

Cheshire West and Chester Council



Homelessness Review 2014

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1		Executive Summary	Page 3
2		Introduction	Page 8
	2.1	What is a Homelessness Review?	Page 8
	2.3	Achievements since the last Homelessness Review	Page 8
	2.2	The Review process	Page 9
3		Strategic Developments over the last 5 years	Page 11
4		Profile of Cheshire West and Chester	Page 19
5		Current housing provision	Page 21
6		The Homelessness Review:	Page 26
	6.1	Review of current and likely future levels of homelessness	Page 26
	6.2	Review of activities that contribute towards homelessness prevention	Page 41
	6.3	Review of activities that contribute towards securing accommodation	Page 45
	6.4	Review of activities that contribute towards providing support	Page 47
	6.5	Review of the resources available	Page 51
7		Consultation feedback	Page 52
8		Key findings	Page 56
9		Next steps	Page 58

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council has developed this Homelessness Review as required by the Homelessness Act 2002. Under the Act every local authority has to carry out a review of homelessness in their district every 5 years and to use the findings to publish a Homelessness Strategy, in consultation with other local statutory and voluntary organisations.

1.2 This review considers:

- Current and likely future levels of homelessness
- Activities that contribute towards homelessness prevention
- Activities that contribute towards securing accommodation
- Activities that contribute towards providing support
- Resources available

1.3 Partnership working and customer feedback have been key in the review process and the Council has worked closely with many statutory and voluntary agencies as well as customers to make this a multi-agency document.

1.4 Homelessness data from a range of sources have contributed to the review process. The statutory P1E statistics only provide information on households who approach the council as homeless so in addition the review includes data from:

- Housing Solutions
- Gateway referrals
- Trust Homechoice
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- County Court
- Rough Sleeper's Count
- Outreach Team
- Welfare Reform Group

1.5 The P1E statutory homelessness figures show that homeless applications have been reducing since 2011 but are still high compared to previous years and with other Cheshire authorities. Most households are found to be 'not homeless' and this has not changed over the past 5 years. The number of accepted cases went down significantly last year (2013/2014) from 42% to 32%. The number of intentionally homeless households has gone up and of these most households were homeless due to rent arrears in the private sector. The number of single men being accepted as homeless is still increasing and is now the second biggest group after female lone parents. The main reason for homelessness is the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. The main reason for priority need is dependent children but this is much lower than previous years.

1.6 The P1E also shows us that most households who were accepted as homeless (72%) were placed in temporary accommodation and the rest were considered

to be homeless at home. Cheshire West and Chester has the lowest level of homeless at home in Cheshire and the North West region. The snapshot figure provided on the 31st March 2014 showed that 36 households were in temporary accommodation. Most were in council or registered provider stock and the rest (22%) were in Bed and Breakfast. The number of households in Bed and Breakfast remains high and the average length of stay has gone up to 4.8 weeks. The average length of stay in temporary accommodation has come down considerably since 2009 and has settled at 11 weeks for the past three years. The majority of households in temporary accommodation are single men followed by female lone parents.

- 1.7** There are 309 units of specialist accommodation for households who have housing and support needs in Cheshire West and Chester, most of which are funded by the Housing Related Support programme. 29 of these units are temporary accommodation for homeless households. This arrangement is currently under review. Since April 2012 there have been over 2700 referrals to the Gateway for supported housing and floating support. Floating support services in Cheshire West and Chester are provided by P3. They support people by offering advice and support at home or at one of their hubs.
- 1.8** The main provider of homelessness prevention activities is Housing Solutions. The vision of the service is 'every homeless presentation is preventable' and they work towards this by working closely with households who are threatened with homelessness to either enable them to remain in their home or assist them to move. Between April 2012 and March 2014 over 500 customers completed a customer satisfaction survey and 98% of them rated the service as excellent, very good or good.
- 1.9** Housing Solutions opened 3859 housing advice cases last year. This is lower than previous years and the number of cases where homelessness has been prevented is also lower than previous years, however more of the cases opened do have an actual threat of homelessness (95%). The prevention tools used by the team show that the number of households who have their homelessness prevented through prevention tools, which enable them to remain in their existing home, has dropped dramatically, especially in the area of debt advice, resolving rent arrears and mortgage interventions. The team are four times more likely to prevent homelessness by finding alternative accommodation than by enabling households to remain in their accommodation.
- 1.10** There are 6268 households on the housing register of which 3288 are in housing need. 47.5% of households on the register are in Band D and are therefore over 55 with no housing need.
- 1.11** Since Trust Homechoice was transferred to the Council in October 2013 there have been 1622 property adverts through choice based lettings. Most adverts (49%) are for 2 bed properties. 25% of adverts are for sheltered properties. Sheltered properties are studios, flats or bungalows designated for households

over 55. Sheltered properties also account for 27% of properties which are advertised more than once because a suitable tenant has not been found.

1.12 According to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2013 there are 12,619 existing households in need. This accounts for 8.9% of the population. Housing need is 'the quantity of housing required for households who are unable to access suitable housing without financial assistance'. The survey found that households were in housing need due to homelessness or insecure tenure, mismatch of housing need and dwellings, dwelling amenities and condition, and social needs. The survey also found that people in private rented accommodation were more likely to experience housing need and lone parents were the household group more likely to experience housing need.

1.13 Court figures from the Ministry of Justice show that action by mortgage lenders is going down whereas action by landlords is going up. Cheshire West and Chester have the highest number of combined mortgage and landlord possession claims in Cheshire. County court evictions by the three main social housing providers have increased significantly in the last year.

1.14 Foundation Enterprise North West delivers homelessness provision for single homeless people over the age of 18, including emergency accommodation and a rough sleeper outreach service. The Outreach team figures confirm that the numbers of rough sleepers has reduced but it is still an issue and 78 rough sleepers were recorded in 2013. Cheshire West and Chester have continued to place rough sleepers on discretionary grounds in Bed and Breakfast to help them get off the streets and placed 11 in 2013/14. The No Second Night Out project has also supported 272 rough sleepers across Cheshire.

1.15 Future levels of homelessness in Cheshire West and Chester will be influenced by:

- The continuing impact of the credit crunch, financial pressures and debt on individuals and families
- Financial pressures on local government budgets and homelessness services
- The loss of advice agencies such as Shelter in the area
- Changes to Housing Related Support services
- Lack of one bedroom and affordable properties
- Welfare Reform, particularly the under-occupation charge, leading to rent arrears
- An increase in evictions by housing providers due to Welfare Reform
- Government changes to the Armed Forces and more people being discharged with no accommodation to go to
- Overcrowding and families falling out due to welfare reform
- The continuing effects of the Right to Buy on the number of available properties

- An aging population will require appropriate housing and support to prevent an increase in homelessness amongst older households

1.16 The Council's resources available to fund a wide range of homelessness services are reducing as the authority is faced with a financial challenge of saving £49 million over the next three years. The Housing Solutions revenue budget was cut by £90,000 in 2013/14.

1.17 Consultation was central to the review process and was carried out with staff, partner agencies and customers. Housing Solutions staff recommended a number of changes to help improve the service and make it better for the customer. Customers thought the Housing Solutions team were professional, friendly, informative and helpful and provide an excellent service but did make suggestions for improvements. Partners highlighted strengths, areas for improvement, gaps in provision and future trends. Much of the feedback is incorporated into the key findings of the review.

1.18 The key findings of the Homelessness Review are:

- The recent housing market and mortgage lending trends mean that there is a significant reduction in owner-occupation among those age 34 or younger as this age group now tend to rent in the private sector.
- Welfare reform is increasing the demand on already stretched third sector services such as the CAB.
- There are high levels of demand for supported accommodation and move-on.
- 15% of rent arrears are related to under-occupied properties. Social housing providers are serving more notices and evicting more tenants since changes to welfare provision was rolled out in April 2013.
- Reductions in public spending will mean that the Council will have to closely review all service provision including the Housing Solutions service. The Growth Agenda for the Council will play a key role in all services.
- The number of homeless applications has gone down but still remains high compared to 2009/10. The number of households accepted as homeless is reducing.
- Intentionally homeless decisions have been increasing year by year. Most households are intentionally homeless due to rent arrears.
- The number of households accepted as homeless age 16-24 has gone down.

- The number of single male households accepted as homeless now represents nearly 28% of households.
- The temporary accommodation figure is a lot higher than previous years.
- The number of households placed in Bed and Breakfast is remaining high and the average length of stay in Bed and Breakfast has increased to 4.8 weeks. Cheshire West and Chester has the highest use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Cheshire.
- There were more single males in temporary accommodation between April 2013 and March 2014 than any other household type.
- Young people are waiting longer in temporary accommodation before being rehoused.
- Money advice and mortgage arrears advice is no longer provided by Housing Solutions.
- 1248 households were prevented from being made homeless.
- Housing Solutions are nearly four times more likely to prevent homelessness by finding alternative accommodation than by enabling households to remain in their accommodation.
- Almost half of households on the register are in Band D, over 55, with no housing need but are eligible for sheltered housing.
- A quarter of Trust Homechoice adverts are for sheltered properties. Sheltered properties also account for 27% of properties which are re-advertised.
- Cheshire West and Chester have the highest number of combined mortgage and landlord possession claims in Cheshire.
- Rough sleeping is still an issue in the area and some rough sleepers are being placed in Bed and Breakfast.
- Working with Strategic Commissioning is vital to ensure that homeless households receive the high quality support and accommodation they need.
- Housing Solutions do not discharge the homelessness duty in the private sector.
- The ICT modules for the housing register and homelessness are not integrated.

2. Introduction

2.1 What is a Homelessness Review?

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness in their district every 5 years and to use the findings to publish a Homelessness Strategy, in consultation with other local statutory and voluntary organisations.

A Homelessness Review must consider the following:-

- a. Current and likely future levels of homelessness
- b. The activities which are carried out for any of the following purposes (or which contribute to achieving any of them):
 1. Preventing homelessness in the housing authority's district
 2. Securing that accommodation is or will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless
 3. Providing support for people in the district who are or may become homeless or have been homeless and need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.
- c. The resources available to the local housing authority, the social services authority for the district, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons for the activities outlined in 2 above.

The Cheshire West and Chester Homelessness Review provides an analysis of levels of homelessness, an audit of services, and a review of resources within the Cheshire West and Chester area.

The information gathered from the Homelessness Review provides an evidence base for the new Homelessness Strategy which will focus on homelessness prevention and providing the services to support and accommodate those in housing need. The new Homelessness Strategy will continue to build upon the good work that is already well established across Cheshire West and Chester highlighted below.

2.2 Achievements since the last Homelessness Review

The last Cheshire West and Chester Homelessness Review was published in 2009. Since then there have been a number of achievements including:

- A 'No Second Night Out' (NSNO) service was developed in partnership with Cheshire East. The NSNO project was part of a Government initiative to help rough sleepers. In Cheshire West and Cheshire East rough sleepers who are new to the streets and in receipt of benefits are offered a bed for a maximum of 72 hours provided by a local supported housing provider. During this time a

caseworker will identify housing and support needs, create a comprehensive support plan, coordinate a multi-agency meeting and move the client into suitable accommodation.

- The 2010-2015 Homelessness Strategy was launched at a Housing Solutions conference, helping to raise awareness of the root causes of homelessness with partners.
- Cheshire West and Chester were granted two years government funding to develop an Enhanced Housing Options team providing specialist roles in money advice, employment and resettlement.
- A new five year contract for homelessness provision was awarded to Foundation Enterprise North West.
- Successful funding applications from partners have resulted in specialist roles in the private rented sector for young people and ex offenders.
- A 'Housing Gateway' referral system for supported accommodation across the borough was introduced.
- A Housing Solutions telephone advice line was launched to ensure one point of contact for the customer
- The Housing Solutions teams were integrated and centralised in Ellesmere Port.
- The housing register and choice based lettings service transferred to Housing Solutions.

2.3 The Review Process in Cheshire West and Chester

Whilst the Homelessness Review has been produced by Cheshire West and Chester Council as part of its statutory duty the Council has worked closely with many statutory and voluntary agencies making it a multi-agency document.

Partnership working has been key in the review process. The Cheshire West and Chester Homelessness Steering Group has been responsible for the development of the review and the Homelessness Forum has provided vital information and support. Both groups are made up of a range of organisations working in homelessness across the area.

The information gathered for the review has come from a wide range of sources:

- Completed questionnaires by the main housing providers in the area
- Completed questionnaires by service users
- Focus groups with service users
- Focus groups with Housing Solutions staff
- Focus groups with the Homelessness Forum
- Statistical returns
- Performance indicators
- Homelessness figures from partners

When analysed alongside demographic data the information gathered for the review helps identify gaps in provision, unmet need, future trends and key areas for action. This analysis can be found in the Key Findings section of the report.

As part of the consultation process the Homelessness Review is available to staff, stakeholders, partners, service users and the public for comments. Cheshire West and Chester Council will work with these groups to identify priorities for the new Homelessness Strategy. The Strategy will then be drafted for completion in 2015.

3. Strategic Developments over the last 5 years

3.1 National Strategic Context

3.1.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government

The Department for Communities and Local Government has outlined what the Government wants to achieve in terms of housing as:

- ❖ Increase the number of houses available to buy and rent, including affordable housing;
- ❖ Improve the flexibility of social housing (increasing mobility and choice) and promote homeownership;
- ❖ Protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged by tackling homelessness and support people to stay in their homes; and
- ❖ Make sure that homes are of high quality and sustainable.

Some of the key elements of the Government's national policy agenda over the last 5 years include:

3.1.2 Making Every Contact Count

This is a Government report published in 2012 on a joint approach to tackling homelessness, particularly focusing on preventing households from reaching a crisis point where they are faced with homelessness. In this report the Government sets out ten local challenges:

- ❖ adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
- ❖ actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
- ❖ offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
- ❖ adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
- ❖ have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
- ❖ develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
- ❖ actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- ❖ have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
- ❖ not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation

- ❖ not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

3.1.3 Gold Standard

The Government launched the Gold Standard in April 2013 to help councils deliver the best possible homelessness services. Using many of the principles from the Making Every Contact Count initiative, the standard aims to ensure that homelessness remains the last possible option. Led by a small expert team based at Winchester City Council and supported by the National Homelessness Advice Service, the peer-led scheme will provide a host of free training and support to help local authority housing options teams learn from each other and gain Gold Standard status. The main aims are as follows:

- ❖ offering a comprehensive prevention service, with advice and support for single people as well as families in need
- ❖ working with local agencies to provide employment, education and training opportunities
- ❖ helping householders facing the threat of repossession by providing access to mortgage debt advice and support such as the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- ❖ adopting a local No Second Night Out scheme to help prevent new rough sleepers from becoming entrenched into a street lifestyle

3.1.4 Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM)

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of four national charities – Clinks, DrugScope, Homeless Link and Mind – formed to influence policy and services for adults facing multiple needs and exclusions. Together the charities represent over 1600 frontline organisations working in the criminal justice, drug and drug treatment, homelessness and mental health sectors.

By working together local services can develop coordinated interventions that can transform lives. The MEAM approach provides a non-prescriptive framework for developing a coordinated approach in the local area.

3.1.5 The Localism Act (2011)

The Government's 'Programme for Government' set the scene for a radical devolution of power to local authorities and community groups; critical to this is the Localism Act. The Act includes measures to reform:

- ❖ The planning system;
- ❖ Social housing; and
- ❖ The council house finance system.

3.1.6 Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England

In 2011 the Government published its Housing Strategy for England, which sets out its 'intended direction of travel for housing, its role in the wider economy and its contribution to social mobility. It sets out ideas on the shape of housing provision that the government wants to see, which involve the primacy of home ownership; social housing as welfare; and an increasing role for the private rented sector.'

The Strategy introduces a series of new interventions and approaches, which are set out under the following headings:

- ❖ **Increasing supply, more homes, stable growth** which includes a newbuild indemnity scheme led by the Home Builders Federation and Council for Mortgage Lenders to provide up to 95% loan to value mortgages for newbuild properties in England, backed by a housebuilder indemnity fund; and a £400m 'Get Britain Building investment fund;
- ❖ **Social and affordable housing reform** which includes implementing a radical programme of reform to make better use of social housing to support those who need it most; and re-invigorating Right to Buy with the one for one replacement of homes sold;
- ❖ **A thriving private rented sector**, through supporting investment in homes to rent, marketing new Built to Rent pilot sites and encouraging local authorities to make full use of powers to tackle dangerous and poorly- maintained homes;
- ❖ **A strategy for empty homes**, with a commitment to bring empty homes back into use through awarding the New Homes Bonus to empty properties brought back into use, providing information and practical advice to local authorities and communities and proposing changes to Empty Dwelling Management Orders to tackle the worst long-term empty homes;
- ❖ **Quality of housing experience and support**, through supporting the most vulnerable households to prevent and tackle homelessness and providing a better deal for older people, with greater choice and support to live independently; and
- ❖ **Quality, sustainability and design**, by encouraging the promotion of imaginative, innovative, locally distinctive, well designed new homes and neighbourhoods; a commitment to Zero Carbon homes by 2016; reviewing building regulations to further improve energy efficiency and carbon emission standards of new buildings.

3.1.7 Welfare Reform Act (2012)

On 8 March 2012 the Welfare Reform Act received Royal Assent, and with it began the most dramatic change to the welfare state since its inception. In its drive to 'make work pay' and ensure a fairer and more transparent benefits and tax credits system, the Government has introduced a range of measures that it believes will not only reduce overall spending and deliver deficit reduction, but will also 'protect the most vulnerable in society'.

The key elements of the Act are:

- ❖ Creating Universal Credit as a streamlined benefit to replace most income related benefits, including housing benefit;
- ❖ Putting in place a stronger approach to fraud and error with tougher penalties for the most serious offences;
- ❖ Reform of Disability Living Allowance, by introducing Personal Independence
- ❖ Payments to meet the modern needs of disabled people; and
- ❖ Reforming Housing Benefit and introducing a charge for tenants who under-occupy their homes

Reforms to Housing Benefit set out in the Act include:

- ❖ Introducing a size criteria to the calculation of housing benefit for social sector tenants;
- ❖ Up-rating future Local Housing Allowance rates in line with Consumer Price
- ❖ Index rather than actual rents (from April 2013); and
- ❖ Introducing household benefit caps of £500 per week for couples and £350 per week for single claimants.
- ❖ Changes already introduced to housing benefit following the June 2010 Budget include: arc4 Cheshire West and Chester 2013 SHMA 15
- ❖ Capping the maximum Local Housing Allowance payable for each property size and applying a four-bed limit. This mainly affects households living in London (from April 2011);
- ❖ Calculating Local Housing Allowance rates using the 30th percentile of market rents rather than the 50th percentile (from October 2011);
- ❖ Limiting housing benefit for working age tenants so that it only covers the size of property they are judged to need (from April 2013);
- ❖ Increasing deductions for non-dependents (no longer frozen at £7.40 per week for non-earners and linked to prices since April 2011);

- ❖ Time limiting full housing benefit and Local Housing Allowance payable to people on Job Seekers' Allowance so that after 12 months housing benefit is reduced by 10% (from April 2013);
- ❖ Increasing discretionary housing payments (from October 2010); and
- ❖ Resourcing an additional bedroom for carers (from April 2011).
- ❖ The age at which the single room rate is applied increased from 25 to 35 from January 2012. This increases the age that single people can qualify for housing benefit for a self-contained property.

3.1.8 The Marmot Review (2010)

In November 2008, Professor Sir Michael Marmot was asked by the then Secretary of State for Health to chair an independent review to propose the most effective evidence-based strategies for reducing health inequalities in England from 2010. The final report, 'Fair Society Healthy Lives', was published in February 2010, and concluded that reducing health inequalities would require action on six policy objectives:

- ❖ Give every child the best start in life
- ❖ Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- ❖ Create fair employment and good work for all
- ❖ Ensure healthy standard of living for all
- ❖ Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- ❖ Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention.

Delivering these policy objectives requires action by central and local government, the NHS, the third and private sectors and community groups. National policies will not work without effective local delivery systems focused on health equity in all policies. Effective local delivery requires effective participatory decision-making at local level. This can only happen by empowering individuals and local communities.

3.1.9 Caring for our future: Reforming care and support (White Paper 2012)

Housing plays a critical role in helping older people and disabled adults to live as independently as possible, and in helping carers and the wider health and social care system offer support more effectively. Following the publication of the White Paper the Government produced the joint publication: 'Integrated care and support: Our shared commitment', which sets out the vision of making person-centred coordinated care and support the norm across England over the coming years.

3.2 Sub-Regional Strategic Context

3.2.1 Countywide Homelessness Group

Whilst each local authority is responsible for homelessness within its district it is important to recognise the benefits of sub-regional working. In 2003 the six districts which previously made up Cheshire, together with Halton and Warrington, combined to form a Countywide Homelessness Group. This group aims to address the larger, cross boundary issues. As a result, a number of notable achievements across the County have been made including;

- ❖ A single service commitment that all councils would adopt as a baseline was agreed
- ❖ Continued sharing of best practice and benchmarking each service to ensure we are maintaining a robust and consistent approach across the partnership
- ❖ Staff knowledge and skills were improved as result of the training
- ❖ Common approach to supporting rough sleepers to re-connection to their home area and also during periods of cold weather
- ❖ A common approach bringing the main housing duty to an end by making an offer of suitable private rented sector accommodation
- ❖ Reduction in the number of street homeless people
- ❖ Best use of housing related support services was ensured through the adoption of single access 'gateway', resulting in those in the most need being prioritised for the allocation support units
- ❖ Opportunities were expanded and increased for single homeless people to obtain private rented sector accommodation to prevent homelessness or help people make a planned positive move-on
- ❖ Establishing a NSNO service across Cheshire was an ambitious undertaking and is now in its second year.

3.3 Local Strategic context

3.3.1 The Council Plan

The vision for Cheshire West and Chester is to be the best Council in the UK by:

- ❖ Putting the Customer First;
- ❖ Demonstrating Best Practice and Innovation
- ❖ Delivering Value For Money

To achieve this goal the Council Plan sets out the Council's priorities for 2015 to 2018. It informs decision making at all levels of the Council and sets the framework we use to plan and deliver our services, including strategic

housing services. Housing is a key priority in the Council Plan, with outcomes including:

- ❖ Increased supply of both market and affordable homes
- ❖ More vulnerable adults enabled to achieve independent living and settled accommodation
- ❖ Reduced homelessness
- ❖ More empty properties brought back into use
- ❖ More homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard

3.3.2 The Local Plan

Work is currently underway to produce a new Local Plan for Cheshire West and Chester. The Local Plan is the strategic document that will set out the long-term vision of how the borough should develop and improve. The Local Plan is a key Council document. It is the spatial expression of the borough's priorities and development needs going forward. It provides the planning framework to support the priorities identified in other Council plans and programmes including the Council's Corporate Plan (Altogether Better, the Council Plan 2011 - 2015), the Sustainable Community Strategy and other Council strategies covering regeneration, housing, climate change, environment and waste. The Local Plan is being adopted in July 2014.

3.3.3 The Growth Strategy

The Growth Strategy: Altogether Better for Business: An Economic Growth Strategy for West Cheshire (2013-2018) identifies how these aims will be achieved through four Strategic Objectives:

- ❖ SO1: Enterprise and business
- ❖ SO2: Economic infrastructure
- ❖ SO3: Employment and skills, and
- ❖ SO4: Enabling behaviours for growth

3.3.4 Housing Strategy

The Housing Strategy for the borough is being developed in collaboration with partners and key stakeholders including the Local Housing Partnership and colleagues in Housing Solutions and throughout the Council. This collaborative approach will help to develop holistic policies and strategies and a coordinated response to tackling common issues and improved housing outcomes for local people. The local Housing Strategy's vision echoes the themes and priorities set out in the Council Plan 'Altogether Better':

- ❖ To deliver homes of the right type, quality and cost in the right locations in line with current and future needs of the population to ensure West Cheshire remains an attractive location to live and help ease affordability pressures.

Through consultation with partners three overarching priorities for housing in the borough have been identified to help fulfil this vision:

- ❖ Increasing supply: more homes stable growth: outcomes for this priority include reducing the number of empty homes in the borough, working with partners to stimulate new development and helping to ease affordability pressures
- ❖ Improve access to housing: outcomes include tackling the barriers faced by local people in accessing housing and increasing the range of homes and tenures available, as well as reducing homelessness and ensuring that there is a sufficient choice of housing options available to the borough's most vulnerable residents
- ❖ Quality, sustainability and design: outcomes for this priority include improving the quality and condition of the borough's existing housing stock, as well as ensuring that new housing development is well designed and sustainable and continuing to support projects delivering affordable warmth to the borough's residents.

Following a further period of consultation the Housing Strategy will be adopted later in the year.

4. Profile of Cheshire West and Chester

4.1 Cheshire West and Chester is a highly desirable place to live, work and visit and is one of the most affluent areas in the North West. The borough was formed in 2009 with the creation of a new unitary authority through the amalgamation of Chester City, Ellesmere Port and Neston and Vale Royal Councils with the western part of Cheshire County Council. Cheshire West and Chester covers a large geographic and demographically diverse area and is the fourth largest authority in the North West.



4.2 Over 329,000 people live in Cheshire West (141,442 households) with over 160,000 people working in the borough. The area covers 350 square miles and is characterised by attractive countryside, varied landscapes and diverse settlements ranging from the historic city of Chester to small rural hamlets. Chester, Ellesmere Port and Northwich dominate the northern part of the borough and sit within or adjoining the North Cheshire Green Belt which covers 42 percent of the borough's land area. Three of the larger rural settlements, Neston, Frodsham and Helsby, are also located in the Green Belt in the more urbanised north of the borough.

4.3 Cheshire West and Chester is part of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership and the Mersey Dee Alliance, but the borough does not cover a single economic geography. In economic and geographic terms, the borough lies between the urban centres of Manchester and Liverpool and the boundary of the spheres of influence of these economic centres runs through the area. The view that Cheshire West and Chester is not at the centre of its own economic geography is supported by the fact that residents can, on average, earn more by out-commuting than working within the borough.

4.4 The key long term economic issue for Cheshire West and Chester is an ageing population and a decline in the working age population. As increasing numbers of

residents reach retirement age there will be implications for total disposable income, retail and service sector vitality and future labour supply which may deter future investment.

4.5 The population has high levels of economic activity, strong skills and is likely to be employed in managerial and professional employment although there are some areas of deprivation in the borough. There are pockets of deprivation concentrated in Ellesmere Port, Chester, Winsford and Northwich. Where there is unemployment, the age profile of those affected, the duration of unemployment and the level of vacancy rates compare favourably to national averages.

4.6 In comparison to the wider North West area, Cheshire West and Chester is an area where house prices are high and when considered alongside income levels are relatively unaffordable. Given that workplace earnings are not particularly high compared to neighbouring authorities (average £27,347 per year), it is likely that average house prices are being maintained by those who value the living environment and education opportunities offered within the area but who out-commute for employment.

4.7 Housing market trends show a significant reduction in owner occupation among those aged between 16 and 34 years and an increase for this age group renting in the private sector. By contrast, there has been an increase in owner occupation among those aged between 35 and 49. This reflects trends in the national housing market. Data from the Council for Mortgage Lenders show that the average age of a first time buyer has been relatively stable at around 29 for some time. The proportion of older first time buyers is increasing though; in July 2013, 26% of all first time buyers were aged 35 or over.

4.8 The distribution of employment opportunities across Cheshire West and Chester leads to a high proportion of car use for commuter journeys across the area. There is a low level of public transport use in some communities and there is a strong correlation between public transport use and those areas where deprivation is highest.

4.9 According to the 2011 Census, 2.5% of Cheshire West and Chester's population is 'non-white'. 89% of the population were born in the UK and 97% have English as their main language. 70% of the population stated that they are Christian.

5. Current Housing Provision

5.1 Number and size of dwellings

5.1.1 According to the 2011 census there were a total of 147,568 dwellings across Cheshire West and Chester and a total of 141,142 households. The total number of dwellings has increased from 146,626 in 2010. According to the 2011 Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix there were 4,777 vacant dwellings across Cheshire West and Chester, an increase from 4,571 in 2010.

5.1.2 The table below reviews the profile of dwelling stock by size and type based on the 2013 Household Survey. Overall, the vast majority (75.3%) of properties are houses, 12.6% are bungalows, 11.1% are flats/maisonettes and 1% are other types of property including park homes/caravans. Of all occupied properties, 8.4% have one bedroom, 23.5% two bedrooms, 43.8% three bedrooms, 20.2% four bedrooms and 4.2% five or more bedrooms.

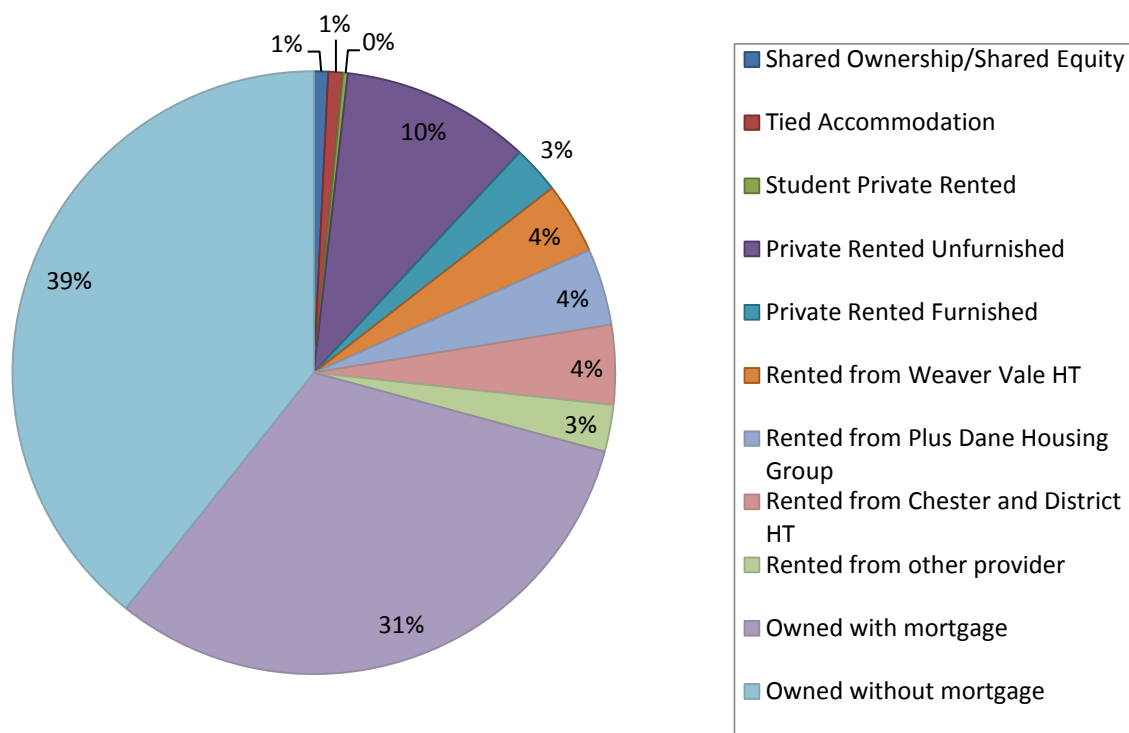
Property Type	Number of bedrooms					
	1	2	3	4	5+	TOTAL
Detached house	0.1	0.8	8.3	14.8	3.3	27.2
Semi-detached house	0.2	4.6	22.3	3.4	0.6	31.2
Terraced House	0.5	6.5	8.7	1.0	0.2	16.9
Flat/Maisonette	1.6	4.7	4.0	0.8	0	11.1
Bungalow	5.7	6.5	0.3	0.1	0	12.6
Other/not known	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.1	0	1.0
Total	8.4	23.5	43.8	20.2	4.3	100

5.2 Stock condition

5.2.1 The borough's housing stock is significantly younger than the national average. 28% of homes in the private sector were constructed after 1980. Modern homes are likely to be in a better state of repair and only 20% of homes do not meet the Decent Homes Standard, compared to 25% of all private dwellings in England. In spite of this, rates of disrepair in the private housing sector remain above the national average and have increased since 2010. Rates of non-decency are highest in the private rented sector and are above average for poorer households, with the youngest and oldest households worst affected. Poor housing conditions are not evenly distributed across the borough; in the rural areas non-decency is around 22% and, in a small number of rural and urban wards, over 30% of homes are non-decent.

5.3 Tenure

5.3.1 Overall, 70.7% of occupied dwellings are owner-occupied, 15.4% are affordable (social/affordable rented and intermediate tenure) and 13.7% are private rented. These compare with 2001 census figures of 74.4% owner occupied, 17.1% affordable and 8.7% private rented. The tenure profile of Cheshire West and Chester based on 2011 census data is summarised below:



5.3.2 The split between tenure and areas is as follows:

Area	Owner Occupied %	Private Rented %	Affordable/Social Rented %	Total Dwellings
Chester Urban Area	62.7	19.3	18.1	35642
Chester Villages	85.4	9.8	4.8	3498
Cuddington/Sandiway	83.6	8.4	8.1	2297
Ellesmere Port	68.5	10.7	20.8	25963
Farndon	70.1	21.9	7.9	2552
Frodsham	76.6	12.3	11.2	4119
Helsby	80.4	12.1	7.5	2192
Malpas	68.8	19.1	12.1	1755
Neston	75.9	10.8	13.3	7179
Northwich Urban	71.7	13.1	15.1	22732
Rural East	85.7	9.0	5.3	6358
Rural North	82.9	10.5	6.7	7514
Tarporley	78.2	12.2	9.5	1969
Tarvin and Kelsall	82.3	10.7	7.0	3294
Tattenhall	68.4	21.6	10.0	1921
Winsford Urban Area	65.7	11.8	22.6	12457

5.3.3 Owner Occupation

Of the 70.8% of households across Cheshire West and Chester who are owner occupiers, 40.5% own outright and 30.3% have a mortgage. Most owner occupied properties are either houses or bungalows; and around three-quarters have three or more bedrooms.

5.3.4 In 1996, a household income of around £16,500 was required to ensure that a median-priced property was affordable. By 2007, an income of around £45,600 was required, an increase of 176% and far outstripping wage inflation over this period. During 2012, the level of household income required for a median priced property to be affordable was £45,071.

5.3.5 Median property prices in Cheshire West and Chester 1996-2012, annual rate of change and income required to be affordable:

Year	Cheshire West and Chester Median Price	% change on previous year	Income required (£) 3.5 x multiplier
1996	£57,475	~	£16,421
1997	£60,832	5.8	£17,380
1998	£63,000	3.6	£18,000
1999	£67,648	7.4	£19,328
2000	£74,650	10.4	£21,329
2001	£82,608	10.7	£23,602
2002	£95,500	15.6	£27,286
2003	£114,833	20.2	£32,810
2004	£141,000	22.8	£40,286
2005	£145,000	2.8	£41,429
2006	£154,417	6.5	£44,119
2007	£159,650	3.4	£45,614
2008	£162,000	1.5	£46,286
2009	£157,500	-2.8	£45,000
2010	£162,500	3.2	£46,429
2011	£155,000	-4.6	£44,286
2012	£157,750	1.8	£45,071

Source: CLG Housing Statistics

5.3.6 Housing market trends show a significant reduction in owner occupation among those aged between 16 and 34 years and an increase for this age group renting in the private sector. By contrast, there has been an increase in owner occupation among those aged between 35 and 49. This reflects trends in the national housing market. Data from the Council for Mortgage Lenders show that the average age of a first time buyer has been relatively stable at around 29 for some time. The proportion of older first time buyers is increasing. In July 2013, 26% of all first time buyers were aged 35 or over.

5.3.7 Social and affordable housing

There are around 21,895 households who live in affordable properties across the Cheshire West and Chester area, accounting for 15.5% of all occupied

dwellings. Of these households 14.7% rent from a Registered Provider and 0.8% are shared ownership.

5.3.8 33.7% of households living in affordable accommodation are single people (under 65), a further 30.2% are older single people and couples, 12.0% are lone parents, 12.8% are couples with children, 7.6% are couples with no children and 3.6% are other types of household.

5.3.9 Across Cheshire West and Chester the social rented stock consists of Council owned stock managed by Plus Dane, stock which has been transferred to the two registered providers Weaver Vale Housing Trust and Chester and District Housing Trust and stock belonging to other registered providers. Over the past 10 years, the number of social rented properties has reduced from 21,456 to 20,808. Social rented stock as a proportion of total dwelling stock currently stands at 14.7%.

5.3.10 Between the three main registered providers the breakdown of property size and number of properties are shown in the following table:

Number and size of property for the main stock holders						
Property size	CDHT		CWAC/Plus Dane		WVHT	
	General needs housing	Housing for older people	General needs housing	Housing for older people	General needs housing	Housing for older people
Bedsit	16	52	0	0	3	147
1 bed	464	899	549	830	240	830
2 bed	1791	680	1105	300	1232	830
3 bed	2043	1	2750	3	2459	19
4 bed	117	0	105	0	123	2
5 bed	1	0	3	0	3	0
6 bed	3	0	5	0	4	0
TOTAL	4435	1632	4517	1133	4064	1828

5.3.11 Ensuring an on-going supply of affordable housing is a key challenge currently facing housing providers working across the Borough and, if not achieved, will lead to bigger waiting lists and an increase in homelessness.

5.3.12 The Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2013 confirmed that there has been a reduction in the supply of housing across the board but particularly relating to social housing the Assessment identified that:

- ❖ The supply of affordable housing has reduced, although as a proportion of the overall supply of housing it has increased
- ❖ There has been a significant increase in demand for affordable housing
- ❖ Turnover within the existing affordable housing stock is reducing, as households have nowhere to move to

- ❖ Demand is predominantly for affordable rented accommodation
- ❖ Under the new affordable rent model most registered providers are letting homes at 80% of the Local Housing Allowance (as opposed to 80% of open market rent)

5.3.13 Private rented housing

Nationally, the private rented sector has established itself as an important dimension of the housing market to complement owner occupation and social renting. Nationally, 18.1% of households now rent privately which is higher than those who rent from a social landlord (17.7%). The sector plays a major role in facilitating labour mobility. The sector is diverse in terms of the range of households it accommodates and the types of properties available.

5.3.14 The private rented sector accommodates around 13.7% of households (19,440) across Cheshire West and Chester. Of these households, 14,817 rent unfurnished properties, 3,711 rent furnished accommodation and 912 rent tied accommodation.

6. The Homelessness Review

6.1 Review of current and likely future levels of homelessness

6.1.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council are required to provide homelessness statistics in the quarterly P1E return which records the numbers of households who have approached the Council as homeless and what decisions were made on each application. The P1E figures give us a useful insight into the levels and nature of homelessness but only for those households who approach the council and make a homeless application.

6.1.2 As well as the P1E, data from other sources has been included in this section to help give a fuller picture of homelessness. The data included is from:

- ❖ Housing Solutions
- ❖ Gateway referrals
- ❖ Trust Homechoice
- ❖ Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- ❖ No Second Night Out
- ❖ County Court
- ❖ Rough Sleeper's Count
- ❖ FENW outreach services
- ❖ Welfare Reform Group

6.1.3 Homeless applications recorded on the P1E for Cheshire over the last 5 years

Local Authority	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Cheshire West	84	176	276	258	204
Cheshire East	198	119	162	160	161
Halton	214	78	152	166	197
Warrington	257	238	155	123	252

6.1.4 In 2013/14 Cheshire West and Chester made decisions on 204 homeless applications. This figure has gone down since the previous two years but still remains high compared to 2009/10. Cheshire West is the only authority in Cheshire where homeless applications have gone down since 2012/13.

6.1.5 Homeless decisions recorded on the P1E over the last 5 years:

Year	Ineligible	Accepted	Not homeless	No priority need	Intentionally homeless	TOTAL
2009/10	0	34	45	4	1	84
2010/11	0	72	86	14	4	176
2011/12	0	100	134	25	17	276
2012/13	0	109	110	15	24	258
2013/14	4	65	74	16	45	204

6.1.6 Between April 2009 and March 2012 the number of households accepted as homeless were increasing year by year. The economic climate meant that more people were struggling financially and finding themselves in housing difficulty through no fault of their own. In 2012/13 it reduced slightly but in 2013/2014 the number has gone down significantly. 42% of applications were accepted in 2012/13 but last year it had gone down to 32%.

6.1.7 Intentionally homeless decisions have been increasing year by year. In 2012/13 9% of cases were intentionally homeless but last year 22% were. This is higher than the other Cheshire authorities which range from 19% to 4%. Further analysis of the 45 cases of intentional homelessness last year show that 23 of them were single men (51%) and rent arrears was the main reason for homelessness (27%), followed by family unable to accommodate (20%) and leaving prison (15.5%). The majority of rent arrears cases were in the private sector (67%).

6.1.8 Households accepted as homeless showing a comparison with other local authorities in Cheshire:

Local Authority	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Cheshire West and Chester	34	72	100	109	65
Cheshire East	55	80	111	108	104
Halton	158	37	64	86	50
Warrington	215	201	140	82	107

6.1.9 Homeless acceptances have generally gone down across Cheshire apart from in Warrington where they have significantly gone up. Cheshire East accepted 65% of their applications in 2013/14 which is a lot higher than the other Cheshire authorities.

6.1.10 Households accepted as homeless showing age:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
16-17	0	2	3	6	1
18-24	11	21	29	17	9
25-44	17	38	54	61	38
45-59	4	10	10	21	15
60+	1	1	4	5	2
TOTAL	34	72	100	110	65

6.1.11 Over the last 2 years the number of households accepted as homeless age 16-24 has gone down and in 2013/2014 only 15% were age 16-24 compared to 32% from 2009-2012. The number of 16 to 17 year old applicants has gone down by 5 from last year. Housing Solutions staff put this down to the Young Person's Protocol and the mediation service for young people Firm

Foundations is continuing to prevent homelessness amongst this age group.

6.1.12 Households accepted as homeless showing ethnic group:

Ethnic Group	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
White	33	70	96	105	58
African Caribbean	0	0	1	2	1
Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi	0	1	1	0	0
Other ethnic origin	1	1	2	3	4
TOTAL	34	72	100	110	65

6.1.13 The number of households accepted as homeless from ethnic groups other than White have been consistently very low or zero over the last 5 years with a slight increase from 'other ethnic origin'.

6.1.14 Households accepted as homeless showing household type

Household Type	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Couples with children	11	24	20	26	8
Lone parent (male)	2	3	8	5	5
Lone parent (female)	11	27	46	35	19
One person household (male)	8	5	6	14	18
One person household (female)	1	4	12	18	9
Other households	1	9	8	12	8
TOTAL	34	72	100	110	65

6.1.15 The number of single male households accepted as homeless has been increasing since 2010/2011 and now represents nearly 28% of households compared to 13% in 2012/13 and 6% in 2011/12. This is high compared to the figure for the North West region which is 21%. The number of female lone parent households has gone down dramatically and is at its lowest for 4 years at 29% of households compared to 46% in 2011/12 and 38% in 2010. The number of couples with children is at its lowest for 5 years and the number of single female households is also lower than previous years.

6.1.16 Households accepted as homeless showing main reason for homelessness:

Main reason for homelessness	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	7	11	14	7	9
Other relatives or friends no longer or able to accommodate	7	7	9	9	5
Non-violent breakdown of relationship	2	3	5	1	2
Violent breakdown of relation involving partner	1	2	8	15	2
Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated persons	0	2	2	4	1
Racially motivated violence	0	0	0	0	0

Other forms of violence	0	3	1	5	1
Racially motivated harassment	0	0	0	0	0
Other forms of harassment	0	2	4	4	1
Mortgage arrears	3	4	13	11	8
Rent arrears on local authority or other public sector dwellings	0	0	0	0	0
Registered social landlord or other housing association dwellings	0	0	0	0	0
Private sector dwelling	0	9	5	2	2
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	9	2	24	34	12
Other reasons for loss of rented accommodation	3	0	1	3	1
Required to leave National Asylum Support Service accommodation	0	0	0	0	0
Left prison	0	1	2	2	3
Left hospital	0	0	1	0	0
Left other or LA care	1	0	0	0	1
Left HM-Forces	0	0	0	1	1
Other reason	0	8	11	12	14
TOTAL	33	72	100	110	65

6.1.17 The category most used as main reason for homelessness is 'Other Homelessness' which in 2013/14 included arson, eviction from a women's refuge, and unsuitability of accommodation for a premature baby.

6.1.18 Apart from 'other reason' for homelessness most households were homeless due to termination of assured shorthold tenancy and parents no longer willing to accommodate. The main reason for homelessness shows that the violent breakdown of relationship involving a partner has gone down over the last few years to 3% compared to 14% in 2012/13.

6.1.19 Households accepted as homeless showing reason for priority need

Priority Need (PIE records main reason)	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Emergency	0	0	0	0	4
Children	23	51	71	66	32
Pregnant	2	6	6	4	4
16/17 year olds	1	1	1	3	1
Care leaver	1	1	1	2	1
Old age	2	0	2	1	0
Physical disability	5	6	10	11	9
Mental disability	0	6	6	8	11
Drug dependency	0	0	0	0	0
Alcohol dependency	0	0	0	0	0
Asylum seeker	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	4	0
Care leaver	0	0	0	1	0

HM forces	0	0	0	1	0
Custody	0	0	0	0	0
Violence	0	0	0	9	2
Domestic Violence	0	1	3	7	0
TOTAL	34	72	100	110	65

6.1.20 Last year 49% of households had dependent children which is a lower figure than previous years of 60% and 71%. The number of people with a mental disability has risen to 17% compared to 7% and the number of households with a physical disability is slightly lower than the previous two years. For the first time in 5 years a figure was recorded for homeless in an emergency. Usually being zero a figure of 4 (6%) is unusually high but on this occasion it was due to a block of flats collapsing and was therefore a one-off.

6.1.21 Immediate outcome for households accepted as homeless:

Outcome	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Placed in temporary accommodation	19	40	54	65	47
Homeless at home	8	32	40	41	17
Accepted qualifying offer of AST	0	0	0	0	0
Accepted "Part 6" offer	6	0	3	1	1
Made own arrangements	0	0	3	3	0
TOTAL	33	72	100	110	65

6.1.22 In 2013/2014 most households accepted as homeless were provided with temporary accommodation (72%) or were considered homeless at home (26%). The temporary accommodation figure is a lot higher than previous years and as a result the homeless at home figure is a lot lower. Cheshire West and Cheshire has the lowest homeless at home figure in Cheshire (49%) and the North West region (33%). As with previous years no households have accepted a qualifying offer of an Assured Shorthold tenancy.

6.1.23 Number of homeless households accommodated in temporary accommodation on 31st March 2014:

Type of accommodation	Number of households
Bed & Breakfast	8
Other nightly paid	0
Other nightly paid	0
Hostel	0
Women's refuge	0
PSA leased by LA	0
PSA leased by RSL	0
Directly with PL	0
Own Stock	8
RSL stock	20
Other	0
TOTAL	36

6.1.24 This is a snapshot figure for the 31st March and is provided every year as part of the P1E. On this day there were 36 households in temporary accommodation. Most households (78%) were in RSL stock (Gorse Hill) and own stock (The Lymes) but this does mean that 22% were in Bed and Breakfast

6.1.25 This table shows that the number of households placed in Bed and Breakfast by Housing Solutions was 150 last year which is high but significantly lower than the previous year and that the average length of stay in Bed and Breakfast has increased to 4.8 weeks. Bed and Breakfast is only provided as a last resort. It is usually provided as interim accommodation whilst investigations are being carried out on a homeless application or to a rough sleeper placed under discretionary powers to prevent homelessness. In spite of this Cheshire West and Chester has the highest use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Cheshire.

Year	Number of households placed in B&B	Discretionary B&B Placements	Total	Average length of stay in weeks
2009/10	6	10	16	1.85
2010/11	59	15	74	1.61
2011/12	132	11	143	1.66
2012/13	177	30	207	3.96
2013/14	139	11	150	4.80

6.1.26 Bed and Breakfast costs £190,000 per year. It is increasingly difficult to find interim accommodation at short notice for homeless households, particularly those with complex needs. Over the last 5 years we have used a total of 63 different Bed and Breakfasts but generally the team use the same three Bed and Breakfasts in Chester and the Travelodge.

6.1.27 Temporary accommodation is used for households as interim accommodation whilst they await a homeless decision and for those who have been accepted as homeless who are waiting to be rehoused. The average length of stay in temporary accommodation has come down considerably since 2009 and has settled at around 11 weeks for the last 3 years.

Year	Number of households	Average length of stay in weeks
2009/10	Not available	32.29
2010/11	Not available	21.79
2011/12	Not available	11.30
2012/13	177	11.34
2013/14	211	11.05

6.1.28 There are 29 units of temporary accommodation owned by Cheshire West and Chester. These consist of 12 flats at Gorse Hill, Chester and 8 flats at The Lymes, Northwich. Another 9 dispersed units are used in Ellesmere Port. As well as this 35 different types of supported housing have been used to accommodate homeless households and 10 different women's refuges. Also 12 households have been placed in Assured Shorthold tenancies in the private rented sector.

6.1.29 211 households were placed in temporary accommodation between April 2013 and March 2014. The table below shows that during this year single males were the highest household type at 38% followed by female lone parent at 24%.

Household type	Number of households in TA
Single male	80
Single female	37
Female lone parent	50
Male lone parent	3
Couples with children	21
Couples	20
TOTAL	211

6.1.30 During April 2013 and March 2014 13% of people in temporary accommodation were age 16 or 17 and 40% were under 25. We know that only 10 young people were accepted as homeless during 2013/2014 but 84 were in temporary accommodation. This shows that the majority were not accepted, evicted from the TA, left voluntarily or that they were accepted in previous years and have still not been rehoused.

Age	Number of households in TA
16- 17	28
18-24	56
25-44	87
45-59	32
60+	8
TOTAL	211

6.1.31 Since April 2012 referrals to supported housing projects and floating support have been through a centralised system called the Housing Support Gateway. The referrals to the Gateway are very high compared to the number of those who are accepted. 13% of referrals were accepted in 2012 and 15% in 2013.

Year	Referral accepted	Referral rejected	Awaiting decision	Referral withdrawn	Other e.g. on waiting list	Total referrals
2012/13	181	221	-	969		1371

2013/14	138	81	-	558	116	893
2014 (up to 31st May)	30	24	216	108		378

6.1.32 Referrals are made to the Gateway and clients are allocated a priority rating based on their circumstances. Providers are required to allocate vacancies based on this priority status therefore those with low support needs are unlikely to be accepted into supported accommodation. The number of withdrawn referrals is a reflection of this process as after a period of time has passed and contact with the client has been lost they are withdrawn from the Gateway.

6.1.33 The P1E figures on homelessness only show part of the picture. Many households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness are provided with advice and assistance by the Housing Solutions team and homelessness is prevented. Direct intervention by the team means that fewer homeless applications are taken.

6.1.34 The number of advice cases opened by the team is extremely high as shown below. Although the number of advice cases opened went down in 2013/14 the number of cases opened for households who were threatened with homelessness has gone up significantly to 95%. The prevention figure has gone down over the last few years but when the prevention tools are considered it is clear to see the impact that the Money Advisers and Mortgage Arrears Adviser had on the figures. Debt related cases are increasing due to Welfare Reform but without the specialist advisers within the team the number of preventions in this area will continue to go down.

Year	Number of cases opened	Number of cases where homelessness prevented	% prevented of total cases	Not threatened with homelessness	Threatened with homelessness	Actual % prevented
2010/11	4011	1770	44	878	3133 (78%)	56
2011/12	4358	1593	37	1084	3274 (75%)	49
2012/13	4467	1429	32	1078	3389 (76%)	42
2013/14	3859	1248	32	758	3405 (95%)	37

6.1.35 The table below shows the number of cases where positive action was successful in preventing homelessness and the prevention tool used. It shows that although the number of preventions went down in 2013/14 there were still 1248 households threatened with homelessness that may otherwise have made a homeless application if the Housing Solutions team had not intervened.

Type of Prevention	Year				
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
(A) Household able to remain in existing home as a result of:					
Mediation	31	47	25	29	32
Conciliation	29	74	70	19	12
Financial payments	2	4	8	5	0
Debt advice	7	9	73	15	4
Resolving Housing Benefit problems	6	18	11	14	9
Resolving rent arrears	56	15	14	26	9
Sanctuary Scheme	161	84	187	123	119
Crisis intervention	2	3	10	2	2
Negotiation in private sector	20	27	33	24	17
Other assistance in the private sector or social rented	14	65	71	37	32
Mortgage interventions	42	50	34	22	16
Other	108	272	86	45	28
Total A	478	668	622	361	280
(B) Household assisted to obtain alternative accommodation by:					
Hostel or HMO	99	92	86	34	35
Private sector with incentive	238	230	237	220	162
Private sector without incentive	122	222	180	238	242
Friends or relatives	27	83	35	19	20
Supported accommodation	106	206	215	320	214
Social housing management move	3	3	2	1	3
Social Housing part 6 offer	113	206	157	174	161
Social housing negotiation with RSL	20	15	44	48	124
Low-cost home ownership	0	1	1	0	0
Other	19	44	14	14	6
Total B	747	1102	971	1068	967
Total A and B	1225	1770	1593	1429	1248

6.1.36 The prevention figures also show that the team are nearly four times more likely to prevent homelessness by finding alternative accommodation than by enabling households to remain in their accommodation. This figure has gone down quite significantly since the team lost the money and mortgage arrears advisers.

6.1.37 The Housing Register also provides some figures for homelessness. In October 2013 a new Allocations Policy was adopted which only allowed those in housing need on the register unless they were 55 or over. As of May

2014 there were 6268 households on the housing register with the following priorities:

Band	Oct 13	Nov 13	Dec 13	Jan 14	Feb 14	Mar 14	Apr 14	May 14
Band A	76	76	83	87	81	77	92	88
Band B	893	896	908	897	911	898	914	931
Band C	2368	2349	2321	2309	2270	2284	2281	2269
Band D	3032	3027	3019	3016	3007	2988	2984	2980
Total Housing Register applications:	6369	6348	6331	6309	6269	6247	6271	6268

6.1.38 These figures show us that 47.5% of households on the register are in Band D and are therefore over 55 with no housing need. Only 1.4% of households are in Band A which includes those who are statutorily homeless.

6.1.39 Since Trust Homechoice was transferred to the Council in October 2013 there have been 1622 adverts for properties through choice based lettings. The following table shows the number of adverts for each property type and the number which were not let or had to be re-advertised:

Property Type Advert	Number of adverts	Not let or re-advertised
Studio bungalow	1	0
1 bed bungalow	70	4
2 bed bungalow	54	7
3 bed bungalow	4	0
Studio flat	72	48
1 bed flat	366	137
2 bed flat	423	194
3 bed flat	17	3
2 bed maisonette	7	1
3 bed maisonette	28	18
1 bed house	4	2
2 bed house	149	36
3 bed house	410	194
4 bed house	16	0
5 bed house	1	0
Total	1622	644
Total of which sheltered	403 (25%)	176 (27%)

6.1.40 This table shows that most adverts (49%) are for 2 bed properties. 25% of adverts are for sheltered properties. These are studios, flats or bungalows designated for households over 55. Sheltered properties also account for 27% of properties which are re-advertised.

6.1.41 Core data supplied to the CLG shows us that only a small proportion of social lettings go to homeless households:

Year	Not homeless	Stat Homeless with duty	Stat Homeless no duty	Other homeless	Total general lets
2009/10	1194	21	7	32	1254
2010/11	1087	32	5	22	1146
2011/12	1226	45	9	32	1312
2012/13	1103	36	3	21	1163

6.1.42 Homelessness identified in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2013. According to the Household Survey 2013, across Cheshire West and Chester there are 12,619 existing households in need. 'Housing need' can be defined as: 'the quantity of housing required for households who are unable to access suitable housing without financial assistance'. The reasons for housing need are summarised below:

Category	Factor	Number of households
Homeless households or with insecure tenure	Under notice, real threat of notice or lease coming to an end	1089
	Too expensive, and in receipt of housing benefit or in arrears due to expense	1887
Mismatch of housing need and dwellings	Overcrowded according to the 'bedroom standard' model	2782
	Too difficult to maintain	3325
	Couples, people with children and single adults over 25 sharing a kitchen, bathroom or WC with another household	1234
	Household containing people with mobility impairment or other special needs living in unsuitable accommodation	3099
Dwelling amenities and condition	Lacks a bathroom, kitchen or inside WC and household does not have resource to make fit	586
	Subject to major disrepair or unfitness and household does not have resource to make fit	704
Social needs	Harassment or threats of harassment from neighbours or others living in the vicinity which cannot be resolved except through a move	1035
Total in housing need		12,619
Total households		141,442
% of households in need		8.9%

Source 2013 Household Survey

6.1.43 The proportion of households in housing need by tenure (Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2013) shows that private renters are more likely to experience housing need.

Tenure	No. Households in need	Total no. Of households	% households in need
Owner Occupier	7711	100105	7.7
Private	3234	19441	16.6
Affordable	1673	21896	7.6
Total	12619	141442	8.9

Source 2013 Household Survey

6.1.44 The proportion of households in housing need by household group (Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2013) shows that lone parents are more likely to experience housing need.

Household type	Households in need	Total households	% households in need
Single Adult (under 65)	2056	25712	8.0
Single Adult (65 or over)	1338	18005	7.4
Couple only (both under 65)	2504	25595	9.8
Couple only (one or both over 65)	1646	22335	7.4
Couple with 1 or 2 children under 18	1013	18891	5.4
Couple with 3 or more children under 18	141	2608	5.4
Couple with children aged 18+	1436	14035	10.2
Lone parent with 1 or 2 children under 18	424	4652	9.1
Lone parent with 3 or more children under 18	145	473	30.6
Lone parent with children aged 18+	809	5006	16.2
Other type of household	1860	18688	10.0
Total	12619	141442	100

Source 2013 Household Survey

6.1.45 Local court activity from the Ministry of Justice can also show us levels of homelessness. It is interesting to see from this that action by mortgage companies is going down whereas action by landlords is going up, further shown by table 6.1.46. Figures for 2013/14 also show that Cheshire West and Chester have the highest number of combined mortgage and landlord possession claims in Cheshire (Warrington, Halton and Cheshire East).

Year	Mortgage claims for possession	Mortgage Orders for Possession	Landlord claims for possession	Landlord Orders for Possession
2010/2011	448	312	442	316
2011/2012	384	307	515	357
2012/2013	351	268	513	402

6.1.46 At the end of March 2014 there were 6636 live rent arrears cases with the three main social housing landlords in the area. The amount owed in rent arrears was £3.52 million. £714,015 of those arrears were related to under-occupied properties which is 20% of the total rent arrears owed to Weaver Vale Housing Trust, Plus Dane and Chester and District Housing Trust.

6.1.47 Between April 2013 and March 2014 the three main social housing providers served 2284 notices to seek possession. County Court evictions by the three main social housing providers have increased significantly, particularly in 2013/2014. Welfare Reform and the under-occupation charge will have had an impact on the number of evictions.

Year	Number of evictions		
	Chester and District Housing Trust	Cheshire West and Chester (Plus Dane)	Weaver Vale Housing Trust
2010/2011	13	4	14
2011/2012	14	4	17
2012/2013	15	2	27
2013/2014	13	10	37

6.1.48 Each Authority is required to submit an official figure of numbers of rough sleepers found per year to the Department of Local Communities (DCLG) this can either be submitted as an estimate, based on local intelligence based on one particular night, or an Authority may carry out a full headcount. As Cheshire West and Chester have had a dedicated outreach team, since 2011 we have submitted estimates based on local knowledge and intelligence. The night used to base the figure on is agreed with other nearby local authorities in order to avoid the possibility of double counting. Although 0 was recorded in 2012/13 this does not mean that there are no rough sleepers in the area. It only means that none were found asleep on the agreed night.

Year	Cheshire West and Chester headcount figure submitted to DCLG (estimates)	North West estimates and headcounts
2010	1	100
2011	4	149
2012	3	147
2013	0	152

6.1.49 Rough sleepers are also recorded by the FENW Outreach Team but included in these figures are people they see on the streets in Chester who are not always homeless and often choose to go to Chester to engage in street activity. Some have accommodation but refuse to access it. In spite of this the outreach figure has gone down significantly from last and previous years.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL
2010				5	12	12	13	11	14	13	15	9	104
2011	12	8	9	11	6	5	12	15	16	11	8	3	116
2012	12	11	10	13	15	11	10	13	13	13	10	5	136
2013	5	2	4	4	7	7	5	7	7	14	6	10	78

6.1.50 Under the Cheshire West and Chester's Reconnection Policy rough sleepers who have a connection to another area, and can access accommodation or support networks there, are helped to return to this area in a planned way. Since November 2012 FENW have reconnected 48 rough sleepers through this scheme, providing financial and practical support.

6.1.51 FENW provide 6 safe seats at Richmond Court, Chester, and a further 3 via the mobile outreach vehicle, allowing service users to sleep in a safe place as well as providing opportunities for immediate contact with FENW staff. Safe seats are not beds but snooze and recline seats in a safe area or on the mobile vehicle allowing someone to get off the streets until they can access accommodation. 4503 safe seats have been provided since November 2012, allowing individuals at risk of rough sleeping to access a place of safety hosted by professional staff.

6.1.52 The No Second Night Out service was launched across Cheshire in April 2013 and so far 669 rough sleepers have been supported by the FENW hosted service from the Cheshire West and Cheshire East areas.

6.1.53 Cheshire West and Chester Council are one of the only authorities to place rough sleepers in Bed and Breakfast on discretionary grounds to help get them off the streets. The CLG use it as an example of good practice.

Year	Number of Rough Sleepers placed in B&B
2010/11	20
2011/12	11
2012/13	30
2013/14	11

6.1.54 The Citizens Advice Bureau in Cheshire West and Chester records the number of enquiries they receive regarding homelessness. From April 2013 to March 2014 the CAB dealt with 2575 separate housing problems. Of these 461 were households actually homeless or threatened with homelessness. In addition the CAB dealt with 9697 debt problems in the same period and 11,319 welfare benefit problems.

6.1.55 Having reviewed the current levels of homelessness in the area the Homelessness Review should also look at the likely future levels of homelessness. There are many factors to consider which could influence the

number of people in Cheshire West and Chester who are homeless or threatened with homelessness over the next few years:

- ❖ The continuing impact of the credit crunch, financial pressures and debt on individuals and families
- ❖ Financial pressures on local government budgets and homelessness services
- ❖ The loss of advice agencies such as Shelter in the area
- ❖ Changes to Housing Related Support services
- ❖ Lack of one bedroom and affordable properties
- ❖ Welfare Reform, particularly the under-occupation charge, leading rent arrears
- ❖ An increase in evictions by housing providers due to Welfare Reform
- ❖ Government changes to the Armed Forces may see an increase in people being discharged with no accommodation to go to
- ❖ Overcrowding and families falling out due to welfare reform
- ❖ The continuing effects of the Right to Buy on available properties
- ❖ An aging population will require appropriate housing and support to prevent an increase in homelessness amongst older households

6.2 Review of activities that contribute towards homelessness prevention

6.2.1 The Housing Solutions team

Housing Solutions are currently part of the Growth and Prosperity directorate at Cheshire West and Chester and are based at Civic Offices in Ellesmere Port. A proposed restructure at Director and Head of Service level will lead to further changes in the directorate. The Council is currently reviewing all services to ensure they are well placed to deliver good outcomes as financial resources continue to reduce. Known as Make or Buy, the review process looks at what each service should deliver and what is the best delivery model to achieve this. A number of new delivery models have been identified which include the redesign of in-house services, public sector partnerships, joint ventures and potential outsourcing. The Housing Solutions service is already part way through the Make or Buy review.

- 6.2.2 The team deals with housing advice, homelessness and the housing register. Following a recent re-structure there are 25 staff (full time equivalents). The Housing Solutions Advisers specialise in homelessness (3 FTE), housing advice (8 FTE) and private rented accommodation (2 FTE).

Role	Number of full time equivalent staff
Team Leaders	3
Housing Solutions Advisers	14
CBL Advisers	5
Housing Solutions Assistants	3

- 6.2.3 The first point of contact for customers wishing to speak to Housing Solutions is the Housing Solutions Telephone Advice Line which was introduced in October 2011. Over 42,000 calls were received in the first year, which was higher than anticipated and indicated a growing level of need across the Borough. The Advice Line is available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 9am-5pm and Wednesday 1-5pm.

- 6.2.4 Number of calls to the Housing Solutions Advice Line:

Quarter	2012/13	2013/14
1	10072	10514
2	11925	14842
3	8486	11621
4	11628	12517
TOTAL	42111	49667

- 6.2.5 For some years now the vision for the service has been that “every homeless presentation is preventable”. Housing Solutions Advisers work closely with households who are threatened with homelessness to either enable them to remain in their home or to assist them with planned and timely moves into more suitable and sustainable accommodation. They do this by offering a range of housing options and where appropriate, referrals to support

organisations. Advice is provided regardless of priority and intentionality, and is tailored towards the individual needs of the client.

6.2.6 Although the number of preventions have gone down in the last year the team are still very successful in preventing homelessness compared to other councils. Some of the prevention tools used by the team are:

- ❖ General housing advice
- ❖ Advice on tenancy law and security of tenure
- ❖ General benefits advice
- ❖ Mediation for young people
- ❖ Bond Scheme for private rented housing
- ❖ Homeless Prevention Fund
- ❖ Referrals to floating tenancy support
- ❖ Choice Based Lettings
- ❖ Assistance in accessing permanent accommodation
- ❖ Cheshire Night Stop referral
- ❖ FIRM foundations referral
- ❖ Housing register application
- ❖ Housing Support Gateway referrals to supported housing or floating support
- ❖ MARAC referral
- ❖ Sanctuary Scheme
- ❖ Court Desk
- ❖ Referral to the CAB or other specialist agencies
- ❖ Hospital Discharge Protocol

6.2.7 The number of advice cases opened by the team is extremely high as shown below. Although the number of advice cases opened went down in 2013/14 the number of cases opened for households who were threatened with homelessness has gone up significantly to 95%.

	Number of cases opened	Number of cases where homelessness prevented	% prevented of total cases	Not threatened with homelessness	Threatened with homelessness	Actual % prevented
2010/11	4011	1546	38.5	878	3133 (78%)	49
2011/12	4358	1354	31	1084	3274 (75%)	41
2012/13	4467	1117	25	1078	3389 (76%)	33
2013/14	3859	994	26	758	3405 (95%)	29

6.2.8 Between April 2012 and March 2014 over 500 Housing Solutions customers completed a customer satisfaction survey. The results are recorded below and show that overall satisfaction is extremely high.

Year	Number of surveys completed	Ovearall Satisfaction: Excellent, Very Good or Good	%
2012/13	253	228	90.1%
2013/14	252	247	98%

6.2.9 In April 2013 the Housing Solutions Service Standards were simplified so that they could be measured from the customer satisfaction survey results. The results show that 50% of customers are not clear about what the team do and more work may be needed to improve publicity around this. The other service standards are being achieved, particularly providing a high standard of customer service and providing outcomes that customers are satisfied with which are both over 88%.

Housing Solutions Service Standards 2013-14	% achieved
Make it clear to customers what Housing Solutions do	50.4%
Make the Housing Solutions Service available to customers	77.4%
Provide a high standard of advice	74.7%
Provide a high standard of customer service	88.5%
Provide outcomes that customers are satisfied with	88.8%

6.2.10 Foundation Enterprise North West

Foundation Enterprise North West (FENW) was awarded a five year contract (with possible two year extension) to deliver homelessness provision across Cheshire West and Chester for single homeless people over the age of 18, including emergency accommodation and a rough sleeper outreach service, beginning in November 2013

6.2.11 FENW manages a flexible network of resources to deal with people presenting as homeless and provides an intelligence 'hub' for the homelessness service at Richmond Court in Chester. Richmond Court is one of several options available to meet the range of needs of those presenting to the homelessness service, providing 36 temporary and emergency units of accommodation with staff available 24 hours a day, as well as the homeless hub for the borough. In order to address the often complex and varied barriers preventing individuals from accessing homelessness services, FENW has committed to offering couples provision and, uniquely within the sector, will also accept pets.

6.2.12 The FENW Outreach Service is intelligence-led and involves daily patrols as far as Northwich, but predominantly concentrated in the Chester City area. Safe seats can be offered to rough sleepers who access the outreach service.

6.2.13 To further support this work, FENW has a specially adapted outreach vehicle, similar in specification to a motor home and equipped with catering facilities, Wi-Fi, a shower, toilet and washing facilities. The outreach vehicle also allows rough sleepers to stay overnight in purpose built, reclining seating. There is no charge for using the services provided through the outreach vehicle, the

fundamental aim of which is to provide a safe alternative to individuals at significant risk of rough sleeping in the community

6.2.14 Citizens Advice Bureau

The Citizens Advice Bureau helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent, and confidential information and advice, and by influencing policy makers. It is the largest provider of free money advice in the UK.

6.2.15 Aims and principles:

- ❖ To provide the advice people need for the problems they face
- ❖ To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives

6.2.16 Cheshire West and Chester Citizens Advice provides advice and information on a range of housing issues, including homelessness, defending possession proceedings, disrepair, tenancy law and accessing accommodation. The team consists of specialist advisers providing debt and welfare benefits casework and trained volunteers providing a generalist service.

6.2.17 The services offered by Cheshire West Citizens Advice has always been in high demand, however, the current economic climate and welfare reforms have seen increasing demand upon services. The withdrawal of Shelter has further impacted on the number of people coming to Cheshire West Citizens Advice for housing advice. Cheshire West Citizens Advice Service is the lead agency on an Advice Services Transition Project, working in partnership with other advice agencies in the area. Working together the project is aiming to find new ways of working to overcome the challenges they are facing and provide and secure the best possible services to Cheshire West residents.

6.3 Review of activities that contribute towards securing accommodation

6.3.1 There are 309 units of specialist accommodation for households who have housing and support needs in the borough. Many of them are supported accommodation currently funded by the Housing Related Support programme, 29 of which are temporary accommodation for homeless households.

6.3.2 The Council's Strategic Commissioning team is in the process of reviewing most of the supported housing listed below. Following consultation there will be move toward a more flexible support model which is not tied to a specific address. The consultation has shown that there are some Care and Support Services that will need to be reviewed in conjunction with prevention and well being colleagues. Others will be retendered later this year. The approach would hope to maintain the number of units currently available.

Organisation	Service name	Units	Client Group	Male or female
Arena Options	Bridge Foyer	31	Young people at risk/leaving care	Both
Barrowmore	Barrowmore House	35	People with learning disabilities People with mental health problems	Both
Community Integrated Care	Bache Hall	6	People with mental health problems	Both
Foundation Enterprises North West (FENW)	Richmond Court	36	Single homeless with support needs	Both
FENW	Howley House	9	Single homeless with support needs	Female
FENW	Halkyn Road	6	Single homeless with support needs	Male
Forum Housing	The Lock	8	Single homeless with support needs Young people at risk	Both
Forum Housing	The Houses	8	Teenage parents Single homeless with support needs	Female
Forum Housing	The Quays	8	Single Homeless with Support Needs Young people at risk	Both
Muir	Panton Road	7	Young people leaving care	Both
Muir	Cornwall House	8	People with mental health problems	Both
Muir	Rowlands Lodge	16	People with learning disabilities	Both
Muir	Victoria and Albert House	30	Single homeless with support needs	Both
Nacro	Linenhall Mews	9	Offenders and makes	Both

			at risk of offending	
Nacro	Milestones	9	Offenders and males at risk of offending Young people at risk	Both
Richmond Fellowship	Tower House	18	People with mental health problems	Both
Stonham	Watergate Street	12	Offenders and males at risk of offending	Male
Stonham	Moore House	8	People with learning disabilities People with mental health problems	Both
Stonham	Somerville Crescent	11	Offenders or people at risk of offending	Both
Stonham	Chester Move-On	6	Offenders or people at risk of offending	Both
Stonham	Cheshire Domestic Abuse Services	12	Women and families fleeing domestic abuse	Female
Vale Royal Women's Aid	Phoenix Domestic Abuse Services	5	Women and families fleeing domestic abuse	Female
Weaver Vale Housing Trust	Cotswold House	9	Single homeless with support needs	Female
Weaver Vale Housing Trust	Malvern House	3	Single homeless with support needs	Female

6.3.3 Housing Solutions also have 29 units of temporary accommodation.

Gorse Hill, Chester	12
The Lymes, Northwich	8
Dispersed properties, Ellesmere Port	9
TOTAL	29

6.3.4 Gorse Hill is situated in Blacon, Chester. The property is managed by Muir Housing and provides 12 one and two bed units. All the units are self contained with one fully adapted for a disabled household.

6.3.5 The Lymes is in Northwich and is managed by People First Housing Association. It has 8 self contained flats, one with disabled access.

6.3.6 The provision of accommodation for homeless households is essential and as the Bed and Breakfast figures suggest in previous chapters, there is not enough. It is therefore important for Housing Solutions to work closely with the Strategic Commissioning team whilst the review of supported housing takes place to inform the process and to ensure that there is enough suitable accommodation available.

6.4 Review of activities that contribute towards providing support

6.4.1 Floating support services in Cheshire West and Chester

In September 2013, Cheshire West and Chester Council commissioned P3 to provide all the floating support across the borough. The aim of the service is to improve the quality of people's lives whilst promoting and maintaining independent living by encouraging people to build on their existing strengths and develop the skills they need to live an independent life. Since September 2013 P3 have assessed 600 people in the area. They support people locally offering advice and support to adults within their own homes or within one of the 5 Navigator Hubs on a range of issues such as:

- ❖ Maximising Benefits
- ❖ Accessing Community Groups
- ❖ Staying Independent
- ❖ Getting back into education and training
- ❖ Dealing with debts
- ❖ Getting in touch with other agencies

6.4.2 There is a team of 30 staff across 5 Hub sites:

- ❖ Ellesmere Port
- ❖ Neston and Rural North
- ❖ Chester
- ❖ Northwich and Rural North
- ❖ Winsford and Rural East

6.4.3 The FIRM project – (Forum Intervention Research Mediation Project)

This aim of the FIRM project is to prevent homelessness by providing specialist intervention and support and facilitating the move on options for young people. The service includes the direct provision of assessment of young people to establish their individual needs and the necessary identified interventions. This could include: sign posting, mediation, support to claim benefits, access services, gain training and employment etc. The provider will also facilitate a range of accommodation options in the private rented sector including emergency accommodation for short periods of time and other options such as lodgings and house shares that are aimed at young people.

6.4.4 Medical support services

- ❖ St Werburgh's Medical Practice For The Homeless, Chester
A dedicated GP service to homeless households in the area
- ❖ Cheshire Drug and Alcohol Services
Information, advice, education, support and treatment to individuals experiencing substance misuse.

- ❖ **Mental Health Specialist Practitioner for the Homeless**
To provide mental health care and access to primary and secondary mental health services for homeless people.
- ❖ **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**
Specially trained workers whose job it is to improve the mental health of children and young people living in the area.

6.4.5 Domestic Abuse Support Services

- ❖ **Cheshire Domestic Abuse Family Safety Unit**
Specialist staff provide ongoing support and co-ordinate multi-agency provision to meet the needs of high risk victims and their children.
- ❖ **Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC)**
Monthly locality-based information sharing meetings for high-risk domestic abuse cases.
- ❖ **Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA)**
Based at the Countess of Chester Hospital the IDA works alongside the Accident and Emergency Department and Maternity Department to provide early intervention for clients experiencing domestic abuse who visit the hospital.
- ❖ **Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA)**
Work with individuals who have experienced recent and historical sexual abuse to provide emotional and practical support.
- ❖ **Sanctuary Scheme**
In relation to high risk domestic abuse victims the Sanctuary Scheme has the specific aim of enabling victims and their children to remain in their own home by providing essential security and repairs or the installation of a safe room within the home of the victim.
- ❖ **Special domestic violence court**
Run weekly by magistrates who have received specialist domestic abuse awareness training. It aims to make the legal process quicker and less traumatic for victims of abuse. The use of a video link can be provided for the victim to give evidence to the court rather than attending in person.
- ❖ **Cheshire West and Chester Domestic Abuse Partnership (CWaCDAP)**
Provides a forum for effective multi agency action and networking on domestic abuse.

6.4.6 Adult Social Care

Social Services offer a range of support services to the following groups;

- ❖ Children and young people under the age of 18 and their families
- ❖ Young people who have been cared for by social services
- ❖ Adults and older people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health or drugs or alcohol related problems
- ❖ Older people to help them remain in their own homes
- ❖ Carers

6.4.7 The following is a list of some of the things Social Services are able to do;

- ❖ Give specific information and advice
- ❖ Arrange for a worker to assess the client's needs
- ❖ Assess the needs of children where families are having difficulties
- ❖ Investigate when a child is, or maybe at risk of suffering serious harm
- ❖ Support people suffering acute mental illness to get treatment
- ❖ Investigate where a vulnerable adult/older person is at risk of being abused
- ❖ Arrange for services to be provided that help people with disabilities or older people to remain living independently in their own homes

6.4.8 Furniture Projects

- ❖ **Blacon Furniture Project**

Blacon Furniture Project works to prevent re-usable items of furniture, household and electrical items needlessly filling local landfill sites and spoiling the local environment. They also actively encourage local people to volunteer and engage with their community.

- ❖ **St. Vincent de Paul Society**

A furniture unit in Ellesmere Port. The unit supplies second-hand donated furniture at affordable prices to disadvantaged families and single people. They also encourage local people to become volunteers for warehouse work, shop assistance, electricians, carpenters, drivers and driver's assistants.

- ❖ **Changing lives in Cheshire**

A furniture project in Winsford. The main aims of the project are to improve access to furniture and appliances to those on low incomes, provide work-based training opportunities to improve employment prospects, reduce the amount of items going to land-fill, provide services that the community needs and make a difference.

6.4.9 Youth Offending Team (YOT)

Work with teenagers (10-18yrs) who offend and assist with accommodation, employment and education issues. The main housing issue experienced by their client group is parental eviction usually as a result of the offending behaviour

6.5 Review of the resources available

6.5.1 The resources available for homelessness services spread across many services and the total costs are unknown.

6.5.2 The budget for the Housing Solutions service is set on an annual basis.

2014/15	
Housing Solutions (staffing)	859,104
Other costs (B&B, Prevention Fund)	201,000
Budget Total (2014/15)	£1,060,104

6.5.3 The budget for 2014/15 has reduced by £446,896 from last year. A restructure within Strategic Housing moved the Housing Solutions Development Team away from the front line service and the budget for 2014/15 reflects this.

6.5.4 Cheshire West and Chester pay £558,000 per annum directly to Foundation Enterprise North West for homelessness services including emergency accommodation and a rough sleeper outreach service. An additional £212,000 is payable on results achieved against key performance indicators.

6.5.5 Between April 2013 and March 2014 £600,294 has been spent on Discretionary Housing Payments.

6.5.6 The Authority is faced with a financial challenge of saving £49 million over the next three years. Plans are in place to deliver savings in the region of £43 million leaving a residual gap of £6 million. This proposal to restructure Directors and Heads of service could save another £1million.

7. Consultation feedback

Consultation was central to the review process and was carried out with staff, partner agencies and customers.

7.1 Staff consultation

7.1.1 The opinions of Housing Solutions staff were captured in a focus group and also a staff workshop as part of the Make or Buy review. Over 100 different ideas and comments were generated from these two sessions which have been summarised below:

7.1.2 Some of the key findings and ideas from the session were:

- ❖ Review the Bond Scheme
- ❖ Incentives for private landlords to increase numbers
- ❖ Private landlords to pay for floating support or a management service
- ❖ Integrate the mediation service FIRM Foundations with the team and expand this service
- ❖ Housing Benefit specialist within the team
- ❖ Money Advice Worker within the team
- ❖ FENW or other agency to do Out of Hours
- ❖ Lease private sector properties for temporary accommodation
- ❖ Share temporary accommodation with Cheshire East
- ❖ Volunteer drivers to take people to temporary accommodation rather than taxis
- ❖ Promote Housing Solutions to other departments and organisations
- ❖ Target young people through a media campaign
- ❖ Education in schools about homelessness
- ❖ Introduce triage for advice
- ❖ Introduce an email enquiry service to reduce phone calls
- ❖ Merge Trust Homechoice phone line and the Advice Line
- ❖ More suitable temporary accommodation for young people and those with complex needs
- ❖ Mentors for young people
- ❖ Work with Commissioning on reviewing risk assessments
- ❖ Review the on-line application to ensure customers complete all sections
- ❖ Make the Housing Options Wizard compulsory before making a housing register application
- ❖ Shared ICT with partners/Cheshire East
- ❖ Integrate the ICT modules for housing and homelessness
- ❖ Improve the Gateway administration

- ❖ Customer Services to scan documents, help with admin, take calls and complete housing register forms
- ❖ Develop the Private Sector Liaison Officer role
- ❖ Advertise private sector properties through Trust Homechoice
- ❖ Prioritise customers who are threatened with homelessness
- ❖ Review the customer satisfaction survey and ask customers what they want
- ❖ Work with Commissioning to influence commissioned services
- ❖ Discharge homelessness duty into the private sector
- ❖ More work with people who have debts to encourage landlords to take them
- ❖ Review of temporary accommodation provision and management
- ❖ Links with other services such as Work Zone
- ❖ Improve relationships with housing providers to encourage sharing information
- ❖ Change the name of the service back to Housing Options
- ❖ Improve the Kiosk technology
- ❖ Increase affordable housing especially for young single people.
- ❖ Work with Youth Services regarding prevention of homelessness
- ❖ Increase the emergency accommodation for 16 & 17 year olds
- ❖ The lack of suitable move-on accommodation means that supported housing is always full
- ❖ Floating support intervention from P3 as a prevention tool would reduce the number of people being referred to the Gateway

7.2 Customer consultation

7.2.1 Customers who were either homeless or had experienced homelessness in the past were also part of the consultation process and attended a focus group as well as completing a questionnaire.

7.2.2 Some of the key findings were:

- ❖ The Housing Solutions team are professional, friendly, informative and helpful. They provide an excellent service.
- ❖ It was often difficult getting through on the phones
- ❖ Appointments with advisers rather than phone calls
- ❖ The Housing Register application is long and time consuming and it can only be accessed on-line
- ❖ Money and debt advice services were needed
- ❖ More temporary accommodation required
- ❖ Offenders being released from prison with no benefit, prescription or accommodation

- ❖ No provision for rough sleepers during the day
- ❖ 3 young people (2 aged 16, 1 aged 20) slept rough for a number of weeks within the last year and there was no outreach engagement as they were not found during the period of rough sleeping.
- ❖ B&B can be of a very poor standard with no cooking facilities.
- ❖ The services for young people were good but there was a waiting list to see the staff member employed by Forum Housing.

7.3 Partner consultation

7.3.1 Members of the Homelessness Forum, Supported Accommodation Group and Third Sector Assembly attended a consultation event for the Homelessness Review and completed a questionnaire. The feedback is summarised below:

7.3.2 Strengths of the Housing Solutions service:

- ❖ Central, fair accessible service
- ❖ Preventative services – really good to be able to refer clients with Mortgage/private rent arrears
- ❖ Flexible approach to meeting the needs of the customers
- ❖ Approachable staff
- ❖ Staff are trained and supportive
- ❖ Free telephone number (it was acknowledged that there is a charge from mobiles which is set by BT)
- ❖ Single point of access and gateway provision
- ❖ Support given to vulnerable citizens
- ❖ Those who present themselves as homeless feel they are dealt with promptly and appropriately
- ❖ Good relationship with providers

7.3.3 Housing Solutions areas for improvement:

- ❖ Advice Line – more calls need answering so that customers don't need to leave messages. Some customers do not have a number to call back on.
- ❖ Service needs to be 5 days not 4.5
- ❖ Service needs to be across Cheshire West, particularly Northwich and Winsford
- ❖ More appointments with named officers to improve relationships with customers
- ❖ Improve the service for customers who do not have access to phones or computers
- ❖ Need a closer link with processing Trust Homechoice applications
- ❖ Make the homelessness process more consistent
- ❖ Make the process easier for getting advice
- ❖ Increase staffing levels
- ❖ Improve staff knowledge of services

- ❖ Staff available in the evenings and direct contact at weekends instead of a centralised service
- ❖ Provide training on homelessness for staff in supported housing
- ❖ Increase visits to customers in temporary accommodation
- ❖ Increase the number of private rented properties available
- ❖ Review bond scheme as currently too slow and landlords don't want it
- ❖ More information on where Kiosks are and what they can do

7.3.4 Gaps in provision across Cheshire West and Chester:

- ❖ Mother and baby supported accommodation
- ❖ Specialist housing advice due to closure of Shelter office
- ❖ Accommodation for those under 35
- ❖ Intensive support for those with complex needs – health, debt, substance misuse, mental health
- ❖ Not enough affordable housing – both in social housing and private rented sector
- ❖ Shortage in one bed flats
- ❖ Palliative care beds
- ❖ Services that support dual diagnosis clients
- ❖ IT training and access to facilities
- ❖ More mediation needed for young people

7.3.5 Future trends or problems which may lead to an increase in homelessness:

- ❖ Increase in people being discharged from the armed forces
- ❖ Impact of financial pressures and debt on individuals and families will increase homelessness
- ❖ Expected cuts to local government services
- ❖ Uncertain future for services in terms of recommissioning plans
- ❖ Lack of basic skills in English and Maths for those aged over 19 increases the need for support in applying for benefits/housing/employment
- ❖ Not enough mediation available for young people
- ❖ Lack of one bedroom and affordable properties
- ❖ Housing benefit being paid to the tenant could lead to an increase in evictions
- ❖ People accruing arrears due to spare room subsidy but not being able to downsize
- ❖ Joined up consistent delivery “local services for local people” embedding of the re connection policy
- ❖ Overcrowding as families will move in together due to welfare reform cuts and this will cause increased friction and tensions in households

8. Key Findings

- The recent housing market and mortgage lending trends mean that there is a significant reduction in owner-occupation among those age 34 or younger as this age group now tend to rent in the private sector.
- Welfare reform is increasing the demand on already stretched third sector services such as the CAB.
- There are high levels of demand for supported housing and move-on.
- Social housing providers are serving more notices and evicting more tenants since changes to welfare provision was rolled out in April 2013.
- The three main social housing providers are owed £3.52 million in rent arrears of which 20% relates to under-occupied properties.
- Reductions in public spending will mean that the Council will have to closely review all service provision including the Housing Solutions service. The Growth Agenda for the Council will play a key role in all services.
- The number of homeless applications has gone down but still remains high compared to 2009/10. The number of households accepted as homeless is reducing.
- Intentionally homeless decisions have been increasing year by year. Most households are intentionally homeless due to rent arrears.
- The number of households accepted as homeless age 16-24 has gone down.
- The number of single male households accepted as homeless now represents nearly 28% of households.
- The temporary accommodation figure is a lot higher than previous years.
- The number of households placed in Bed and Breakfast is remaining high and the average length of stay in Bed and Breakfast has increased to 4.8 weeks. Cheshire West and Chester has the highest use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Cheshire.
- There were more single males in temporary accommodation between April 2013 and March 2014 than any other household type.
- Young people are waiting longer in temporary accommodation before being rehoused.

- Money advice and mortgage arrears advice is no longer provided by Housing Solutions.
- The Housing Solutions Advice Line continues to take a high number of calls.
- 1248 households were prevented from being made homeless.
- Housing Solutions are nearly four times more likely to prevent homelessness by finding alternative accommodation than by enabling households to remain in their accommodation.
- Almost half of households on the register are in Band D, over 55, with no housing need but are eligible for sheltered housing.
- A quarter of Trust Homechoice adverts are for sheltered properties. Sheltered properties also account for 27% of properties which are re-advertised.
- Cheshire West and Chester have the highest number of combined mortgage and landlord possession claims in Cheshire.
- Rough sleeping is still an issue in the area and some rough sleepers are being placed in Bed and Breakfast.
- Working with Strategic Commissioning is vital to ensure that homeless households receive the high quality support and accommodation they need.
- Housing Solutions do not discharge the homelessness duty in the private sector.
- The ICT modules for the housing register and homelessness are not integrated

9. Next Steps

In order to ensure that the information within the review is an accurate picture of homelessness within the borough, the review will be made available to all stakeholders and the wider public for consultation.

The consultation process is an integral part of the strategy development. Cheshire West and Chester is required to give all partners, including those who supply services and those who use them, the opportunity to discuss and agree what the future priorities should be.

Following this review the council will produce and publish a Homelessness Strategy. Cheshire West and Chester Homelessness Steering Group will be fundamental to the development of this strategy, and the implementation and monitoring of the targets agreed within the action plan.

Any comments on this review can be made to:

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