

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Draft housing strategy for Cheshire West and Chester: July 2014



Cheshire West
and Chester

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Introduction

This housing strategy is intended to provide a clear statement of the Council's vision and aims for housing in the borough for the next five years. It sets out the key drivers and issues affecting the borough and what the Council intends to do to help overcome these challenges and create the right conditions to support growth and promote a more resilient, diverse and balanced local housing market.

It will answer the following questions:

1. **Why** do we need a housing strategy?
2. **What** are the key priorities for housing in the borough?
3. **Where** have these priorities come from?
4. **How** are we going to tackle the issues identified and achieve our aims for housing in the borough?

1. Why do we need a housing strategy?

As the strategic housing authority for Cheshire West and Chester, the Council has a duty to ensure that the housing needs of all the borough's residents are met, regardless of tenure. This means that we must not only ensure that those in greatest housing need are able to access a suitable and sustainable home, but also that the range of housing available in the borough provides sufficient choice for those residents that are able to adequately meet their own housing needs.

The housing sector has undergone a period of unprecedented change in recent years and conditions in the local housing market have become increasingly challenging. Historically, average house prices in Cheshire West and Chester are more comparable to those in the south of the country than to those in the North West region and affordability remains a significant issue in the borough, in spite of the current recession.

In addition, the supply of housing in the borough, both affordable and market housing, has fallen behind household growth for a number of years. As a result, pressure on house prices in the borough has increased considerably, as demand for housing continues to outweigh supply and there is a significant shortage of affordable housing available to local people. First time buyers are effectively priced out of buying local homes, restricting movement throughout the rest of the market. More new housing is essential to meet increasing demand and support the Council's ambitious plans for growth.

Creating more balance in the local housing market through increasing supply will give local people more choice and the ability to move up or down the housing 'ladder' as their needs and circumstances change. Moreover, it will help to promote

greater flexibility by making it easier for local people to pursue employment opportunities, thus supporting economic growth. This, in turn, will help to support further development and encourage new employers to come to the borough, creating a cycle of growth that will benefit the borough and beyond, creating opportunities and revitalising communities.

But the housing strategy is not just about new homes; it also seeks to improve the quality of the borough's existing homes and to achieve affordable warmth for all of the borough's residents. This will not only help to reduce carbon emissions, but will also help to improve health outcomes, especially for young children, older people and those with long-term limiting illnesses and disabilities, who may be more at risk of adverse effects from poor housing conditions and cold weather.

Moreover, sustainable growth cannot be achieved unless our plans for new housing development are inclusive and meet the needs of all our residents, including the most vulnerable in our communities. Understanding the needs of the different groups living in the borough and working collaboratively with our colleagues in health and social care is an essential part of improving health outcomes and enhancing the quality of life experienced by local people.

Increasing access to good quality, sustainable housing will help to improve the quality of life of all our residents, ensuring that everyone is able to live well no matter what their age, background or circumstances, from providing the best possible start in life for children to helping older people to age with dignity and continue to play an active role in their local community.

1.1 Why now?

We cannot consider the housing market in isolation; we must ensure that our strategic priorities for housing are aligned with other Council plans and with those of our partners, so that we can work together to tackle common issues holistically, maximising resources and investment to drive delivery of our shared objectives.

This will mean working together in new and smarter ways to take a joined-up, strategically co-ordinated approach to our public assets and other resources, infrastructure, support for business growth, employment and skills, health and housing to prioritise activities and drive investment and growth.

To this end, the Council is embracing new ways of working to deliver services in a more effective way, reducing duplication and enhancing value for money. As part of this process, Cheshire West and Chester Council, along with our key strategic partners, have collaborated in developing the 'altogether better' initiative. Altogether better is a new, whole place community budget approach testing innovative, radical and, above all, local methods of delivering public services.

As part of the review of our approach, economic growth has been adopted as a key corporate priority; the West Cheshire economic growth strategy aims to draw in £500million of private sector investment to the borough and to deliver 5,000 new

jobs, supported by the delivery of 5,500¹ new homes over a five year timeframe, in accordance with the following vision:

West Cheshire is an ambitious location which is seeking to grow business opportunities, create a varied and thriving economy and support its communities. We wish to ensure that the area remains a great place to live, work and invest.

Cheshire West and Chester plays a key role in the housing markets of Cheshire, Warrington and the surrounding districts and new housing development is a significant driver for economic growth across the area. New housing of the right type and in the right place can have a hugely positive impact on local communities by providing the opportunity for local people to access homes near employment centres, invigorating the local economy and supporting key growth targets.

In view of the Council and its partner's ambitions to drive economic growth and radically rethink the way that services are delivered, it is considered timely to develop a new housing strategy aligning housing delivery and services with the growth agenda, as well as with the emerging Local Plan for the borough.

The Local Plan is a key part of the Council's strategic planning framework, establishing the objectively assessed need for housing across Cheshire West and Chester to 2030 and identifying a supply of land suitable for new housing development to meet the need identified. It also seeks to create sustainable communities by ensuring both that the right type of homes are built in the most appropriate locations across the borough to meet need and that new development supports a vibrant West Cheshire economy.

The housing strategy complements and supports both the planning policies set out in the borough's Local Plan and the Council's ambitious plans for growth and seeks to connect local people to the new opportunities being created. It is intended to place our local priorities for housing within the context of national and sub-regional housing policy and priorities, ensuring a good fit with sub-regional objectives and with the Council's wider corporate aims, as well as setting out our plans to address local housing issues in collaboration with local partners, within the policy framework provided by the emerging Local Plan.

In summary, the housing strategy has been developed with these three core principles in mind:

1. to align with sub-regional priorities, ensuring the housing strategy for Cheshire West and Chester is in harmony with sub-regional aims and vice versa
2. to align with the Cheshire West and Chester growth strategy priorities and emerging Local Plan, ensuring that new housing delivery supports sustainable growth and
3. to align with the localism agenda, the altogether better programme, localities and place team objectives to ensure that new housing development is

¹Source: Cheshire West and Chester draft Local Plan, September 2013 (1,100 dpa)

supported by local people and contributes to the creation of sustainable communities.

2. What are the key priorities for housing in the borough?

2.1 Vision

The Council has identified five key priorities to help to achieve its ambitious vision to be the best council in England: growth, localities, prevention, commissioning and culture. Housing has an integral role to play in supporting the delivery programme for each of these, particularly growth.

Our vision for housing in the borough aligns with the growth strategy for West Cheshire:

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

As part of its ambition to be the best, the Council has also challenged all staff members to ‘imagine, innovate and impress’; for housing, this means:

- imagine: what will the local housing market of the future look like; how can we work with our partners to ensure that the borough remains an attractive place to live and work, with homes that people want to live in and aspire to move to?
- innovate: unlocking delivery through new ways of working across the public, private and voluntary sectors, making best use of combined assets and resources and developing innovative financial and delivery mechanisms to increase supply
- impress: deliver new homes that not only meet housing needs, but that reinvigorate the borough’s housing markets, help drive economic growth and improve people’s health and quality of life.

2.2 Priorities for housing

a) Priority 1: Increasing and enabling supply: more homes stable growth

Summary of issues and priorities:

Issue	Priority for housing strategy and delivery
Local context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Plan establishes demand, supply and spatial distribution for new housing development • Local enterprise partnership’s strategic economic plan and strategic housing investment plan establish sub-regional housing framework • Local housing strategy establishes local housing objectives and priorities for action.
Enable supply to	The priority is to work with developers, Housing Associations,

meet need	landowners and relevant organisations including the Homes and Communities Agency to stimulate/ bring forward and increase levels of development through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unlocking sites and assets • accessing and signposting to funding packages and models • investment opportunities.
Affordability	The priority is to develop mechanisms and initiatives which will help to address affordability pressures in the borough, regardless of tenure.
Empty properties	The priority is to reduce the number of empty properties in the borough and subsequently increase the number of available dwellings, including affordable homes.

A resilient, diverse and functioning housing market is a crucial component of the wider framework needed to underpin sustainable economic growth and economic growth is a key corporate priority. We know that the supply of housing in the borough has fallen behind household growth and there is a significant shortage of affordable housing available to local people; increasing the supply of housing in the borough is therefore essential to meet increasing need and demand and to deliver the right type of homes in the right locations to support the Council’s ambitious plans for growth.

One of our key priorities is therefore increasing and enabling supply to provide more homes and stable growth.

b) Priority 2: Improving access to housing

Summary of issues and priorities:

Issue	Priority for housing strategy and delivery
Diversify the housing mix	The priority is to ensure we have the right housing offer for people at all life stages to diversify the demographic, which is twofold: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to ensure the housing offer attracts and retains people of working age and • to ensure there is a suitable choice of housing for older people to enable movement in the market and release equity, as well as helping to sustain individual independence.
Supporting vulnerable residents	The priority is to ensure there are sufficient housing options available for our most vulnerable residents; ensuring the most vulnerable people are supported to access suitable, sustainable housing and the housing/ tenure mix available in the borough provides sufficient choice for all residents to be able to adequately meet their own housing needs.

Lower income households affected by the economic crisis / welfare reform	The priority is to work with Housing Association partners to mitigate the impact of the economic crisis/ welfare reform and assist in achieving economic wellbeing for social housing tenants, helping to ensure that their tenancy remains affordable and preventing risk of homelessness.
Barriers to the housing market	The priority is, through a range of initiatives and projects, to address: the barriers to accessing homes, including purchasing open market properties; and increase the choice of tenures, particularly private rented sector.

Whilst there are undoubtedly some areas in the borough where house prices are more accessible, West Cheshire is a largely high value housing area and affordability has long been an acknowledged issue for residents. The sustained recession has had a further negative impact on affordability in terms of reducing household incomes in real terms and, in addition, West Cheshire has a higher proportion of detached and semi-detached homes than the national average and this contributes to the barriers faced by residents seeking to access home ownership.

Demand for owner occupation remains high in the borough, but many first time buyers are unable to afford even entry level house prices. Mortgage restrictions and the need for a large deposit mean that even those on above average incomes can struggle to access home ownership and a lack of sales activity at the lower end of the property market stifles movement throughout, constraining existing home owners who want to move on or downsize.

Although demand for home ownership is still evident, the economic downturn has affected the output of many house builders and levels of new development have fallen since the recession began, resulting in a reduction in the supply of homes available. This decline in supply while demand remains strong has acted to increase the pressure further on house prices in the borough, adding to affordability problems as a consequence.

The lack of affordable housing to purchase has resulted in many newly-forming households and would-be first time buyers being diverted to the private rented sector, but increased demand for private rented homes has put pressure on rental values, increasing affordability problems in this sector too. Moreover, the common practice of requiring a substantial deposit for rented property excludes many local people from accessing even the private rented sector without financial assistance.

Whilst financial barriers are also likely to affect those residents who are vulnerable in some way, vulnerable people are likely to experience a diverse range of further barriers to accessing a suitable and sustainable home due to their individual circumstances, including problems arising from mental health issues, physical disabilities, addiction and social exclusion, or simply a lack of the general life skills needed to maintain a home.

As the strategic housing authority for Cheshire West and Chester, the Council has a duty to ensure that the housing needs of all of the borough's residents are met. This means not only making sure that there is a suitable range of housing and tenures available for those who are able to meet their own housing needs, but also ensuring

that the borough's most vulnerable residents are supported to access a safe, secure and sustainable home.

Another key priority is therefore to improve access to housing.

c) Priority 3: Improving housing quality, sustainability and design

Summary of issues and priorities:

Issue	Priority for housing strategy and delivery
Improve the quality of homes	The priority is to improve standards in the Council's own housing stock and work collaboratively with partners to improve the quality of homes in the private sector, especially the private rented sector.
Affordable warmth/ fuel poverty	The priority is to work collaboratively to develop initiatives (e.g. Green Deal/ ECO) that benefit local residents and address fuel poverty including through sustainable construction methods and retro-fitting homes with improved insulation and heating systems etc.
Sustainable design	<p>The priority is to work with developers to encourage sustainable methods of construction and improve the standard of design of new build properties to ensure they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meet the needs of people at all life stages (e.g. lifetime homes/ building for life standards) • providing high quality homes in a high quality environment and • address fuel poverty through sustainable design.

Housing quality is inextricably linked to health; poor housing conditions can contribute to physical and mental health problems and people with no housing experience some of the worst health inequalities of all. A safe, warm and well-designed home helps to provide the best start in life for children, enables those leaving hospital to return home sooner and, with appropriate support, means that older and disabled people can continue to maintain their independence and stay in their own home for longer.

There is also growing evidence that improving the quality of existing housing and related services can bring about significant savings to the public purse by reducing the costs of expenditure on health and social care; achieving affordable warmth is a good example of this, tackling health inequalities and significantly improving the quality of life of the borough's residents. Providing affordable warmth helps to reduce the health impact of excess cold, which can especially affect the very young, the very old and those with physical disabilities and life limiting long-term illnesses. It will also help to tackle fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions through making the borough's homes more energy efficient, contributing to another key corporate goal, namely addressing climate change.

The use of innovative materials and construction methods can help to reduce the carbon footprint of new development and good design can also help to ensure the optimum energy efficiency of new homes. Innovative design can mean that new homes are flexible enough to meet the changing needs of residents throughout all stages of life and sustainable, both in terms of environmental impact and in terms of the costs of maintenance and affordable warmth for the occupants throughout the lifetime of the building.

Our final key priority is therefore to improve housing quality, sustainability and design.

2.3 Summary of key priorities

The table below summarises our key priorities for housing in the borough, as well as the most significant housing issues that could impact on the drive for growth and the well-being of our communities. The table also reflects the priorities set out in the national housing strategy 'laying the foundations', which has also informed the development of this local housing strategy for Cheshire West and Chester and our draft strategic housing action plan.

Issue	Priority for housing strategy and delivery
Priority 1: Increasing and enabling supply: more homes stable growth	
Local context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Plan establishes demand, supply and spatial distribution for new housing development • Local enterprise partnership's strategic economic plan and strategic housing investment plan establish sub-regional housing framework • Local housing strategy establishes local housing objectives and priorities for action.
Enable supply to meet need	<p>The priority is to work with developers, Housing Associations, landowners and relevant organisations including the Homes and Communities Agency to stimulate/ bring forward and increase levels of development through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unlocking sites and assets • accessing and signposting to funding packages and models • investment opportunities.
Affordability	<p>The priority is to develop mechanisms and initiatives which will help to address affordability pressures in the borough, regardless of tenure.</p>
Empty properties	<p>The priority is to reduce the number of empty properties in the borough and subsequently increase the number of available dwellings, including affordable homes.</p>

Priority 2: Improving access to housing	
Diversify the housing mix	<p>The priority is to ensure we have the right housing offer for people at all life stages to diversify the demographic, which is twofold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to ensure the housing offer attracts and retains people of working age and • to ensure there is a suitable choice of housing for older people to enable movement in the market and release equity, as well as helping to sustain individual independence.
Supporting vulnerable residents	<p>The priority is to ensure there are sufficient housing options available for our most vulnerable residents; ensuring the most vulnerable people are supported to access suitable, sustainable housing and the housing/ tenure mix available in the borough provides sufficient choice for all residents to be able to adequately meet their own housing needs.</p>
Lower income households affected by the economic crisis / welfare reform	<p>The priority is to work with Housing Association partners to mitigate the impact of the economic crisis/ welfare reform and assist in achieving economic wellbeing for social housing tenants, helping to ensure that their tenancy remains affordable and preventing risk of homelessness.</p>
Barriers to the housing market	<p>The priority is, through a range of initiatives and projects, to address: the barriers to accessing homes, including purchasing open market properties; and increase the choice of tenures, particularly private rented sector.</p>
Priority 3: Improving housing quality, sustainability and design	
Improve the quality of homes	<p>The priority is to improve standards in the Council's own housing stock and work collaboratively with partners to improve the quality of homes in the private sector, especially the private rented sector.</p>
Affordable warmth/ fuel poverty	<p>The priority is to work collaboratively to develop initiatives (e.g. Green Deal/ ECO) that benefit local residents and address fuel poverty including through sustainable construction methods and retro-fitting homes with improved insulation and heating systems etc.</p>
Sustainable design	<p>The priority is to work with developers to encourage sustainable methods of construction and improve the standard of design of new build properties to ensure they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meet the needs of people at all life stages (e.g. lifetime homes/ building for life standards) • providing high quality homes in a high quality environment and • address fuel poverty through sustainable design.

3. Where have these priorities come from?

3.1 Strategy development

Our priorities for housing in the borough have been developed within the context of relevant national, sub-regional and local policies and strategies. They have been informed by extensive research, a robust evidence base and a thorough knowledge of local housing markets and drivers of change. They have been further shaped through consultation with key partners and stakeholders, including our strategic housing partnership, which has been instrumental in developing this housing strategy for the borough.

The strategic housing partnership is a forum made up of representatives from the key Registered Providers managing and developing housing stock within Cheshire West and Chester, facilitated by the Council's strategic housing team. Following a comprehensive review in June 2013, the Partnership adopted the following priorities, which are reflected in our housing strategy for the borough:

- supply: to increase the supply of housing to meet local housing needs and to stimulate and support economic growth and regeneration across the borough
- support: to ensure that there is an appropriate choice of homes available to allow older, disabled, vulnerable and potentially vulnerable people to access housing that supports them to live as independently and healthily as possible
- improve and inform: to fulfil the Council's role as the strategic housing authority for the borough
- innovate and engage: to provide a forum for sharing good practise and innovation and act as a driver of improvement within the local housing sector.

These fundamental themes provided the basis of consultation with key stakeholders and with Council colleagues, resulting in the adoption of three broad priorities for further consultation, namely:

- increasing and enabling supply to provide more homes and stable growth
- improving access to housing and
- improving housing quality, sustainability and design.

These broad priorities were further refined through a series of themed workshops and further consultation, the feedback from which has informed the development of the draft action plan attached to this strategy. Both the strategy and action plan will now be subject to public consultation, to inform a final draft which will be presented to the Council's Executive Committee for approval later this year.

3.2 Policy context

This section outlines the relevant key national, sub-regional and local policies which provide the framework for this strategy.

National:

- **Laying the foundations: a housing strategy for England (2011)**

This is the Government's national housing strategy; it identifies six key strategic themes and a range of priorities and actions to address barriers within each theme while stimulating and supporting economic growth. Our local housing strategy for the borough is aligned with the key themes and priorities identified in the national housing strategy, namely:

- developing innovative new approaches to tackling the shortfall of homes
- increasing supply to support economic growth and create more balance in the local housing market
- creating a thriving private rented sector
- tackling empty homes
- ensuring that vulnerable people are supported to access and maintain a suitable home and
- improving the quality, sustainability and design of homes.

- **Localism Act (2011)**

The Government wants to ensure that decision making is devolved to the lowest possible level, giving communities greater involvement in decisions about the area in which they live; the Localism Act provides the legal framework to achieve this.

- **National planning policy framework (NPPF) (2012)**

This framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England, providing a framework within which local people and local authorities can produce their own local and neighbourhood plans that reflect the needs and priorities of their communities, in keeping with the aims of the Localism Act.

The framework stresses the need for councils to work with communities and businesses to seek opportunities for sustainable growth to rebuild the local economy, helping to deliver the homes, jobs, and infrastructure needed for a growing population, whilst at the same time ensuring the needs of the most vulnerable are met and protecting the environment.

- **Welfare Reform Act (2012)**

The reform of the welfare system aims to help move more people into work and reduce the overall financial cost to the state. The key reforms which will impact on the housing sector are the introduction of universal credit, the cap on the total amount of benefits receivable and revised housing benefit rules.

- **Construction 2025 industrial strategy: Government and industry in partnership (2013)**
 The construction industry accounts for around 10% of all UK employment and contributes almost 7% of the total UK economy; more if the whole life contribution through planning, design, construction, maintenance, decommissioning and reuse is taken into account. The industrial strategy sets out a number of key strategic commitments to transform the construction industry, including removing barriers to innovation and delivering a more strategic approach to apprenticeships in the sector, helping to reduce skills shortages, increase efficiency and drive delivery.
- **Investing in Britain's future (2013)**
 The Government has announced further financial commitments as part of the comprehensive spending review (2013), as detailed in this document, which emphasises that housing is an integral part of the UK's economic and social infrastructure, supporting labour mobility and providing a direct benefit to growth and jobs as new homes are built.
- **Open public services white paper (2011)**
 The open public services white paper was published in 2011 with the aim of re-evaluating the delivery of public services in England to tackle inefficiencies, improve delivery, increase accessibility and realign services within the context of increasing financial pressures.
- **The Marmot review (2010)**
 This review identified some important findings regarding health inequalities, namely that they arise from a complex interaction of many factors, are largely preventable and success in tackling them requires action across all the social determinants of health, necessitating a collaborative approach from all agencies involved. A better understanding of the wider relationship between health outcomes and housing is a key challenge and developing a partnership approach with colleagues in the health sector is a key objective of this housing strategy.
- **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 co-ordinated care and support the norm across England over the coming years.

Sub-regional:

- **Lord Heseltine review: 'no stone unturned in the pursuit of growth'**
 The Lord Heseltine review made a number of recommendations to drive economic growth including empowering local communities to contribute to growth going forward, a more accessible support infrastructure for new and

growing businesses and a more strategic approach to developing skills. The report also made the case for an enhanced role for local enterprise partnerships, delivering economic plans tailored to the local area and bringing together funding for regeneration, skills and employment support, infrastructure and housing into a single pot, supporting the localism agenda.

- **Cheshire and Warrington local enterprise partnership (LEP)**

The LEP consists of representatives from the private and public sectors and is currently working with the three local authorities in Cheshire (Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington Councils) together with other key stakeholders to develop the Growth Plan for the sub-region and submit it to Central Government to secure funding for the delivery of our shared growth objectives.

Local:

- **Council Plan**

The Council Plan sets out the Council's priorities for 2011 to 2015. 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 and
- more homes meeting the decent homes standard.

- **Local investment plan (LIP)**

The LIP sets out the agreed investment parameters to support the Council's economic, housing and environmental ambitions. The LIP was drawn up in collaboration with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), which oversees and manages Government initiatives and funding relating to housing such as the affordable housing programme, Help to Buy, get Britain building, the care and support specialised housing fund and traveller pitch funding. The HCA must be satisfied that the priorities defined in the LIP are relevant, achievable and deliver value for money.

The LIP has three primary purposes:

- to set out local priorities for investment and activities to support growth
- to provide the HCA with a set of clear priorities and parameters to inform business planning and investment decisions and
- to provide a prospectus for the local area, setting out key strengths and opportunities, to draw in further inward investment.

- **Altogether better**

Within the context of the open public services white paper referred to earlier, all public services are being reviewed with the aim of delivering services in a

more efficient and more cost effective way. As part of this process, Cheshire West and Chester Council, along with our key strategic partners, have collaborated in developing the altogether better initiative.

Altogether better is a new, whole place community budget approach testing innovative, radical and, above all, local methods of delivering public services. Cheshire West and Chester Council is one of only four local authorities in England piloting this new approach. The aim is to improve service delivery in the borough through working together with partners in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to encourage a proactive approach and early intervention to tackle the root causes of longstanding problems.

There are a number of key projects within the altogether better programme addressing a range of issues, based around relevant themes such as early years support, employment and skills training, living well and ageing well. Housing and related services is a key aspect of many of these projects and a key element of the framework supporting delivery of the programme.

- **Locality and Regeneration Boards**

In line with the open public services white paper, Cheshire West and Chester Council has identified four geographical areas which are identified as distinct Localities: Ellesmere Port, Chester, Rural, and Northwich and Winsford. Each area has a locality head and a place team providing strategic leadership for the relevant area, working with councillors, communities and other partners to deliver services in a more locally focussed way.

In addition, each area has a regeneration board, focussing on revitalising the local economy through attracting new development and new investment, as well as working with existing local businesses to maximise economic potential and empowering local people to take advantage of the new employment opportunities being created. Affordable local housing is a key part of the framework needed to support local economic growth, connecting local people to these new opportunities and promoting mobility to access work.

- **Altogether better for business: an economic growth strategy for West Cheshire (2013-2018)**

The growth strategy reiterates that housing is a vital part of the infrastructure needed to achieve economic growth and sets out four strategic objectives to help us deliver our ambitious plans for growth in the borough:

- SO1: enterprise and business
- SO2: economic infrastructure
- SO3: employment and skills and
- SO4: enabling behaviours for growth.

- **Local Plan**

Cheshire West and Chester Council's emerging Local Plan for the borough is currently under development, with adoption anticipated later this year (2014). The Local Plan accords with the national planning policy framework and will provide the overarching policy framework for housing in the borough.

There are a range of evidence documents which support the Local Plan, three of which are of particular relevance to housing availability and deliverability: the strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA), the strategic housing market assessment (SHMA), and the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessment (GTAA) all of which have been refreshed as part of the Local Plan development process.

- **Health**

Housing plays an important role in determining an individual's health. Poor housing conditions can contribute to physical and mental health problems and people with no housing experience some of the worst health inequalities of all.

Low temperatures and cold weather can have a particularly adverse effect on the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions and Cheshire West and Chester's affordable warmth strategy details how the Council and its partners will work collaboratively to reach people who are struggling to heat their homes and provide the necessary assistance.

There is also growing evidence that housing and related services can bring about significant savings to the public purse by reducing the costs of expenditure on health and social care; a safe, warm and well-designed home helps to provide the best start in life for children, enables those leaving hospital to return home sooner and, with appropriate support, means that older and disabled people can continue to maintain their independence and stay in their own home for longer.

These themes are common to both the draft strategic housing action plan and the new draft health and wellbeing strategy for the borough, developed by the health and wellbeing board partnership network, which is currently out for consultation. The health and wellbeing strategy recognises that health issues should not be seen in isolation and acknowledges the importance of addressing the wider health and wellbeing agenda, including issues such as education, employment and housing and their impact on health outcomes for local people.

The Authority recognises the significant interrelationship between health and housing and has recently appointed a consultant in public health, whose remit is to advise on the wider determinants of health and support greater integration between health and other services, including the strategic housing function. This includes carrying out a housing health needs assessment to inform priorities for housing policy and future housing development in the borough and to provide a public health perspective to the development of the borough's emerging housing strategy.

3.3 The evidence base

This section provides a summary of the key issues identified through the evidence base, which has informed the development of this housing strategy and related action plan. There is a more detailed summary provided in the appendices and the full evidence base is available to view as a separate document.

This section is divided into three themes:

- people / social
- market / supply and
- affordability.

People / social

- **Demographic change**

West Cheshire has a growing population, but the number of older people living in the borough is expected to increase significantly, while the number of working age people is forecast to decline. This has a number of implications for the borough including:

- impact on business growth and workforce availability
- a change in the types of housing and tenure mix required
- increased demand for services, particularly services for older people and
- a potential increase in the number of households suffering from fuel poverty and isolation.

- **Relatively low waged economy**

Although employment is high, average incomes in the borough are relatively low, especially among part-time workers and those in the leisure and service industries. The borough has the highest housing benefit claimant rate (as a percentage of the local population) in the sub-region, reflecting the low incomes and lack of affordable housing.

- **Lack of first time buyers**

The structure of the housing market is changing; over the past decade, there has been a reduction in owner occupation among those aged between 16 and 34 years and a corresponding increase in private sector lettings. By contrast, there has been an increase in owner occupation among those aged between 35 and 49, which would appear to indicate that the age of the average first time buyer in the borough is increasing, in keeping with trends in the national housing market; in July 2013, 26% of first time buyers in England were aged 35 or over.

- **Affordable warmth**

Fuel poverty is a major issue affecting low income households in the borough, particularly those with older homes and in remote rural locations, where some homes do not have access to mains gas.

- **Supporting older people's independence**

Evidence shows that the help older people require to sustain their independence includes assistance with repairs and maintenance (including garden maintenance) and adaptations to enhance energy efficiency, reduce living costs and enhance quality of life.

- **Mobility within the market**

West Cheshire's housing market is relatively self-contained, with over two thirds of those intending to move within the next five years wanting to stay in the borough. The majority of households moving to the borough from outside the area do so for employment-related reasons, indicating strong economic links with neighbouring local authority areas. The majority of people moving recently have stayed within the same tenure, but newly-forming households are more likely to move into the private rented sector, illustrating the impact of affordability constraints on the borough's young people.

Market and supply

- **Housing mix**

The borough's existing housing stock is dominated by large, family homes; around two thirds of all homes in the borough are either detached or semi-detached and there are fewer flats and terraced houses here, compared to the national average. The lack of smaller homes makes it difficult for first time buyers and newly-forming households to access entry level, more affordable accommodation.

- **Tenure mix**

Owner occupation is the predominant tenure in the borough, comprising 71% of all the housing stock. This means there is a limited choice of other tenures available to newly-forming households and results in sustained pressure on house prices and private sector rents; both the average and lower quartile house price in West Cheshire is significantly higher than the North West equivalent. However, although the current stock and tenure mix may give rise to affordability concerns, the relatively high percentage of established homeowners living in West Cheshire means that the borough's housing market is less susceptible to economic 'shocks' and consequently more resilient to recession than other areas in the UK. This is evidenced by local house prices, which have remained relatively stable in spite of the current economic conditions.

- **Supply not matching demand**

While sales volumes are slowly beginning to increase as economic conditions improve, supply and demand in the local housing market is not in balance; the available supply of homes is greater than visible demand. This could be a result of affordability constraints, restrictions in the financial sector impacting on lending or new supply not matching local demand. The Government's Help to Buy scheme is beginning to have an impact in terms of increasing people's ability to access lending and has the potential to increase demand at the local level, but it will only have a very small impact on sales in proportion to the borough's housing market as a whole. The key issue is supporting first

time buyers to access lending, which will in turn support sales activity throughout the rest of the market.

- **Lower income households disproportionately affected by the economic crisis**

The number of possessions and possession orders in the social housing sector has risen since the end of 2012, in contrast to those in the private sector, which remain well below historic levels. This indicates that those on the lowest incomes are being hardest hit by increasing financial pressures.

- **Stock condition**

The borough's housing stock is in relatively good condition; only 20% of the borough's homes do not meet the decent homes standard, compared to 25% of all private dwellings in England, but rates of disrepair in the borough's private housing sector remain above the national average and, sadly, have increased since 2010. Improving conditions in this sector remains a key Council objective. In terms of Council housing stock, the five year capital programme approved by the Council in 2010 should result in the backlog of non-decent homes being cleared by the end of March 2016 and there is a robust business plan in place which will provide sufficient resources for the Council to maintain all its stock at the decent homes standard going forward.

- **Location/ impact of empty homes**

Over two thirds of empty properties are found in the borough's rural areas and market towns, but the highest concentrations of empty homes are found in the wards of Chester City, Garden Quarter (Chester) and Rossmore (Ellesmere Port). This is in spite of the median house price to income ratio in these wards being comparatively low, meaning that these areas are relatively affordable compared to neighbouring wards; the number of empty properties could be a reflection of the above average number of private rented homes found in these locations, as turnover in this sector is likely to be higher than in the owner occupied sector.

Affordability

- **Shortfall in affordable homes**

The strategic housing market assessment for the borough identifies a net annual shortfall of 714 affordable dwellings in the borough and indicates a particular need for affordable accommodation for older people and smaller properties suitable for newly forming households.

- **High house prices**

Average house prices in Cheshire West and Chester are relatively high and are well above the North West average; in fact West Cheshire is the eighth least affordable district in the North West, according to the latest strategic housing market assessment for the borough. Affordability is consistently identified as being a significant issue for local people, with the cost of housing impacting on local residents across different tenures and socio-economic groups.

- **Incomes**

On a more positive note, the median full-time income in the borough is higher than the regional and national average for males, although it is lower for females. The difference in salaries between male and female employees is likely to reflect different types of employment, as women are more likely to work part time and work in lower paid roles, such as administration, the service industry, leisure and care; only around a third of working age females in the borough are employed full-time, compared to almost half of working age males.

- **First time buyers priced out of the market**

A significant percentage of first time buyers are priced out of the housing market; based on a multiplier of three and a half times average income, over 40% of first time buyers are unable to afford to purchase a terraced house in the borough. On the same basis, first time buyers earning median salary levels or less would struggle to afford anything more than an averagely-priced one bed flat in the borough without financial assistance.

- **High demand increasing rental costs**

The cost of renting a one bed home in the borough's private rented sector is higher than the cost of servicing a mortgage, perhaps due to the limited supply of one bed properties available, compounded by increased demand due to the Government's welfare reform programme and reduced housing benefit availability. Although the borough's private rented sector is growing as a proportion of the total housing stock, private sector rents would be unaffordable for many households without financial assistance, including working households; individuals with incomes in the lower quartile range would only be able to afford a bedsit or shared accommodation at most and would probably have to spend more than a third of their total annual income on rent.

- **Increasing demand for social housing**

Between 2007 and 2012, the number of people seeking social housing from the Council rose from 11,794 to 17,382, an increase of almost 50%; over the year to April 2012, the number of households registering to apply for a social home in the borough rose by 7.4%. However, new legislation has allowed the Council to change the way social housing is allocated; a 'closed' register was put into operation from 1st October 2013, greatly reducing the number of applicants on the housing register. Applications are now only accepted from those households who are considered to be in housing need. Although the majority of households on the housing register are reliant on benefits, applications from working households are increasingly being received, indicating the mounting financial pressures facing the borough's residents.

Growth in the affordable housing sector has been significantly hampered by reducing levels of grant funding and increasing financial risk, impacting on the capacity of Registered Providers to deliver new affordable homes, increasing the pressure on the borough's already stretched social housing sector.

3.4 Direction of travel: growth

The key corporate priority for the Council is economic growth; strategic and operational delivery must align with this priority, including housing policy and delivery. At both the local and sub-regional level, housing is a critical part of the framework needed to support delivery of the growth agenda.

The local enterprise partnership's strategic economic plan identifies housing as a priority in its own right, with a series of strategic objectives and actions to align delivery across the three local authority areas making up the Cheshire sub-region and, where feasible, integrate activity to increase effectiveness and impact.

The significance of having the right housing 'offer' to support growth is also reflected in the Cheshire West economic growth strategy, where housing forms part of the economic infrastructure strategic objective.

The diagram over the page illustrates the relationships between these plans and the housing strategy for the borough.

4. How are we going to tackle the issues identified and achieve our aims for housing in the borough?

A draft strategic housing action plan has been developed, in collaboration with the strategic housing partnership and other stakeholders, which sets out a series of key activities and outputs required to tackle each of the three broad priorities identified through this housing strategy.

The draft strategic housing action plan identifies the key tasks needed to deliver the required outcomes, the timescale of each objective and the lead individuals and agencies whose involvement is needed in order to achieve our shared aims. Many of the aims and objectives are necessarily fairly high level at this stage, but will lead to more detailed plans being developed as part of the delivery process and as the action plan progresses.

Key indicators for success will be identified for each objective and achievement against targets will be monitored by the relevant agency or steering group. The strategic housing partnership will undertake a wider performance monitoring role of the action plan as a whole.

It is expected that the housing strategy and associated action plan will both develop over time, as goals are achieved and as circumstances change. To reflect this, and to ensure the continued relevance of the priorities and outcomes identified, the action plan and evidence base will be refreshed at regular intervals.

Spatial dimension:

Sub-regional - local enterprise partnership

Strategy:



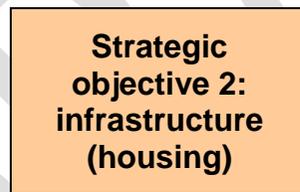
Related housing element:



Objectives/ priorities:

- Objective 1: Develop a housing spatial plan and investment strategy
- Objective 2: Support a sustainable housing market which supports population and economic growth
- Objective 3: Develop investment models and new solutions to support housing growth

West Cheshire



- Priority 1: Establish and use a robust intelligence source
- Priority 2: Facilitate the development of new homes
- Priority 3: Improve access to homes
- Priority 4: Increasing household income levels



- Priority 1: Increasing supply: more homes stable growth
- Priority 2: Improve access to housing
- Priority 3: Quality, sustainability and design

Draft strategic housing action plan:

Cross-cutting themes			
No.	Theme	Outputs	Outcomes
(1)	Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A robust and up-to-date evidence base that identifies needs/ gaps in provision and informs housing policy and strategy • Co-ordinated research and data collection • Good practice and innovation captured and shared with partners • Regular monitoring of delivery and effectiveness of the strategic housing action plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved understanding of local housing markets, leading to appropriate and co-ordinated action • Effective performance management of the strategic housing action plan
(2)	Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess and, where appropriate, challenge proposed changes in legislation and national housing policy • Engage with Government, key organisations representing the sector and partners to ensure housing's role in stimulating and supporting economic growth and health and wellbeing is recognised • Engage with local partners and key stakeholders to drive delivery and achieve local strategic housing objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A unified voice for local housing issues • Housing is recognised as a vital component of the infrastructure needed to support local economic growth and improved health outcomes • The need for a step change in the number of new homes delivered in order to meet local housing needs is recognised
(3)	Integrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with partners and the LEP at sub-regional level to influence key objectives and ensure a good fit with local housing priorities • Ensure that our strategic priorities for housing are aligned with other Council plans and with those of our partners, including the altogether better programme • Ensure new development supports integration and sustainable communities objectives and is in keeping with the requirements of local residents • Work collaboratively with partners to maximise resources and investment and drive delivery of shared objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinated and cohesive policies and strategies that result in improved housing outcomes for local people

Priority 1: Increasing and enabling supply; more homes, stable growth**1.1 Support growth and enable delivery of new homes**

No.	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	Develop and implement a housing investment plan as part of the Council's wider growth investment plan, ensuring a ready pipeline of investment projects and initiatives	Develop and implement a co-ordinated housing investment plan which: (a) provides a targeted programme for Section 106 and Right to Buy funding (b) maximises the use of external funding, including affordable housing programme funding (c) identifies suitable assets/ sites already in Council ownership and establishes a programme for delivery (d) identifies investment opportunities using capital funding from Cheshire West and Chester Council (e) identifies collaborative development opportunities using other public sector land	In accordance with housing investment and growth plan timetables
(2)	Bring forward development on stalled sites in the borough	Identify and analyse the reasons for stalled sites to feed into and inform the sub-regional housing investment fund and secure funding to unlock stalled sites across the borough	In accordance with housing investment plan timetable
(3)	Support delivery of identified sites for housing development through the strategic housing framework model	Make maximum use of the strategic housing framework procurement model for the Council's land assets to deliver an enhanced offer including affordable and specialised housing	In accordance with housing investment plan timetable
(4)	Work with other public sector agencies (Clinical Commissioning Group, schools, the Homes and Communities Agency etc) to identify other surplus public sector land suitable for housing delivery, including more specialist housing delivery	Influence the delivery and make best use of public sector assets outside of the Council's own portfolio to secure new housing, including affordable and specialised housing	In accordance with housing investment plan timetable

(5)	Support Registered Providers to increase the supply of affordable and intermediate housing using alternative funding sources (linked with housing investment plan priorities)	Work with partners to identify alternative funding sources and deliver additional affordable housing units, over and above those already to be delivered through the affordable housing programme pipeline	In accordance with housing investment plan timetable
(6)	Ensure new development supports integration and sustainable communities objectives and meets the needs and aspirations of local residents	Establish a mechanism for regular liaison with Localities teams to ensure community involvement and foster ownership of plans for new development	Throughout life of Strategy
(7)	Identify and align common policies at a sub-regional level to facilitate delivery/ investment opportunities	Align identified housing policies, based on best practice, with other local authority partners to improve delivery Review and identify planning policies which could be unified across the sub-region including Section 106 policy, providing a common, uniform approach	Throughout life of Strategy
(8)	Encourage the development of good quality intermediate and market rented homes in suitable locations across the borough to meet identified local needs	Work in collaboration with partners through the housing investment plan to develop and analyse institutional investment funding models to facilitate the delivery of suitable homes, including intermediate and market rented homes, to meet identified local needs Investigate potential for Registered Providers to develop homes for market rent or to manage homes developed by others, to increase the supply of good quality homes in the borough's private rented sector	In accordance with housing investment plan timetable March 2015

1.2 Bringing empty homes back into use			
Reference	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	Ensure that the Council has a robust policy framework and makes the best use of the powers available for tackling empty homes	Refresh the existing empty property strategy Establish a service level agreement with the regulatory services team and protocols for the use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Compulsory Purchase Orders	December 2014 March 2015
(2)	Introduce a partnership approach to tackling empty properties and develop new initiatives for bringing empty homes back into use.	Investigate current innovations and good practice for bringing empty homes back into use employed by other local authorities, including purchase or lease and repair schemes Benchmark performance on tackling empty homes with neighbouring authorities Develop a partnership approach to returning empty homes to use for affordable housing in association with Registered Providers and other key stakeholders Investigate potential to introduce a sub-regional approach to preventing and tackling empty homes through the Cheshire and Warrington Housing Alliance	December 2014 March 2015 March 2015 December 2015
Priority 2: Improving access to housing			
2.1 Understand the different market sectors and different housing needs in the borough			
Reference	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	Capture and analyse relevant customer profile data	Establish an appropriate dataset and protocol for obtaining data from the housing waiting list, and potentially from other service areas, to support production of a robust evidence base and inform policy and strategy development	March 2015

(2)	Establish a better understanding of the needs of those living in the private rented sector and the expectations of private landlords	<p>Establish contact with local lettings agents and agree relevant data/ intelligence to be collected on a quarterly basis</p> <p>Establish a way forward to ensure continuity for the private landlords forum and landlord accreditation scheme following directorate restructure</p> <p>Establish relationship with private landlords through the private landlords forum and landlord accreditation scheme</p>	<p>December 2014 and quarterly thereafter</p> <p>December 2014</p> <p>December 2014</p>
(3)	Evaluate need/ demand in the local housing market, both in terms of specific housing sectors and of specific groups, including vulnerable groups, minority groups and different ethnic groups.	<p>Utilise existing research to establish the different housing sectors in the borough and estimated need/ demand (including the strategic housing market assessment, local plan evidence, needs surveys and the private sector stock condition survey)</p> <p>Establish links with place and locality teams to understand local housing needs and aspirations in the borough's four designated localities: Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford and Rural</p> <p>In collaboration with colleagues and relevant partners, develop an appropriate research programme going forward (subject to resources), reviewed annually</p>	<p>October 2014</p> <p>December 2014</p> <p>January 2015</p>
(4)	Capture and share intelligence on the local housing market	Publish four quarterly local housing market bulletins per year	Quarterly each year
(5)	Develop a mechanism to ensure performance monitoring and evaluation of strategic housing action plan	<p>Establish performance evaluation framework and timetable</p> <p>Strategic housing action plan updated annually</p>	December 2014

	and inform future housing plans and policies	Evidence base refreshed annually	
2.2 Diversify the housing/ tenure mix to support a more balanced local housing market			
Reference	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	Promote housing that supports a more balanced housing market and improves the tenure mix in areas of limited variety	<p>Work with partners to secure the provision of new homes that meet local housing needs and promote a balanced and sustainable local housing market</p> <p>Liaise with place and locality teams to ensure new development is sustainable and contributes to meeting local needs</p> <p>In collaboration with colleagues in planning, establish a protocol to share details of projected completions with local housing partnership to assist with forward planning and ensure new supply is sustainable and meets identified local needs</p>	<p>In accordance with planning guidelines</p> <p>In accordance with planning guidelines</p> <p>September 2014</p>
(2)	Identify if there is added value to developing an intervention to support people to downsize and release larger homes onto the market	Work with local housing partnership to establish viability and effectiveness of current downsizing schemes in use and determine way forward	December 2014
(3)	Investigate ways of retaining graduates in the borough once their studies have finished	<p>Establish liaison arrangements with Chester University and local colleges and work together to determine baseline and relevant statistics for annual reporting</p> <p>Determine housing needs/ expectations/ aspirations of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contacts established by December 2014 • statistical set agreed by February 2014 • first report June 2015 <p>December 2015</p>

		students who wish to stay in the borough and work with colleagues in Planning to establish a way forward	
2.3 Support vulnerable residents.			
Reference	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	In collaboration with strategic commissioning team, evaluate context and future needs for housing for vulnerable groups and those with special needs, leading to cohesive strategic delivery plan	<p>Contribute to supported housing review</p> <p>Work with strategic commissioning team, Registered Providers, service providers and colleagues to map current supply and establish anticipated future housing needs/ demand for relevant groups</p> <p>Work with relevant partners to develop a better understanding of the likely future need/ demand for housing for older people in the borough</p> <p>Work with partners to develop a more co-ordinated approach to needs planning, to ensure new development/ remodelling of existing stock supports anticipated future needs</p>	<p>In accordance with review timetable</p> <p>March 2015</p> <p>March 2015</p> <p>March 2015</p>
(2)	Develop links with children's services to ensure successful pathways to suitable housing/ accommodation solutions for young people, especially vulnerable young people	Liaise with colleagues in children's services to understand likely future demand v capacity and develop a more co-ordinated approach to future planning	March 2015
(3)	Develop closer links with public health to understand where needs are and raise awareness of importance of housing pathways for recovery	<p>Contribute to the continual refinement of the Integrated Strategic Needs Assessment (ISNA) for the borough through the provision of relevant data</p> <p>Attend ISNA meetings to encourage greater integration between housing and health</p>	<p>In accordance with ISNA timetable</p> <p>In accordance with ISNA timetable</p>

		Utilise ISNA data to inform future planning for housing in the borough for special needs groups including the frail elderly and adults with learning or physical disabilities	In accordance with strategic housing review timetable
(4)	Support the delivery of appropriate housing/ accommodation solutions for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople	Work with colleagues to support delivery of planned transit/ permanent sites In collaboration with relevant partners, support the creation of a sub-regional gypsy and traveller team	In accordance with established timetable for delivery In accordance with established timetable for delivery
(5)	Ensure that the Council has a robust policy framework and makes the best use of the resources available for preventing and tackling homelessness	Complete review of the existing homelessness strategy and develop a new strategy and action plan for preventing and tackling homelessness in the borough	April 2015
2.4 Support lower income households affected by the economic downturn and welfare reform			
Reference	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	Continue to work together with key partners through multi agency welfare reform task group (WRTG) to understand and monitor impact of welfare reforms	Regularly attend WRTG sessions and report back to housing partnership to ensure co-ordinated approach to issues identified Assess potential financial implications for the Council and partners of welfare reforms, including universal credit Work with key partners to respond to future Government policy on welfare reform and other relevant policy changes/ consultations	In accordance with WRTG timetable December 2014 As and when required
(2)	Increase access to training opportunities and employment for local people in the	Work with colleagues in planning and the employment, skills and learning teams to develop a protocol for use in Section 106 agreements to require access to training	December 2014

	construction/ housebuilding sector	opportunities for local people Take advantage of opportunities arising from the strategic housing framework to encourage Registered Providers, developers and other key partners to offer apprenticeships, work placements, mentoring/ coaching opportunities etc to local people	In accordance with delivery timetable
2.5 Help to address barriers to the housing market			
Reference	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	Increase access to housing for local people	Complete investigation into demand for/ viability of expanding Private Rented Sector Access scheme across the borough and determine way forward Work with partners to understand the need/ appetite for shared housing for young single people and the viability of promoting house sharing solutions across a range of sectors including the private rented and social rented housing sectors Work with private sector landlords through the private landlords forum to encourage them to offer longer, 'family friendly' tenancies and address the growing issue of refusing tenants who are in receipt of benefits	June 2014 September 2014 March 2015
(2)	Improve access to information about the housing options and related services available in the borough	In collaboration with partners, analyse how local people currently access information about housing and related services in the borough and identify any potential improvements Investigate whether there is any added value to be gained from introducing a single access portal for all housing information provided by the Council, across all tenures	March 2015

(3)	Ensure that the Council has a robust policy framework for making the best use of the existing social housing stock in the borough	<p>Regularly review the Common Allocations Policy for homes let through the joint choice-based lettings scheme in the borough (Trust HomeChoice) to ensure it remains fit for purpose</p> <p>Review and refresh the current tenancy strategy for the borough</p>	<p>Current policy launched 1 October 2013:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • six month review to be completed by end May 2014 • full review to be completed March 2019 • light touch review December 2014 • full review March 2019
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Priority 3: Quality, sustainability and design

3.1 Improve the quality of homes in the borough

Reference	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	Improve the quality and condition of social housing in the borough	<p>Establish current baseline for all social housing providers in the borough against the decent homes standard</p> <p>Ensure all Council-owned housing stock reaches the decent homes standard, as per the terms of the housing management contract and five-year capital programme approved by the Council in 2010</p> <p>Ensure all Council-owned housing stock is maintained at the decent homes standard going forward, as per the terms of the housing management contract and the Council's long-term business plan</p> <p>Share best practice in terms of DHS plus through the</p>	<p>March 2015</p> <p>March 2016</p> <p>Reviewed annually</p> <p>March 2015</p>

		<p>local housing partnership and determine whether there is any appetite/ added value to be gained from a more co-ordinated approach</p> <p>Establish current baseline of bedsit-style accommodation in the local social housing sector and work with partners to determine a sustainable way forward for this type of accommodation</p>	September 2015
(2)	Ensure that the Council has a robust policy framework in place to improve the quality of existing stock in the owner-occupied and private rented sectors	<p>In collaboration with colleagues in regulatory services, review current powers available to the Council to address poor housing conditions and establish a service level agreement and protocols for the use of these powers</p> <p>Review and refresh the current private sector housing enforcement protocol and home assistance policy</p> <p>Work with partners and relevant colleagues to develop a collaborative approach to improving access to grants, loans, advice and other support for older and disabled people to carry out improvements/ adaptations to their homes</p>	<p>December 2014</p> <p>March 2015</p> <p>March 2015</p>
3.2 Provide affordable warmth for residents in the borough			
Reference	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	Develop advice and advocacy service for people wanting domestic energy efficiency measures	<p>Develop boroughwide service provision for domestic energy efficiency measures to deal with enquiries, referrals and installation of measures.</p> <p>Ensure all housing partners can access the borough wide service provider</p>	September 2014
(2)	Build on and support individual and community based projects that promote	Ensure housing partners are linked to the Council's multi-agency affordable warmth steering group	September 2014

	affordable warmth	<p>Develop a suitable method to keep all housing partners updated with current affordable warmth schemes and initiatives</p> <p>In collaboration with relevant colleagues, determine potential to utilise customer profile data from the housing register, adult social care client list and housing related support client list to identify households who are entitled to free or low cost energy saving measures, but who have not yet taken up the offers available to inform targeted promotion campaign</p>	<p>September 2014</p> <p>December 2014</p>
(3)	Educate to change behaviour; help people to understand cost benefits of making homes more energy efficient	<p>Identify sources of general affordable warmth advice available to residents</p> <p>Identify where affordable warmth advice is available to residents via face-to-face meetings or home visits</p> <p>Identify sources of income maximisation advice and develop systems for referring residents to advisors</p> <p>Investigate and share good practice and work with colleagues providing advice to take advantage of economies of scale wherever possible</p>	<p>December 2014</p> <p>December 2014</p> <p>December 2014</p> <p>Throughout life of strategy</p>
(4)	Investigate examples of good practice for improving the energy efficiency of social housing stock e.g. Warrington's 'social housing solar' model	<p>Establish best practice examples and determine potential viability to replicate in the borough</p> <p>Improve SAP ratings of Council owned housing stock and participate in benchmarking through North West performance improvement club</p> <p>Investigate potential cost v benefits for residents, in terms of reducing utilities bills and reducing fuel poverty, of</p>	<p>December 2014</p> <p>Review target annually</p> <p>December 2014</p>

		installing photo voltaic solar panels on council owned housing stock	
3.3 Promote sustainable design			
Reference	Action	Outputs	Timescale/ target date
(1)	Achieve optimum design, quality and sustainability of new homes in the borough	<p>Work in collaboration with key partners including Registered Providers, developers and colleagues in planning, place and locality teams to encourage new housing development that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • of high quality design • flexible and inclusive in its design, to be able to cater for a diverse range of potential occupants and for the different life stages of its occupants • sustainable both in terms of its environmental impact and in terms of the costs of maintenance and affordable warmth for the occupants going forward • successfully able to integrate, and enable its occupants to integrate, into the local community 	Throughout life of strategy
(2)	Make the most of the opportunities available to promote energy efficient housing in the borough and help reduce CO ² emissions	<p>In collaboration with colleagues in planning and other relevant teams, encourage/ incentivise developers to ensure that new homes support energy efficiency and low carbon priorities</p> <p>Challenge and support developers and Registered Providers to use innovative materials and delivery/ construction methods to reduce the carbon footprint of new development</p>	Throughout life of strategy

5. There is only one question remaining to be asked:

Have we got it right?

Give us your views by completing the online questionnaire here:

<http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/housingstrategyconsultation>

Or, if you prefer, you can email your comments to us at:

housingstrategy@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Or you can write to us at:

Housing Strategy,
Cheshire West and Chester Council,
4, Civic Way,
Council Offices,
Ellesmere Port
CH65 0BE

Or you can call 0300 123 8 123 and ask for housing strategy to speak to a member of the team.

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Appendices

Appendix 1	Evidence base detailed summary – Please note that this document is available to download as a separate document, due to its size.
Appendix 2	National, sub-regional and local housing priorities and policies
Appendix 3	List of other relevant Council plans
Appendix 4	Glossary

Appendix 1: Evidence base detailed summary
document is available to download as a se

Appendix 2: National, sub-regional and local housing priorities and policies

National

- **'Laying the foundations: a housing strategy for England' (2011):**
 - developing innovative new approaches to tackling the shortfall of homes
 - increasing supply to support economic growth and create more balance in the local housing market
 - creating a thriving private rented sector
 - tackling empty homes
 - ensuring that vulnerable people are supported to access and maintain a suitable home and
 - improving the quality, sustainability and design of homes.
- **Major reform of the welfare system, including:**
 - introduction of the size criteria for social housing occupants (commonly known as the 'bedroom tax')
 - a cap on the overall amount of benefit payable to individual households
 - extension of the shared accommodation rate to those aged 26-35; (that group being previously eligible for the single room rate)
 - introduction of universal credit: a single welfare payment for working-age claimants to replace a range of existing benefits, with an overall cap on the amount payable and
 - a reduction in the amount of council tax benefit available to working-age claimants.
- **Major reform of the social housing sector, including:**
 - introduction of affordable rents
 - the power for local authorities to house homeless households in the private rented sector in order to discharge their homelessness duty
 - more freedom for local authorities to decide who should be accepted onto to housing needs registers, and who should have priority for rehousing and
 - changes to the Right to Buy for social housing tenants, including increased discounts to encourage take up.
- **Reform of the planning system, including:**
 - the introduction of a new simplified national planning policy framework (NPPF), to replace the existing planning policy statements, to include a presumption in favour of sustainable development
 - new rights for local people to take control over development in their local areas, through neighbourhood planning
 - introduction of the community right to build and

- the introduction of a new community infrastructure levy on developers for the funding of strategic infrastructure to support development.
- **A more joined up approach to housing and health, including:**
 - recognition of the key importance of housing to health outcomes
 - a requirement for local authorities to promote a more co-ordinated approach to commissioning health and social care and improving public health, through the launch of health and well-being boards with responsibility to develop a local health and well-being strategy and co-ordinate the production of joint strategic needs assessments (JSNAs)/ integrated strategic needs assessments (ISNAs)
 - reinforcing the consultant in public health role in terms of advising on the wider determinants of health and supporting greater integration between health and other services, including the strategic housing function.

Sub-regional:

- **Local investment plan (LIP)**
The LIP sets out the agreed investment parameters to support the Council's economic, housing and environmental ambitions. The LIP has three primary purposes:
 - to set out local priorities for investment and activities to support growth
 - to provide a set of clear priorities and parameters to inform business planning and investment decisions and
 - to provide a prospectus for the local area, setting out key strengths and opportunities, to draw in further inward investment.
- **Building on success: accelerating economic growth in Cheshire and Warrington**
Cheshire and Warrington has a key role to play in driving growth for UK plc and by 2030 the local enterprise partnership aims to:
 - increase annual GVA by at least £11.1 billion to some £30 billion through accelerated growth of our existing businesses, inward investment and new start ups
 - create at least 75,000 jobs with a key focus on manufacturing and exports, as key wealth creators and
 - develop 70,000 new homes to meet the needs of our current and future population.

Local:

- **Council Plan objectives:**
 - 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 and
- more homes meeting the decent homes standard.

- **Local Plan**

When adopted, the Local Plan will replace the existing planning policies that cover the borough of Cheshire West and Chester and will set out the broad spatial vision and priorities for development over the coming years, including new housing development.

The Local Plan is currently undergoing independent examination by a Government appointed planning inspector and, if it is approved, will be followed by a series of more detailed planning policies. These will set out specific site allocations and development policies, including the preferred sites for the location of new homes, which will guide future development in the borough.

- **Altogether better**

- starting well: all children and young people have the best start in life in safe and supportive families. This includes a 'team around the family' assessment, resulting in one single view of the family and all services that they currently use/ require, including housing and the introduction of integrated early support teams, bringing together health, children and young people's services and other professionals, including housing, enabling joint case management and a co-ordinated approach by all relevant agencies to tackle the root cause of the issues identified
- working well: making sure all individuals have the opportunity to work and benefit from a dynamic economy. This involves linking employment and skills with related services, including housing and health, ensuring individuals can get the support they need to address barriers to work.
- living well: all communities are great places to live with neighbourhoods that are safe, attractive and communities are empowered. This is the heart of housing's role in the local community: to provide a safe, secure and sustainable home
- ageing well: all older adults can age well with dignity, independence and as an active participant in the life of their community. This involves supporting older adults to maintain their independence through better early interventions and a recognition of the role that housing plays in supporting optimal health outcomes for those leaving hospital, needing support at home, or needing other forms of accommodation, such as care homes and extra care housing
- smarter services: all services are smart and work together efficiently to tackle causes rather than symptoms. This includes adopting a place-based, rather than organisational approach to the management and use of land and buildings across the public sector, driving successful outcomes.

- **Altogether better for business: an economic growth strategy for West Cheshire (2013-2018)**

Altogether better for business provides the common thread between sub-regional and strategic aspirations and local delivery of Council schemes through private sector-led, locality focused, regeneration boards within West Cheshire: Ellesmere Port development board, Chester Renaissance, Weaver Valley partnership and the Rural regeneration board and in partnership with other organisations (for example University of Chester, Chamber of Commerce).

It is the local strategy for growth and seeks to support the aims of the sub-regional growth strategy (building on success: accelerating economic growth in Cheshire and Warrington) through a package of targeted activity over the next five years designed to facilitate the creation of:

- 5,000 new jobs
- a minimum of 7,300 new homes
- £500m worth of private sector investment

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Appendix 3: List of other relevant Council strategies and documents

The housing strategy is intended to provide the overarching strategic framework for housing in the borough, bringing together the main aims and objectives from a range of Council functions, to promote a co-ordinated approach and a single point of reference for key housing issues. It sits alongside other fundamental strategies, including the Local Plan, the growth strategy and the health and wellbeing strategy, forming part of the wider corporate framework which encapsulates the Council's principal aims and objectives for improving outcomes and improving the quality of life for local people.

There are a number of related Council plans and strategies which are relevant to housing in the borough and these inform and, in turn, are informed by the housing strategy. The following list is not exhaustive, but gives some examples of the main strategies that are associated with the housing strategy in this way:

- **Council plans:**
 - Council Plan 'altogether better'
 - sustainable community strategy: together we can aim high
- **Strategic housing:**
 - affordable warmth strategy
 - rural regeneration strategy and action plan
 - rural housing strategy
 - older persons' housing strategy
 - strategic housing and commissioning business plan (draft)
- **Housing solutions:**
 - allocations policy
 - homelessness strategy
 - homelessness review
 - tenancy strategy
- **Private sector housing:**
 - empty homes strategy
 - home assistance policy
 - enforcement protocol
 - housing standards policy
- **Supporting people:**
 - supporting people commissioning framework
 - supporting people commissioning plan
 - supporting people commissioning policy

- supporting people move on strategy and implementation plan
- supporting people needs assessment
- supporting people vision and values

- **Health and social care:**
 - health and wellbeing strategy
 - adult social care and health strategic commissioning plan
 - adult social care and health market position statement
 - strategic commissioning plan for independence, health and wellbeing (draft)
 - cheshire west and chester and nhs western cheshire joint carers strategy
 - cheshire west and chester and nhs western cheshire autism strategy

- **Planning documents:**
 - current Local Plans and supplementary planning documents
 - emerging Local Plan for the borough
 - neighbourhood plans
 - Ellesmere Port development board - regeneration framework and implementation plan
 - Weaver Valley partnership business development plan
 - Chester 'one city' plan
 - strategic housing market assessment
 - strategic housing land availability assessment
 - Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessment

Appendix 4: Glossary

Affordable housing	Affordable housing is for those households whose housing needs are not met by the market (subject to eligibility criteria); it includes social rented housing (e.g. council housing), affordable rented and intermediate housing.
Affordable housing programme	The Government funding mechanism for the delivery of affordable housing, administered by the Homes and Communities Agency.
Affordable rent/ affordable rented housing	A type of affordable housing; the rent applicable for affordable rented housing can be no more than 80% of the full market rent achievable for the property concerned.
Building for life standards (see also lifetime homes standard)	A set of standards recommended by a partnership of leading industry peers to ensure new development is of a high standard of quality and design.
Choice based lettings	Choice based lettings is a scheme for allocating social housing that enables people on the Housing Register (the 'waiting list') to express an interest or 'bid' for properties which are advertised through the scheme.
Decent homes standard	<p>A technical standard for social housing that ensures homes in the sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meet minimum safety standards • are in a reasonable state of repair • have reasonably modern facilities • have appropriate heating and insulation <p>All four elements of the standard must be met for a home to meet the decency criteria.</p>
ECO – the energy company obligation (See also Green Deal)	A Government scheme which places a legal obligation on the major energy suppliers in the UK to deliver energy efficiency measures/ insulation for vulnerable households and for hard-to-treat homes.
Extra care housing	Extra care housing is self-contained accommodation with care designed to enable older people to maintain their

	independence for as long as possible; the level of care provision is flexible and can be varied to meet the changing needs of individuals as required.
Fuel poverty/ affordable warmth	A household is said to be in fuel poverty if it needs to spend more than 10% of income to heat its home adequately; the Council's Affordable Warmth Strategy sets out how we will work collaboratively with our partners to help people who are struggling to afford to heat their homes to a suitable level for comfort and health and lift households out of fuel poverty.
Green Deal (See also ECO – the energy company obligation)	A Government scheme which aims to help people make energy efficiency improvements to their homes by allowing them to pay the costs through their energy bills rather than upfront.
Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessment	An assessment of the current and future accommodation needs and aspirations of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, including any additional support needs.
HCA – the Homes and Communities Agency	The national housing and regeneration agency for England; the HCA administers the Government's affordable housing programme to fund the development of new affordable homes and is responsible for the regulation of social housing.
Housing Association (See also Registered Provider)	A provider of social housing registered with and regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency.
Housing management contract	The Council has outsourced the day-to-day management of its own housing stock to a Registered Provider (Plus Dane); the housing management contract sets out the agreed terms for carrying out the housing management function on behalf of the Council.
Integrated strategic needs assessment (ISNA) (also called joint strategic needs assessment [JSNA])	A comprehensive analysis of the current and future health and social care needs of the local community that informs evidence-based commissioning.
Intermediate housing	A type of affordable housing that is let at rent that is higher than a social rent but below the market rent.
Joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA)	See integrated strategic needs assessment (ISNA)
Lifetime homes standard (See also 'building for life standards')	A set of 16 design criteria for residential buildings that delivers accessible, flexible

	and easily adaptable homes to meet the broadest possible range of housing needs.
Local Plan	The Council's long-term strategic planning framework, setting out our vision and priorities for development across the borough, in terms of both spatial and strategic planning objectives, including housing, economic and environmental objectives.
Market housing/ market rent	The sales value/ rent which a property can achieve on the open market.
Older people	There is no agreed definition of older or old people and people generally differ widely in what they consider to be 'old'; the Government defines older people as those aged over 50 for the collection of statistics, so this is generally accepted to be the starting point for planning for specialist housing and services for people approaching later life.
Registered Provider (See also Housing Association)	A provider of social housing registered with and regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency. Registered providers include housing associations (also known as private Registered Providers) and councils with retained housing stock.
Right to Buy funding	Social housing tenants have the right to buy their home at a discount as long as they meet certain eligibility criteria; the Council is allowed to keep some of the income generated by Right to Buy sales to fund the development of new social housing.
Section 106 agreement (S106)	These agreements are named after Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which allows local planning authorities to enter into an agreement with a developer to require certain conditions in relation to the grant of planning permission; Section 106 agreements are often used to require developers to provide affordable housing as part of any new development.
Social housing	Housing provided at a lower cost than market housing for those in housing need; social housing is provided by the Council and by Registered Providers.

Strategic housing market assessment (SHMA)	A comprehensive analysis of the local housing market that provides an assessment of local housing needs and intelligence on all housing market sectors to inform the development of key Council strategies and policies, including the housing strategy and Local Plan.
Supported housing	Housing that is provided with care and support services to enable vulnerable people to live as independently as possible and continue to play an active role in their local community. Examples include sheltered housing for the elderly, nursing homes and care homes for people with physical and mental disabilities.
Sustainable development/ sustainability:	The most widely used definition of sustainable development, is the 'Brundtland' definition, which defines it as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.
Trust HomeChoice	Trust Homechoice is a choice based lettings scheme delivered by Cheshire West and Chester Council in partnership with Chester and District Housing Trust, Plus Dane Housing and Weaver Vale Housing Trust.
Universal credit	A new single benefit for people who are looking for work or on a low income. Universal credit is being introduced across the country in stages as part of the Government's welfare reform programme and will replace: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jobseeker's allowance • employment and support allowance • income support • working tax credit • child tax credit • housing benefit
Welfare reform	A programme of changes to the benefits system currently being introduced by Government.