage and post recruitment assistance within our communities.

## Learning Hive

Our Learning Hive is delivered in partnership with the Northern Learning Trust and offers a real platform from where training and employment support is provided to local people in the community. We recognise that some people don't have the skills, experience or confidence to start them on their journey into work and the Hive offers a range of opportunities from learning new practical skills such as first aid and cooking on a budget, to brushing up on Maths and English, learning IT skills to support to finding a job.

We want our customers to have more opportunities to reach their full potential and we work hard to help customers to develop skills and access employment and work experience opportunities.

The key objectives of these projects are to:

- increase the employability of our tenants and residents;
- address any barriers to training or employment;
- increase people's skills, knowledge and confidence; and
- help engage them in education, training, voluntary opportunities and ultimately enable them to look and compete for a job.

## In 2015/16, Brighter Futures supported:

- 128 people into training opportunities;
- 14 people into work experience opportunities;
- 2 people into apprenticeships; and
- 56 people into employment.

## In 2015/16 the Learning Hive supported:

- 217 new learners who accessed the service;
- 89 people to gain IT skills through UKOnline;
- 35 people to achieve accredited qualifications;
- 24 people who have progressed onto further learning and training; and
- 18 people who have progressed into employment.

**For more information on our Brighter Future's Service contact Michelle Graham on 01207 524205 and for the Learning Hive contact Dinah on 01207 294 057**





# SHED

SHED is a social enterprise set up in 2011 to support long term unemployed people in our communities back into work. During 2015/16 SHED worked in our local communities to deliver hundreds of jobs which ranged from gardening and rubbish removal to decorating and general maintenance and had a turnover of £160,000.

The key objectives of SHED are to:

- increase the employment opportunities of tenants and local residents;
- support residents into employment, training and volunteering opportunities;
- increase an individual's work experience and build their CV; and
- offer low cost maintenance services to businesses and communities.

During 2015/16, SHED added to its existing 3 staff members by employing a further 8 as well as giving the opportunity to another 9 individuals to gain valuable work experience by working on a voluntary basis. All volunteers and staff gained various accredited and non-accredited qualifications during this time which supported their long-term career prospects.

**For more information on SHED contact Paul Walton on 0300 500 0993.**



# Enterprise Durham Partnership

Enterprise Durham Partnership is a subsidiary company of Derwentside Homes which whilst also acting as a supplier of furniture packages to assist Derwentside Homes in creating sustainable tenancies, also supplies furniture and white goods to businesses and families across the North East.

Operating from outlets in Stanley and Bishop Auckland, EDP links with Prince Bishops Community Bank in supporting low cost loans for furniture and white goods. It has developed an ethos of supporting people back into work and providing low cost options for furniture ownership which includes the recycling of furniture and white goods.

Throughout 2015/16 EDP employed 38 people in its business, took on 64 paid work placements and delivered various accredited and none accredited qualifications to these groups.

**For more information on Enterprise Durham Partnership contact Phillip Curran on 01207 524216.**



# Foundation of Light

Our partnership with SAFC Foundation of Light focuses on programmes that can have a positive impact on health, behaviour, attitude, skills and knowledge, utilising the power that the Sunderland AFC brand and football has in the North East to engage with people.

The primary objectives are to:

- increase access and participation in positive activity;
- develop skills and abilities to improve options;
- inspire young people to achieve and raise aspirations; and
- contribute to safe, healthy and regenerated communities.

2015/16 was the fourth successful year of our partnership with the Foundation of Light and the achievements included:

- 333 young people (13-19) engaged in Kicks night time activities and 249 young children (8-13) in Mini-Kickers activities, having a positive effect on youth related ASB.

- 82 adults took part in family learning programmes, helping them improve their literacy, numeracy and IT skills and help them understand how their children learn in core subjects.
- 10 young NEET people took part in a Back on Track Study Programme with seven of the group finding paid employment and two others returning to full time education.
- 129 young pre-NEET people participated in Back on Track sessions in school focussing on issues that young people face such as the dangers of drugs and alcohol, sexual health and mental health issues.

**For more information about the work of the Foundation of Light, contact one of the team on 01207 524 280**





# Involving you

## Scrutiny Panel

Derwentside Homes' Scrutiny Panel gives tenants and residents the power to challenge their housing association and drive change within the association. They have an influential role in monitoring the performance, service delivery and priorities for Derwentside Homes.

This year the Scrutiny Panel has produced two customer led reviews around Customer Satisfaction and Capital Works making a total of 28 recommendations to improve services for tenants. They have also 'reality checked' last year's review of a Customer Journey into a New Home, ensuring their recommendations are being implemented and making a difference for tenants. Some members of the Panel are 'Designated Persons' for complaints working with the organisation and tenants to help find fair and timely solutions to complaints at the local level. This year they have helped resolve three complaints at the local level.

What it means to be part of Scrutiny:

"I became a volunteer member of Derwentside Homes' Scrutiny Panel because, as a tenant, I was drawn to the idea of speaking on behalf of all tenants to ensure that we were getting the best possible service that Derwentside Homes could offer. It was a bit scary at first

but all of the panel members made me feel very welcome. Since I joined, just over a year ago, I've met some wonderful people; I get out and about meeting even more; I've developed an interest in the subject of housing and I'm learning something new every day. I now feel that I'm contributing something to the community and having an enjoyable time doing it."

**Lyn Oxberry, Scrutiny Panel Member**

## Virtual Information Panel

The Virtual Information Panel (VIP) is a group of tenants who give us their feedback by email on a range of topics throughout the year. This year they have completed twelve surveys on subjects such as communication around Universal Credit, training for tenants and the format for our annual report.

## Service Champions

Our Service Champions ensure that our tenants are at the heart of all our services. They assisted in setting our Service Standards and ensure these standards are being met.



## Silver Talk

The key objective of Silver Talk is to improve the confidence of older service users, leaving them better resourced to cope with everyday life whilst reducing their social isolation and maintaining their independence.

Silver Talk is a completely free telephone befriending service that has been designed by older people for older people. It provides the opportunity for regular social telephone conversations for anyone over the age of 50. All of the telephone calls are made by friendly, fully trained volunteers.

Key facts about Silver Talk.

- There are 61 trained volunteers.
- 234 Silver Talk Customers.
- The project has provided over 2,600 hours of social chat to isolated older people.
- Silver Talk provides links to other agencies that can help with a variety of issues that will assist older people to live independently in their own homes with confidence – from making sure everyone has up to date information on pensions and benefits to finding help with little jobs around the home and garden.

**For further details on Silver Talk please contact Natalie Dixon, Silver Talk Project Assistant on 0800 093 0092.**



## Sure Living

The purpose of Sure Living is to provide an emergency response service that is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year to residents who need that little bit of extra support. The Sure Living Team helps residents to keep their independence and remain in their own homes with the assurance of knowing that someone is always available to help and will respond if required within 30 minutes.

The key objectives are to:

- provide an emergency response service to support people in their own homes;
- reduce the need for admissions to hospital and residential care; and
- offer extra support options for residents which includes fall detectors, bed/chair occupancy sensors and door exit sensors, making the service especially useful to those who may be at risk of falling, having seizures or wandering.

During 2015/16 we responded to 418 calls; in most cases this was in less than 20 minutes. 112 of these calls were fall related and 17 required hospital admissions.

**For further details on the Sure Living service please contact Angela Hodgson, Older Persons Services Manager on 01207 524283.**



# DigitAL

The DigitAL project is the name given to our overall approach to tackling digital exclusion. With the ongoing changes to the benefit system and the move to online account management, access to the internet and the skills to use it are more important now than ever before.

Many aspects of society and economy are now digital and being digitally excluded reinforces social exclusion and poverty which is already more prevalent in more rural areas such as Derwentside.

Key to our approach to digital inclusion is our DigitAL mobile learning unit, kitted out with PC's and internet and that can be driven around our communities enabling people to have access to ICT.

The objectives of the project are to help our residents to:

- increase their IT confidence skills;
- increase their ability to apply for jobs and increase their employment opportunities;

- support them through Universal Job Match and to be prepared for Universal Credit which are all completed online; and
- improve their access to our services by knowing how to report repairs or pay their rent online.

Our DigitAL project was only launched in the last 6 months of 2015/16 but has already achieved some positive outcomes:

- we engaged with 157 people across our communities;
- 69 people learned basic IT skills through UK online Learn my way; and
- 8 people completed an ITQ Level 1 IT Course.

**For more information on DigitAL, contact Abbie Maddison on 01207 524 259.**



# Partnerships



## Managing Money Better

Managing Money Better is a practical energy advice project run by Prince Bishops Community Bank with financial support from Comic Relief, Derwentside Homes, and the Mid Durham, Derwent Valley and Stanley Local Area Action Partnerships.

Managing Money Better is a successful project that has helped a large number of residents to:

- improve their disposable income;
- reduce their fuel poverty;
- improve their financial capability; and
- understand their energy bills and how easy it is to switch supplier or tariff to save money.

In the last year 1,051 home visits were carried out and annual savings to residents totalling nearly £146,000 were achieved – an average of nearly £139 each. The Managing Money Better service will end in January 2017.

**For further details on the service please contact Vicky McCourt, Project Manager on 0300 500 0933**



## Smarterbuys Store

The Smarterbuys Store is a charity and proven ethical alternative to high-interest weekly payment stores and has been providing a responsible credit route for low income households since 2012.

The Smarterbuys Store enables social housing landlords like Derwentside Homes to offer their tenants an affordable weekly purchase scheme for white goods and furniture at a price they can afford, whilst also being up to 40% cheaper than other weekly payment stores.

Whilst selling good quality products that offer value for money, the Smarterbuys Store promotes the benefits of saving as well as responsible borrowing, offering residents financial information and support to help them improve their credit rating and manage their money more effectively.

The Smarterbuys Store is growing, with 15 social housing landlords benefitting from a franchise, two more planned for 2016/17 and others in the pipeline. During 2015/16 the Smarterbuys Store had 734 total loan sales with a combined value of nearly £577,000 benefitting the local economy by nearly £936,000 and adding an average of £1,275 to the amount of disposable income per agreement.

**For further details on the Smarterbuys Store please contact Vicky McCourt, Project Manager on 01207 523 183.**



# DELIVERING EXCELLENCE

We want to make sure that the services we provide are the best they can be. Our overall aim is to put people and the service they receive first and to deliver excellent, inclusive services centred on our customer needs and expectations.

In order to achieve this and direct our resources to where they are most needed, the key objectives for us are to:

- provide accessible services responsive to customer needs and expectations;
- deal effectively with customer complaints and feedback;
- achieve service excellence;
- embrace channel shift; and
- manage resources efficiently to respond to changes in operating environment.

Our Customer Services team is the most popular contact for customer enquiries and something we know our tenants value. During 2015/16 the team received 92,248 calls, with 98% of those calls answered within our 20 second target.

We recognise though, that other ways of contacting us are becoming increasingly important and have seen a rise in usage of our website and social media contacts with 2,708 following us on twitter and 236 likes on Facebook.

Derwentside Homes assesses itself each year and produces a Value for Money (VfM) Statement which demonstrates our approach to achieving value for money and meeting our organisational objectives.

<http://www.derwentsidehomes.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Published-VfM-self-assessment-2016.pdf>

## Listening to your views

We value what our customers have to say and actively seek their views and opinions so that we can continue to improve our services. Our Tenants' survey in 2013 showed that:

- 88% of tenants are satisfied with the overall services they receive from Derwentside Homes;
- 85% of tenants are happy with the overall quality of their home, the overall condition of their home, their neighbourhood as a place to live and value for money for their rent;
- 86% of tenants are satisfied with how their enquiries are dealt with; and
- 89% of tenants thought that staff members were 'helpful'.

We carry out regular phone surveys of satisfaction on repairs, gas servicing, improvements to homes, on our Sure Living service and for new tenants.

Sometimes our services may not meet customer expectations or requirements. Derwentside Homes aims to make it as simple as possible to make a complaint, ensure we deal with these in a prompt, professional manner and learn from what customers tell us. We received 236 complaints and dealt with 95% of them within 2 working days.

We also appreciate hearing when staff members exceed customer expectations and throughout the year we received 136 compliments. These are shared with service managers and used to highlight and promote strong performance internally.



# OUR PEOPLE

We employ 207 people who are integral to the success of our business. We are a high performing organisation and we are very proud of our achievements over the past 9 years, which are testament to the hard work and commitment of our staff.

People across the organisation are our greatest asset in every sense. Business success comes from the efforts of all our employees and our goal is to continue to build upon what we have already achieved to have a highly motivated and engaged workforce led by talented management in a work environment that is stimulating and attractive to both current and prospective employees.

Our key objectives to enable us to achieve this are:

- One company, one voice – collective leadership from the top, creating a climate of staff engagement, collaboration and cooperation across services and teams.
- Collective leadership – senior leaders set out the organisation's vision, direction and the values that drive it and they 'live' the values in what they say and do.
- One management approach – a consistent management style based on engaging management behaviours.
- One conversation – provision of and access to timely, up to date, accurate information, two way honest conversations and opportunities to have a say.
- One system – transparency and consistency in the systems and processes that support and develop people.



Our achievements in 2015/16 include:

- We invested £136,250 in our organisational development and training programmes to reflect our commitment to Value our People to help us to flourish as an innovative, sustainable and resilient organisation delivering excellent services to our customers and communities.
- We are fully committed to growing our own talent - 13 new apprentices, trainees and undergraduates joined our organisation in 2015/16.
- We ran a successful staff conference, listening to staff's views on the future of our business.
- We received the North East Better Health at Work Continuing Excellence Award in December 2015, recognising the work we do to raise health awareness with the workforce.
- We introduced Exception-AL, our rewards and recognition scheme in 2015, with over 40 staff already recognised for going the extra mile and making a difference in the work they do.

