

Heartbeat 2025 – Impact Report



NORTH STAR

Creating homes, building futures

Executive Summary

The Heartbeat initiative was launched in 2025 to strengthen connections between North Star colleagues, customers and communities. Through volunteering, engagement activities and community projects, the programme aimed to improve customer understanding, build trust and support local communities.

A survey of Heartbeat groups was conducted to understand the activities delivered and the impact achieved during 2025. Nine groups responded, providing insight into the time invested, community reach and outcomes of the initiative.

Key outcomes from the initiative include:

- 445 hours of volunteering activity delivered by staff
- 151 hours spent planning and organising activities
- £8,230 invested in community initiatives
- Approximately 662 residents and community members supported

Overall, the findings indicate that Heartbeat created positive outcomes for both communities and staff. The initiative strengthened relationships across teams, increased understanding of customers and communities, and delivered visible improvements in neighbourhoods.



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10

Heartbeat groups



445

Volunteer hours



151

Planning hours



662

People reached



49

Average volunteer hours per group



8,230

Invested

Introduction

Heartbeat was introduced in 2025 as an organisation-wide initiative designed to strengthen connections between North Star colleagues, customers and communities.

The aims of the initiative were to:

- Improve customer service and satisfaction
- Reduce complaints
- Provide empathetic, flexible services
- Build trust and strengthen relationships
- Listen, learn and act on customer insight
- Ensure all staff understand the communities we serve

This report summarises the activities delivered by Heartbeat groups during 2025 and highlights the impact on communities, colleagues and the organisation.



Participation and Activity

Nine Heartbeat groups completed the survey and reported on the activities they delivered during 2025.

Across these groups, staff contributed a significant amount of time to planning and delivering activities that supported communities and strengthened engagement with residents.

- 445 hours of volunteering activity
- 151 hours of planning and coordination time
- Average of approximately 49 volunteering hours per group

Financial Investment

Heartbeat groups were provided with budgets of up to £1,000 to support their community projects.

- Total spend across groups: £8,230
- Average spend per group: approximately £914

In some cases, groups also received additional support from partners, contractors or community organisations, helping to extend the impact of their activities.

Examples include:

- £1,000 donation from Stonebridge (development contractor)
- 9 hours of Ian Williams' operative time
- Donations of Ring doorbells and safety equipment from Middlesbrough Council
- Contribution to event costs from Thirteen and Accent.



Community Reach

Heartbeat activities reached an estimated 662 people across North Star communities.

Beneficiaries included:

- Residents attending community events
- Families participating in local activities
- Individuals benefiting from improved community spaces
- Local charities and organisations supported through volunteering

The groups were able to reach customers who were most in need of support and also those who North Star may not engage with currently.

“our leafletting also advertised the Christmas Day lunch to the wider estate and, hopefully, brought some new connections to the centre from those on the estate who didn't know they were welcome to go for company.”

“We also provided 'Xmas wishes' for children where gifts of up to £50 were made possible for those experiencing extreme poverty.”

“(we) gave the opportunity to buy themselves a treat that they have no spare cash for, this was remarked upon in a staff induction “those kids get nothing” which generated interest amongst others”



Types of Activities Delivered

Community Events

Several groups organised events that brought residents together, including family activities and seasonal events designed to strengthen community connections.

Environmental Improvements

Groups also delivered projects aimed at improving local environments, such as litter picks, garden improvements and clearing communal spaces.

Volunteering and Community Support

Teams provided practical support to community organisations and charities, including donations and volunteering support.

Customer Engagement

Some activities focused on improving understanding of customer experiences by encouraging colleagues to spend time in neighbourhoods and engage with residents.

Impact on Staff

Heartbeat also had a positive impact on colleagues across the organisation.

- Stronger relationships between teams
- Increased collaboration across departments
- Greater understanding of different roles within the organisation
- Increased connection to North Star's purpose and communities

Broadly, the impact on staff was increased awareness of what others do and increased positive working relationships. It also allowed people to see firsthand the communities we work in which, they may not have had the opportunity to do if it wasn't for the Heartbeat initiative. It also provided a great way for new staff to integrate and also to see the values of the organisation in practice.



"We engaged with colleagues across the business and built great relationships in a less structured way. We got to know each other more and how each role contributes to the business"

"(The impact on staff was) Positive in terms of awareness of what others do, what the Communities Team do and some of the areas we work in"

"We got to know each other better. It was clear to us all that we had shared values and wanted to make a difference. Some of the group were new members of staff and I think this was a great way for them to get to know people. We also got to know a lot more about the patch."

Staff Feedback

A total of 46 members of staff completed the Heartbeat staff impact assessment. Overall, feedback was positive, with most respondents reporting that Heartbeat had a positive impact on both their working relationships and the communities they supported. Thirty respondents (65%) said they would take part again, while those who were less likely to do so generally cited workload and time pressures rather than dissatisfaction with the initiative itself.

Staff particularly valued the opportunity to work alongside colleagues from different teams, build new relationships and gain a better understanding of North Star's communities. Many described feeling more connected to residents and appreciated the chance to contribute to practical projects that made a visible difference. As one respondent commented, "The best part was working with people I don't normally work with in the organisation, and getting to meet residents and see our stock in-person." Another reflected, "It was a great opportunity to get out from behind the laptop and do something practical." Others highlighted the impact of community activities, including "Some of the children made thank-you cards for the team, which was incredibly touching," while another described how "Seeing people's reaction, whether it was appreciation, surprise, or simply a smile highlighted how meaningful even small acts of kindness can be."

Respondents also identified several opportunities to strengthen the initiative. The most common theme was the challenge of balancing Heartbeat activities alongside existing workloads, particularly for frontline teams. One respondent commented, "It took too much time out of people's work day, especially when we are thin on the ground in frontline services," while another said, "It wasn't mandatory as it impacts teams." Others suggested allowing staff greater choice over projects and locations, with one respondent noting, "I would embody volunteering more if staff get to choose and even suggest activities they're passionate about." There were also calls for better planning, increased budgets, clearer project themes and more consistent participation across all teams.

Despite these challenges, the overall feedback suggests Heartbeat was well received. One respondent described it as "a great initiative" and another said it was "a brilliant opportunity to get out in the community and gain a greater understanding of our communities as well as working with staff from other teams." The consultation indicates that Heartbeat successfully strengthened relationships, increased understanding of the communities North Star serves and created meaningful opportunities for staff to make a positive difference, while also highlighting practical improvements that could enhance future delivery.

Lessons Learned

Survey responses also identified opportunities to improve future initiatives:

- Align groups geographically to simplify planning and travel
- Consider increased or more flexible budgets for activities
- Provide clearer structure or themes for projects
- Recognise staff contributions and effort
- Consider workload pressures when organising activities

Overall the biggest areas for improvement suggested were to increase budgets and the potential reach and impact of projects. There was also some thought that staff working certain areas and communities (not just housing officers) should be assigned to those communities. This would increase knowledge and reach in those communities. It is recognised however, that this does reduce the ability for the initiative to increase people's knowledge of areas they do not work in.



Conclusion

The Heartbeat initiative generated meaningful engagement across the organisation and delivered positive outcomes for communities and staff.

With over 445 hours of volunteering activity and more than £8,000 invested in community initiatives, the programme demonstrated the value of structured engagement with communities.

With refinements to structure, support and resources, Heartbeat has the potential to continue delivering positive social impact and strengthening relationships between North Star colleagues and the communities they serve.

Initial discussions within the communities team have identified that our current community grants programme could be realigned to accept applications from Heartbeat groups to support initiatives that they identify. This would boost the budget to approximately £30k, allow tenants to be involved in decision making processes around funding and increase the reach and impact of Heartbeat.

This report will be supplemented by a staff consultation. This will focus on their views of what was most impactful, what worked well and what could be improved.