



Cheshire West & Chester Council

Vulnerable and Older People's Accommodation Plan

2016 - 2020



Building futures, opening doors



Cheshire West
and Chester

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Foreword

Welcome to the Vulnerable and Older People's Accommodation Plan for Cheshire West and Chester.

Accommodation is inextricably linked to health; poor housing conditions can contribute to physical and mental health problems and people without a home experience some of the worst health inequalities of all. A safe, warm and well-designed home enables those leaving hospital to return home sooner and helps older and disabled people to be able to maintain their independence and stay in their own home for longer.

Providing access to suitable accommodation that meets the needs of the individual thus helps to promote improved health outcomes, as well as meeting housing need and promoting independence.

Whilst the majority of our residents are currently well-housed, in good quality, well-designed homes that they can afford, there are still challenges to be met. Older people may find themselves struggling to keep their home in good repair as they age and those with disabilities or other life-limiting conditions can find it difficult to access appropriate and sustainable accommodation that meets their needs.

We know that we need to promote the delivery of more new homes in the borough in general, but we need to make sure that these homes are well-designed, of high quality, are sustainable and meet the needs of our diverse population. This includes meeting the needs of those who require specialist accommodation and ensuring that there is a suitable range and choice of accommodation for our ageing population and for those individuals with low level health issues that are able to meet their own housing needs on the open market, or with low level support.

This accommodation plan sets out our aims for meeting the accommodation needs of older and vulnerable people living in the borough for the next five years. It has been informed by a comprehensive evidence base, based on research into the current supply of and demand for accommodation for older and vulnerable people living in the borough.

It has also been shaped through consultation with stakeholders and key partners including our Strategic Housing Partnership, colleagues in Strategic Commissioning, Social Care, Health, Children's Services and Leaving Care, local residents, voluntary and community groups and groups representing the range of needs existing within our diverse population. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took the time to contribute to the consultation; the feedback we received helped us to better understand the issues affecting our vulnerable and older residents and their housing needs and aspirations.

We face significant challenges in delivering this accommodation plan, however, not least due to the uncertain economic climate and continuing public sector spending cuts; we have witnessed unprecedented housing market conditions across the UK in recent years, resulting in a much lower rate of housing development and the biggest changes to the country's welfare system for decades. These changes will have a profound impact, not only on the ability of local people to access and maintain accommodation, but on the resources available to us to deliver this accommodation plan.

It is clear that we cannot deliver our ambitions to improve housing outcomes for the borough's older and vulnerable people by ourselves and this plan sets out how we will work with our key partners in the housing sector, including Registered Providers, developers and care providers and with our colleagues in commissioning, health and social care to support the provision of the accommodation that local people need.

Together we can deliver better housing outcomes for all of Cheshire West and Chester's residents, helping them to live healthier and more independent lives and ensuring that the borough remains a great place to live for everyone.

Introduction

This vulnerable and older people's accommodation plan is intended to provide a clear statement of the Council's vision and aims for accommodation for vulnerable and older people living in the borough for the next five years. It sets out the key drivers and issues affecting the borough's diverse communities and what the Council intends to do to help overcome these challenges and promote the provision of a range of suitable accommodation options, helping local people to live healthier and more independent lives.

The aims of this accommodation plan are to:

- Explain the accommodation issues affecting older and vulnerable people living in the borough
- Identify ways in which we can work with our partners to improve housing outcomes for older and vulnerable people and
- Ensure that everyone living in the borough has the opportunity to access a safe, sustainable and suitable home that meets their needs.

It will answer the following questions:

1. **Why** do we need a vulnerable and older people's accommodation plan?
2. **What** are the key priorities?
3. **Where** have these priorities come from?
4. **How** will we achieve our aim to improve housing outcomes for vulnerable and older people living in the borough?

It is important to note that, whilst this accommodation plan is principally concerned with the provision of appropriate housing and other accommodation to enable vulnerable and older people to live healthier and more independent lives, in many cases, accommodation is only one part of the solution and vulnerable and older people require a co-ordinated response from a number of agencies and a range of support services. This is why it is so important that there is a joined-up approach across service areas and with our partners to provide co-ordinated and holistic solutions.

1. Why do we need a vulnerable and older people's accommodation plan?

The quality of housing and accommodation that vulnerable and older people live in is fundamental to their health outcomes; poor housing conditions can contribute to physical and mental health problems and people without a home experience some of the worst health inequalities of all.

A safe, warm and well-designed home 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 as long as is possible, or as long as they prefer to.

Housing must therefore be recognised as both a key driver of health inequalities and also as a major force in improving health outcomes.

The ideal home environment can:

- Protect and improve health and wellbeing and prevent physical and mental ill-health
- Enable people to manage their health and care needs more effectively, including long-term conditions, and ensure positive care experiences by integrating services in the home
- Allow people to remain in their own home for as long as they choose or are able to
- Delay and reduce the need for primary care and social care interventions, including admission to long-term care settings
- Prevent hospital admissions
- Enable timely discharge from hospital and prevent re-admissions and
- Enable rapid recovery from periods of ill-health or planned hospital admissions.

In order to reduce health inequalities and improve health and wellbeing, the home should be:

- Warm and affordable to heat
- Free from hazards and well maintained and
- Accessible for both occupants and visitors.

A joined-up approach to housing delivery and housing and care services can therefore help to promote the best possible home environment and ensure that everyone living in the borough has a safe, warm, suitable and sustainable home that meets their needs.

Whilst the majority of the borough's residents are able to meet their own housing needs, either by buying or renting a home on the open market, those with disabilities, life-limiting illnesses or other issues that impact on their day-to-day lives may find it difficult to access a suitable and sustainable home.

Compared to their peers, households containing one or more vulnerable people are:

- More likely to be in housing need
- More likely to be living in homes that are not suitable for their needs
- Less likely to be able to afford to access home ownership and
- Less likely to be able to move to a more suitable home or to buy in the support that they require to continue to live independently.

We all have preferences and aspirations when it comes to how we want to live. We may prefer to live alone, with a partner or with friends, close to family members, or in a certain location and we believe that everybody should be able to make these same choices, regardless of age, disability or other issues affecting their day-to-day lives.

However, these choices and aspirations must be tempered by what is realistic, including what is affordable and practicable. We know that the majority of people living in the borough would like to own their own home, but this is simply not a realistic option for many households, so it is important that there is a range of other options available, to enable those who are able to live independently, with support if needed, to make an informed decision and to be able to exercise real choice in accessing accommodation that meets their needs.

Encouraging self-reliance and promoting independent living wherever possible contributes towards increasing confidence and self-esteem, helping to improve mental and emotional wellbeing, as well as physical health outcomes. It also reduces the likelihood of unnecessary admissions to hospital or residential care, minimising the need to place vulnerable and older individuals in institutional settings, thus reducing costs to the public purse, a key consideration in the current economic climate and in the context of increasing public sector cuts.

Accommodation for older people presents a particular challenge for the borough going forward, as population forecasts show that our community is an ageing one. The number of people aged 65 and over is expected to grow by around 11% and the number of those aged 85 and over is expected to increase by 22.5% by 2022.

This is likely to mean an increase in the number of frail elderly people living in the borough and those suffering from age-related health problems and dementia. This will undoubtedly mean increasing pressure on relevant accommodation and support services for those affected.

There are significant challenges in delivering new homes of any type in the borough given the current economic circumstances, however; we have witnessed unprecedented housing market conditions across the UK in recent years, resulting in the lowest rate of development for decades and the scale of public sector spending cuts continues to have a profound impact, not only on local people's ability to access and maintain suitable accommodation, but on the resources available to the Council to facilitate the delivery of appropriate new homes and support for our residents.

To achieve our aim of improving health outcomes and supporting independence through a suitable and sustainable housing offer, we must maximise existing partnerships and develop innovative new relationships and ways of working, to drive delivery of the homes that local people need.

The Care Act 2014 makes clear that housing is a key element impacting on health. The Act brought about many changes in the way that the Council considers accommodation as part of a holistic care package for those with disabilities and long-term health issues. The Strategic Commissioning Plan (2014) sets out the approach that the Council will take to the delivery of social care and health services for the borough's residents, based on four key tenets:

- **Interaction:** aims include improved information and advice, creating dementia-friendly communities, tackling social isolation and supporting residents to play a more active role in managing their own care through the use of Direct Payments
- **Innovation:** this includes increased use of Telecare services and home adaptations
- **Investment:** this involves better management of services, providers and markets to ensure the provision of high quality services that provide value for money
- **Integration:** continue to work alongside partner organisations to provide seamless care to local people and take advantage of opportunities to reduce duplication and achieve economies of scale.

By working together in a more joined-up way across the health, housing and social care sectors, we can ensure that we maximise the resources available to us to drive delivery of our shared objectives.

2. What are the key priorities?

2.1 Vision

Our vision for the vulnerable and older people's accommodation plan reflects the Council's wider strategic aims and other local and national priorities.

Vision: There is a suitable range of accommodation in the borough that supports older and vulnerable people to live healthier lives and be as independent as possible.

2.2 Priorities:

Priority 1: Increasing supply – promote the delivery of new specialist accommodation and more accessible general needs accommodation that meets the anticipated needs of older and vulnerable people living in the borough

Priority 2: Design – the design of new homes supports older and vulnerable people to live healthier lives and maintain independence

Priority 3: Supporting health and independence – the right range of accommodation and services is available to support older and vulnerable people to live healthier lives and maintain independence

Priority 4: Raising awareness – information about the range of accommodation and support options available is easily accessible and actively promoted

Priority 5: Further developing the evidence base – robust evidence is available to inform future policy and delivery plans.

Priority 1: Increasing supply – promote the delivery of new specialist accommodation and more accessible general needs accommodation that meets the anticipated needs of older and vulnerable people living in the borough.

We understand that people prize their independence and want to remain in their own home for as long as possible. Sometimes, however, the best option for an individual to maintain the highest degree of independence possible and maintain or improve their quality of life is to move to alternative accommodation that is more suited to their needs.

This means it is vital that there is an appropriate range of specialist housing options available in the borough that meet varying levels of need and support people to live as independently as possible.

We are already working with our partners to promote and facilitate the delivery of new accommodation that supports older and vulnerable people to live healthier and more independent lives. This includes the delivery of both specialist accommodation and new general needs housing that is able to be easily adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities and to accommodate the changing needs of occupants as they age.

One of the ways we will do this is through encouraging the use of more flexible design for new homes (see section on Priority 2: Design), but could also include promoting the development of more bungalows and Extra Care schemes on suitable sites and where there is evidence of need for this type of accommodation in the local population.

Extra Care accommodation provides a self-contained home with on-site care and support a range of facilities designed to help 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. The Council has recently completed an Extra Care development programme providing over 400 units of Extra Care accommodation for the borough's older people.

The Council has also been successful in gaining approval for a development programme of 230 new affordable homes for the borough, to be funded through an increase in borrowing within the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Around ten per cent of these new homes will be built to the higher Category 2 standard of current Building Regulations (largely equating to the old Lifetime Homes Standard) and there is the potential for a proportion of these units to be built to fully wheelchair accessible standards, where there is a local need identified.

The Council's Health and Housing Group, which is a sub-group of the Health and Wellbeing Board and which has been instrumental in developing the draft accommodation plan to this point, already has an existing mechanism to share and record information regarding approaches from developers and care providers wishing to develop specialist accommodation in the borough. This enables the group to monitor the location, type and number of units of new specialist accommodation in West Cheshire to help inform future planning and policy direction.

There is the potential to extend this mechanism and to establish a sub-group with a specific focus on new development, working with colleagues from relevant service areas, developers, Registered Providers and care providers to take a more strategic approach to the delivery of specialist accommodation in the borough and to give a clear steer on the homes that are needed, based on the evidence available.

Comprehensive and robust information on current needs and buy-in from partners and from colleagues within the Council will be critical to the success of this proposal, however and, in light of the current economic circumstances and ongoing welfare reforms, particularly the proposal to extend the cap on housing benefits to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate for new social sector tenants, funding new supported housing schemes is likely to be increasingly challenging in the future.

Other sources of funding may be made available for the delivery of specialist or adapted accommodation and the Council will seek to take advantage of these wherever possible. For example, the Council supported a bid by a partner Registered Provider to the Department of Health's Care and Support Specialist Housing Fund in 2015 to deliver accommodation for people with mental health issues in the borough. The Registered Provider has yet to hear whether this submission was successful, but the Council will continue to work with partners to identify any future funding opportunities.

The Council is also considering working with a social property investment fund to establish the viability of a build and lease arrangement to provide affordable rented accommodation and potentially specialist housing such as Extra Care accommodation in the borough.

Priority 2: Design: the design of new homes supports older and vulnerable people to live healthier lives and maintain independence.

The borough's Local Plan provides the overarching strategic spatial framework for all new development in the borough, including new housing. Part 1 of the Local Plan sets out the broad planning policy framework for the borough and includes the following policies relating to the development of housing for older people, but which will also benefit those with disabilities, life-limiting illnesses or other issues that impact on their day-to-day lives:

“Proposals for new housing should take account of the needs of that particular area and especially of:

- The provision of small family homes to assist households into home ownership and for older people who may wish to downsize
- The provision of a range of accommodation types to meet the long term needs of older people; this could include the provision of Lifetime Homes, bungalows and Extra Care housing.”

Part 2 policies are currently being drawn up and these will provide more detailed policy guidance for developers, potentially covering issues such as the design of new homes, promoting health and wellbeing on new developments and more specific guidance around accommodation for older people.

It is essential that these policies reflect the evidenced need for housing and other accommodation for both vulnerable and older people in the borough and the Council’s Health and Housing Group will be instrumental in helping to develop these new policies.

There will be robust consultation on the proposed policies and the Council’s Health and Housing Group will be instrumental in helping to develop and refine them, ensuring that they take account of the evidenced needs of the local population.

The Health and Housing Group is keen to see that planning policy endorses the need for at least a proportion of new homes in the borough to be built to the higher Category 2 standard of current Building Regulations (equating to the Lifetime Homes Standard). However, all Local Plan policies are subject to approval by a Government Planning Inspector and any such policy would need to be substantiated by robust evidence of need to gain approval.

In addition, the Strategic Housing Team is developing a series of locality-based delivery plans aimed at bringing forward sites that have extant planning permission for housing, but remain undeveloped. Many of these sites will deliver an element of affordable housing and the delivery plan also seeks to identify any interventions or available incentives that can be used to help stimulate delivery. Should relevant funding become available, there is the potential to identify sites through the delivery plan that could be used to deliver additional specialist accommodation or homes built to the higher Category 2 standard of current Building Regulations (Lifetime Homes Standard).

Ensuring that housing design is flexible enough to be easily adapted to meet the changing needs of occupants over time does not have to involve expensive additions or major structural changes, however. It can be as simple as ensuring that staircases are straight and that there is a power point at the bottom so that a stairlift can be easily installed, that doorframes are wide enough to allow for wheelchair access, that there is sufficient turning space in rooms and halls or corridors for wheelchair users and that there is a ground floor toilet.

Although it is unlikely that the Local Plan will be able to impose these requirements on all newbuild homes, we will be asking Registered Providers and other interested partners to sign up to a voluntary code of practice to provide homes that meet these criteria on new developments, particularly for new affordable housing.

The Health and Housing Group is also keen to ensure that planning policy supports broader health and wellbeing principles through inclusive design, particularly on large scale developments. The principles of inclusive design aim to ensure that buildings and their surrounding environments are accessible to everyone, irrespective of age or ability, through:

- Appropriate space for people regardless of body size, posture and mobility
- Minimal physical strength and economy of effort needed to navigate the environment
- Ease of use, comprehension and understanding regardless of physical or cognitive abilities
- A safe, comfortable and healthy environment that minimises hazards.

Environments should be designed to encourage healthy activities such as walking and cycling and should comprise greenspaces open to local communities such as parks and allotments. A joined-up approach to the provision of accommodation and a local environment that encourages people to get outdoors and be more active not only promotes a healthier lifestyle and better mental health, but helps to combat social isolation, which is a key concern for the borough's older residents.

Design for accommodation for older people should also include dementia-friendly elements such as:

- Legible public spaces that give clues to help people with dementia understand where they are, what is expected of them in that space and which way they need to go to access other areas
- Wide, short corridors with no dead ends or blind bends, gentle gradients where a change of floor level is unavoidable, non-slip flooring and easily visible handrails
- Lots of natural light and views/ access to safe and interesting outdoor spaces and
- Distinction between different rooms and spaces within private accommodation e.g. clear demarcation of living room and kitchen area.

Priority 3: Supporting health and independence - the right range of accommodation and services is available to support older and vulnerable people to live healthier lives and maintain independence.

- **Supporting people to stay in their own home:** Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), Decent Homes Loans (DHL) and Home Safety Grants (HSG) are available to help people to fund adaptations to their home and to help maintain it in a safe state of repair:
 - DFGs are mandatory grants towards the costs of funding aids and adaptations to the home, part-funded by Central Government, which can considerably improve a disabled person's quality of life and help them to maintain their independence and personal dignity
 - HSGs are intended to help with the costs of removing serious hazards within the home that could adversely affect the health and safety of occupants, including hazards associated with substantial disrepair
 - DHGs facilitate equity release to help home owners pay for essential repairs and improvements, bringing homes up to the Decent Homes Standard.

There are a number of national case studies showing that DFGs not only deliver improved outcomes for older and disabled people but, by reducing the incidence of slips, trips and falls and helping to prevent deterioration of existing health conditions, can save a considerable amount of money to the local NHS. Since 2009, 1,186 DFGs have been completed in the borough, including 142 grants for children. This equates to investment of £12.2 million, which it is estimated could save the NHS in the region of £5.5 million over a 10 year period.

Older people with mobility issues and those with physical and learning disabilities are most likely to receive the greatest benefit from these schemes. Equipment provided ranges from simple aids to day-to-day living like ramps, grab rails and hand rails, to the installation of a walk-in shower or stairlift. In exceptional circumstances major work may be funded or part-funded, such as the provision of an extension to provide a ground floor toilet/ bathroom or bedroom.

In West Cheshire, these schemes are administered through the Council's Home Improvement Agency, which also offers a 'handyperson' service providing help with a range of small jobs to older and disabled households, such as changing a tap washer, putting up curtain poles, fixing handrails and basic gardening. National research by Age UK and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that many older people were not aware that this sort of assistance was available, however, underlining the need for awareness raising among relevant sectors of the community.

Adaptations can be very costly to provide, however. There must be recognition that supporting people to move into more appropriate accommodation, where this is the best long-term solution for the individual concerned, should be the recommended option.

Whilst we acknowledge that the majority of people will want to stay in their own homes for as long as possible, without sufficient specialist support, vulnerable and older people can become trapped in unsuitable accommodation, which is no longer financially or physically manageable and within the confines of which it is not possible to provide sufficient care to enable them to continue to enjoy a good quality of life.

The majority of people in the borough own their own home and even older owner occupiers who do not need personal care and support, can find themselves in a position where they find it difficult to maintain their home in a good state of repair as they age. The latest private sector stock condition survey for the borough (2013) shows that non-decency rates are higher among older owner occupiers and particularly so in rural wards.

Older people living in non-decent housing are more at risk of fuel poverty and ill health arising from or aggravated by cold and damp conditions. The majority of Excess Winter Deaths occur among older people, especially women, and those with underlying health problems. While many associate deaths during periods of cold weather with hypothermia, most are in fact due to cardiac disease, strokes and respiratory problems. Older and disabled people are therefore likely to receive the greatest benefit from initiatives to provide affordable warmth for the borough's residents, helping to ensure their home is affordable to heat. The borough's Affordable Warmth Strategy, currently under review, sets out the initiatives underway to achieve this.

Older people living in rural communities can also be at increased risk of increasing isolation and diminishing access to services, including healthcare services, which could adversely impact on their future health and wellbeing. Nationally, research shows that younger people are leaving rural towns and villages because of a lack of affordable housing and employment opportunities, which means services and businesses like GP surgeries, shops and post offices are unsustainable. Public transport may also be reduced, increasing the potential for isolation and driving up the difficulty and cost of providing care in the home.

The borough's rural population is ageing faster than that in the urban areas, so it is likely that the situation for older people living in rural locations could deteriorate over time. Ensuring a range of attractive, suitable and sustainable alternative accommodation options is available, as well as offering help and assistance with adaptations and repairs to help those who want to stay in their own homes, will allow older people to make an informed decision about their future accommodation choices.

Affordable rural housing is recognised as a key support to maintaining healthy rural communities and there is a rural housing delivery plan currently under development as part of the Council's wider housing strategy framework.

Telecare and other assistive technologies can also offer a cost-effective solution for older and vulnerable people and can serve as a key means of managing needs independently within the home without resorting to more intensive models of care provision. Telecare services can range from pendant alarms, fall detection equipment, smoke detectors, gas shut-off valves, pressure sensors, and door sensors, which alert a central monitoring point when activated. The monitoring centre will then try to contact the service user and/ or identified carer, or will summon emergency help if necessary.

Telecare equipment and other assistive technology are both key components in helping individuals to manage increasingly complex care needs in their own home and can help people to feel safer, reduce reliance on more intensive home care packages and delay or avoid the need to move to an institutional care setting.

- **Supported housing and Extra Care accommodation:** Supported housing is a generic term for housing which is augmented by some kind of care or support service, or which is specifically designed to help vulnerable individuals to manage their day-to-day needs and maintain their independence. It is usually used to denote lower intensity kinds of provision within the community; institutional care, which is the most intensive kind of accommodation for vulnerable people, is not normally deemed to be supported accommodation, but the term does include traditional sheltered housing and Extra Care schemes, as well as tenancies supported by floating support services.

The vast majority of people with disabilities, long-term health conditions or other issues that impact on their day-to-day lives have low level needs and are able to successfully live independently within the community, either on their own, with help from a family member or carer, or with an appropriate package of care and support.

Conversely, for people with higher level and acute care needs, who are unable to be housed safely within the community, residential accommodation may continue to be the only suitable solution, but the Council aspires to reducing reliance on residential and institutional care, in favour of promoting independence and choice.

Access to supported housing can play a key role in the treatment of those abusing drugs and/ or alcohol in particular, by providing a stable environment with support that helps to break the cycle of addiction that leads to sustained negative outcomes. It can also play a key role in supporting families and individuals experiencing domestic abuse, providing a safe and stable environment that supports recovery.

A supply of suitable and sustainable move on accommodation for these client groups is also essential, so that they are able to access permanent accommodation and can be supported to achieve independence, when they are ready, when they are ready to do so.

Stable accommodation is particularly beneficial for mental health clients and those with learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorders, so there is an additional benefit for these groups in finding long-term accommodation solutions, where support services can be provided on-site. This can be achieved in the community with an appropriate package of care and floating support, but can be more easily achieved and more cost effective to deliver in Extra Care accommodation.

Extra Care accommodation provides a self-contained home with 24-hour on-site care and support available and a range of facilities designed to help older and vulnerable 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.

Extra Care developments generally also comprise a range of communal facilities and amenities, which offer residents the opportunity to engage in a host of social activities, combating social isolation and promoting health and wellbeing. These can include a library, residents lounge, gym, assisted bathing, restaurant, hairdresser, IT suite and on-site health facilities. Many have a guest suite so that residents are able to invite visitors to stay and many of the amenities provided are open to surrounding residents, encouraging wider community engagement.

Extra Care schemes cater to residents with varying levels of need, allowing care to be tailored to the individual's circumstances, but are at their most effective in providing those with moderate-to-high care needs with an independent lifestyle they may not otherwise be able to sustain.

The Council has recently completed an Extra Care development programme, which has delivered over 400 units of new Extra Care accommodation for older people living in the borough. The Council is keen to learn any lessons from this development programme that can be applied to the development of more schemes in the future and, in light of ongoing public sector spending cuts, to work with partners to find innovative new ways of funding additional schemes going forward. In light of the borough's ageing population, specialist Extra Care schemes offering care and support for dementia sufferers are considered a particular priority.

The majority of the new Extra Care schemes delivered in the borough to date are aimed at people aged 55 and over, but the Council acknowledges the need to promote greater independence for those with moderate-to-high level care and support needs regardless of age.

Extra Care accommodation can also provide younger people with physical, sensory and learning disabilities and mental health issues with an environment that supports improved health outcomes and promotes independence. Extra Care facilities for those aged under 55 should therefore also be considered a priority.

Shared housing with support or 'keyring' type schemes may also be appropriate for some individuals with lower level needs. The 'keyring' model utilises community volunteers to provide peer support to individuals living in their own homes in the immediate vicinity, helping them to develop the lifeskills needed to reach and maintain independence and signposting to any appropriate services or agencies as and when the need arises.

Evidence shows that, the sooner individuals can achieve independence, the better; providing vulnerable people with the right support, environment and skills to live independently as early in life as possible promotes autonomy and self-reliance, which can prevent the deterioration of health and escalating care requirements later in life, but more importantly, enables the individual to have more control in their day-to-day life and a more fulfilling lifestyle.

With this in mind, a transitional approach for young people is clearly of vital importance, particularly for those leaving children's services, care leavers transitioning to adulthood and adults previously being cared for in the family home; it is especially of concern for ageing carers of adult children with care and support needs, who may need to be moved to alternative accommodation when their parents can no longer care for them. It is therefore very important that individuals from these customer groups and their families and carers are encouraged to plan ahead, so that they can become used to the prospect of living as independently as possible and are assisted to experience alternative ways of living and develop the relevant skills needed before reaching a crisis.

Priority 4: Raising awareness – information about the range of accommodation and support options available is easily accessible and actively promoted.

There is a range of accommodation and support services available in West Cheshire to help older and vulnerable individuals. This includes the provision of information, advice and assistance about the types of accommodation, help and support available and signposting to other support providers and voluntary agencies in the borough where appropriate.

Information and advice services are integral to the health outcomes of older and vulnerable people and a vital component of the package of support which complements the accommodation offer available within the borough.

These services provide an effective early intervention and prevention mechanism, helping people to access lower levels of support early on in their care journey that can prevent their condition from worsening and help them to achieve and maintain independence.

Raising awareness of the help and support available to help older and vulnerable people to live healthier lives and maintain their independence for longer is therefore critical to help people to plan ahead proactively and make an informed choice about how their current and future accommodation and care needs can be met.

The Council operates an enhanced housing options service through its Housing Solutions team, which provides a single point of contact for all housing-related advice and information. The Housing Solutions service can give advice to people on how to make living in their own homes more sustainable, renting a home in the social housing or private rented sector, issues relating to homelessness and can provide appropriate referrals on to the relevant support and care services, including social care if appropriate.

Many households in need of help may not currently be known to the Council or other service providers, however and the danger is that they will only approach a service for help when a crisis occurs. This may be particularly true of ageing carers of adult children with special needs, residents with existing health issues or disabilities reaching old age and people with low level mental health issues or learning disabilities that may be affected by the ongoing welfare reforms, but have previously been self-sufficient.

It is equally important to consider the needs of those who may be caring for an elderly relative or friend and to ensure that they are aware of and able to access any relevant support and assistance, either for themselves or for the cared for person. Early presentation helps people to be able to plan ahead for the future more effectively, avoiding any potential crisis occurring.

This approach not only enables a more personalised, proactive response to the needs of older and vulnerable people, but can generate cost savings by avoiding the need for intensive support and specialised services, which are more likely to be needed once a crisis occurs.

The Council is in the process of developing a new 'local offer' website, which will provide a directory of services offered by the Council and will signpost to help and assistance provided by other organisations, including the voluntary sector. Although still under development, there is already a comprehensive amount of information available to people looking for help and the site has been designed to be simple to use and make it as easy as possible to find relevant information.

In addition to the local offer website, the Council works with representative groups and the voluntary sector to raise awareness of services and the different types of accommodation available, including the Corporate Disabled Access Forum, the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board, Age UK Cheshire, Cheshire West Citizens Advice and DIAL West Cheshire.

To widen awareness further, it is proposed to link in with the home library service run in partnership by the Council and the Royal Voluntary Service, which delivers and collects books for local people who are unable to get to the library by themselves due to mobility issues and to link in with other frontline staff and agencies that visit service users in their own homes.

Priority 5: Further developing the evidence base – robust evidence is available to inform future policy and delivery plans.

A robust and comprehensive evidence base is key to planning to meet the accommodation and related needs of vulnerable and older people living in the borough. Whilst the review that informed this accommodation plan has been of immense value in providing key information, it also highlighted a lack of data for certain service user groups and a lack of refined data.

For example, there is limited data available at lower geographic levels, including at locality level. Although data is available for each of the NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups covering Cheshire West and Chester, for example, it is largely based on population data and Census data. Census data on disability levels is particularly problematic, as it is self-reporting and does not give any details as to the type of disability concerned.

It is also important to note that many people with disabilities, life-limiting illnesses or other issues that impact on their day-to-day lives may not be captured by the data available to us. For example, it is anticipated that many more people with learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorders live in the community unknown to service providers, but being supported by their families. This can cause problems in the future, if care needs escalate and when parents are no longer able to provide care due to old age or their own ill health.

It is therefore key to target households providing care that are currently self-sufficient and encourage them to make themselves known to the Council at an early stage, so that they can be supported to develop future care plans for their loved ones. This will help us to plan ahead in terms of anticipating the demand for care and specialist accommodation for the future, but more importantly will enable the looked after individual to undergo a planned transition and achieve the best possible outcome, taking their needs into account.

A comprehensive evidence base is vital to establish a robust baseline from which to monitor progress, as well as to inform future policy and delivery plans and we will work with colleagues and partners through the Health and Housing Group to develop information sharing protocols going forward, to ensure that relevant information can be collected.

The Care Act has established the right for anyone who needs care or support to carry out day-to-day tasks to request an assessment, leading to a comprehensive care plan for those found to be eligible. This includes any assistance, aids and adaptations needed to be able to continue to live independently and these assessments will be a valuable source of information on needs going forward.

Local authorities and health authorities have a duty to produce a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), the purpose of which is to assess current and future health needs, providing a comprehensive health evidence base to inform strategic decision making and commissioning. The JSNA is made up of a range of statistics and reports which are refreshed on a regular basis. Research is currently underway for a new mental health report for the borough, for example and any new information arising from this research will inform the first review of this accommodation plan (12 months following the date of adoption).

3. Where have these priorities come from?

3.1 The evidence base

- **Vulnerable and older people's accommodation review**

The first step in developing a vulnerable and older people's accommodation plan for the borough was to undertake a review of current supply and demand for relevant accommodation to identify any gaps, both in terms of provision and in terms of available intelligence, likely future accommodation needs and key areas for action and further research. This review provided a robust evidence base that was used to inform the development of this accommodation plan.

Information from a range of different sources was used to develop the review, including customer and accommodation profiles from colleagues across the Council and our partners, our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and national data services and toolkits which give broad estimates of need for different client groups based on existing population data and forecasts for population growth. More information on the data sources used can be found in the review document.

Whilst it is acknowledged that vulnerable people do not exist as a homogenous group and that many vulnerable individuals have complex or multiple needs and may receive services from a number of different providers, including those supplied by the Council, service user records are generally classified in terms of the primary need identified. For ease of reference, therefore, the review focussed on a number of key client groups, namely:

- Older People
- People with learning disabilities
- People with mental health issues
- Care leavers
- People misusing drugs and/ or alcohol
- People with physical and/ or sensory disabilities
- People subjected to domestic abuse
- People who are homeless/ threatened with homelessness
- Gypsies and Travellers.

- **Summary of findings from the review**

In brief, the findings from the review were as follows (more information can be found in the review document, including key issues and outcomes for individual client groups):

- A broad range and type of accommodation is required to meet the diversity of need identified in the borough's population
- There is a lack of awareness of the services and support available, particularly among those not already known to service providers
- The borough's ageing population profile is likely to result in:
 - Increasing numbers of frail elderly people and older people who may need care and support and access to specialist accommodation in the future
 - Increasing numbers of older people with existing conditions and health issues e.g. increasing proportion of older people with learning disabilities
 - An increasing number of ageing carers looking after adult children with care needs in the family home
- Balancing the needs of individuals with multiple issues is a challenge, for example someone with learning disabilities and substance abuse issues
- There is a lack of move on accommodation for those transitioning to independence and care leavers transitioning to adulthood

- Improving health outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers and homeless people is a key concern
- Wider economic context: diminishing resources/ increasing public sector cuts, welfare reforms and subdued housing market.

- **Feedback from consultation on the review**

The review was published on the Council's website for a period of three calendar months from 1 September to 30 November 2015 and stakeholders including service users, carers, providers, third sector organisations and relevant representative groups were invited to view and comment on it. This gave partners and stakeholders the opportunity to tell us whether they were satisfied that the review represented an accurate picture of the supply of and demand for accommodation and related services for vulnerable and older people living in the borough and to highlight any omissions or revisions necessary.

We also published draft key outcomes and priorities based on the information in the review and a comprehensive equality analysis, to give stakeholders the opportunity to comment on these at the same time.

Although people were encouraged to complete an online questionnaire to give us their views, given the nature of the client groups that were likely to want to comment, respondents were also able to give us their feedback in a number of different ways including writing, emailing or telephoning and speaking to Council officers directly, as preferred. Council officers also attended meetings of relevant representative groups, such as the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board, to discuss the review findings and members of the Health and Housing Group raised awareness of the review and developing accommodation plan at other meetings that they attend, such as the Stakeholder Network and the Corporate Disabled Access Forum.

The vast majority of people who responded to the consultation agreed that the review represented an accurate picture of the supply of and demand for accommodation and related services for vulnerable and older people living in the borough. Where people disagreed, reasons given included (in no particular order):

- Use of bed and breakfast type accommodation for homeless people should be avoided unless it is an emergency (this is already the case)
- There needs to be an awareness that the money that can be spent on adaptations is reducing and that residents are encouraged and supported to move to the most appropriate accommodation that is already adapted before they reach the point of crisis (i.e. a more prevention-focused approach)

- The need for a more joined-up approach between housing/ accommodation and health and social care services to remove barriers to accessing suitable accommodation for service users (work is already underway to improve the links between housing, health and social care through the Care Act implementation project)
- The growth of the elderly learning disability population will present particular difficulties and is captured but there is no recognition of current issues facing individuals with a mild to moderate learning disability below age 65 e.g. the ability to maintain tenancies in the face of welfare reform changes; these individuals are likely only to come to attention at a point of crisis e.g. eviction.

The feedback from those respondents that did not complete a questionnaire, but gave comments via email or telephone were more general in nature and included the following:

- Need to reference the role of assistive technology in promoting independence
- The importance of effective partnership working and getting buy-in from key partners
- The importance of maintaining independence for adults and supporting the move to independence for those approaching adulthood
- Emphasis on building homes for life and providing fit for purpose flexible living options
- The need for Extra Care type accommodation for those aged under 55
- The need for more move on accommodation
- The need to improve/ increase the range and availability of specialist accommodation in general

All the feedback we received has been taken into account in developing this draft accommodation plan, which will itself be subject to a further period of consultation before being tabled for adoption.

- **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)**

Local authorities and health authorities have a duty to produce a JSNA, the purpose of which is to assess current and future health needs, providing a comprehensive health evidence base to inform strategic decision making and commissioning. The JSNA is made up of a range of statistics and reports, each dealing with a specific topic and which are refreshed on a regular basis.

In Cheshire West and Chester, JSNA data are grouped around the Altogether Better themes of starting well, living well, working well and ageing well, to help understand the drivers affecting each of these themes and to provide a baseline from which to monitor the progress of any interventions.

Relevant JSNA reports that have informed this accommodation plan include those relating to learning disabilities, older people's health, dementia, drug and alcohol misuse, existing population data and population forecasts for the borough.

Mental health is an acknowledged area of weakness in the current JSNA and the Health and Wellbeing Board approved plans to develop the evidence base for this theme in 2015, as part of a wider review and refresh of the JSNA. Further research into this subject is currently underway and any relevant findings will be considered during the first review of this accommodation plan (12 months after adoption).

3.2 Policy context

- **Council Plan**

The Council Plan sets out the Council's key priorities and informs decision making and commissioning at all levels of the Council. It outlines the vision and priorities for the whole organisation, describes what actions the Council needs to take to achieve its aims and informs the allocation of resources to deliver these actions.

The Council Plan acknowledges that housing is a significant driver of health and quality of life and identifies two key priorities relating to housing and supporting older and vulnerable people living in the borough that this accommodation plan directly accords with:

- Good quality and affordable housing that meets the needs of our diverse communities and
- Compassionate and joined-up care that supports the independence of older people and vulnerable adults.

- **Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

Housing's significant impact on health is recognised in the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which states that health issues should not be viewed in isolation, but should be tackled within the context of the wider health and wellbeing framework. This includes factors such as housing, education, employment and leisure.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy's vision is:

“To improve the health and wellbeing of our local population and reduce health inequalities, enabling residents to live more fulfilling, independent and healthy lives.”

This review and the developing accommodation plan for vulnerable and older people living in the borough has a strong relationship with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, directly contributing to the delivery of the following high level outcomes:

- Older residents are living healthier and more independent lives, feel supported and have a good quality of life
- Improved mental health, wellbeing and personal resilience for our residents
- People lead more healthy lifestyles, (including a reduction in drug and alcohol-related harm).

The Council recognises the significant interrelationship between health and housing and the co-location of Public Health within the local authority framework helps to support greater integration between health and other services, including the strategic housing function. This includes helping to inform priorities for housing policy and future housing development in the borough and providing a public health perspective to the development of this accommodation plan.

- **Housing Strategy**

There are many existing strategies already in place that seek to improve the lives of the borough's vulnerable residents. This includes Cheshire West and Chester's Housing Strategy, which identified housing's role in supporting vulnerable residents to maintain their independence as a key priority. The table over the page illustrates the links between the relevant priorities in the Council Plan, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Housing Strategy and this accommodation plan.

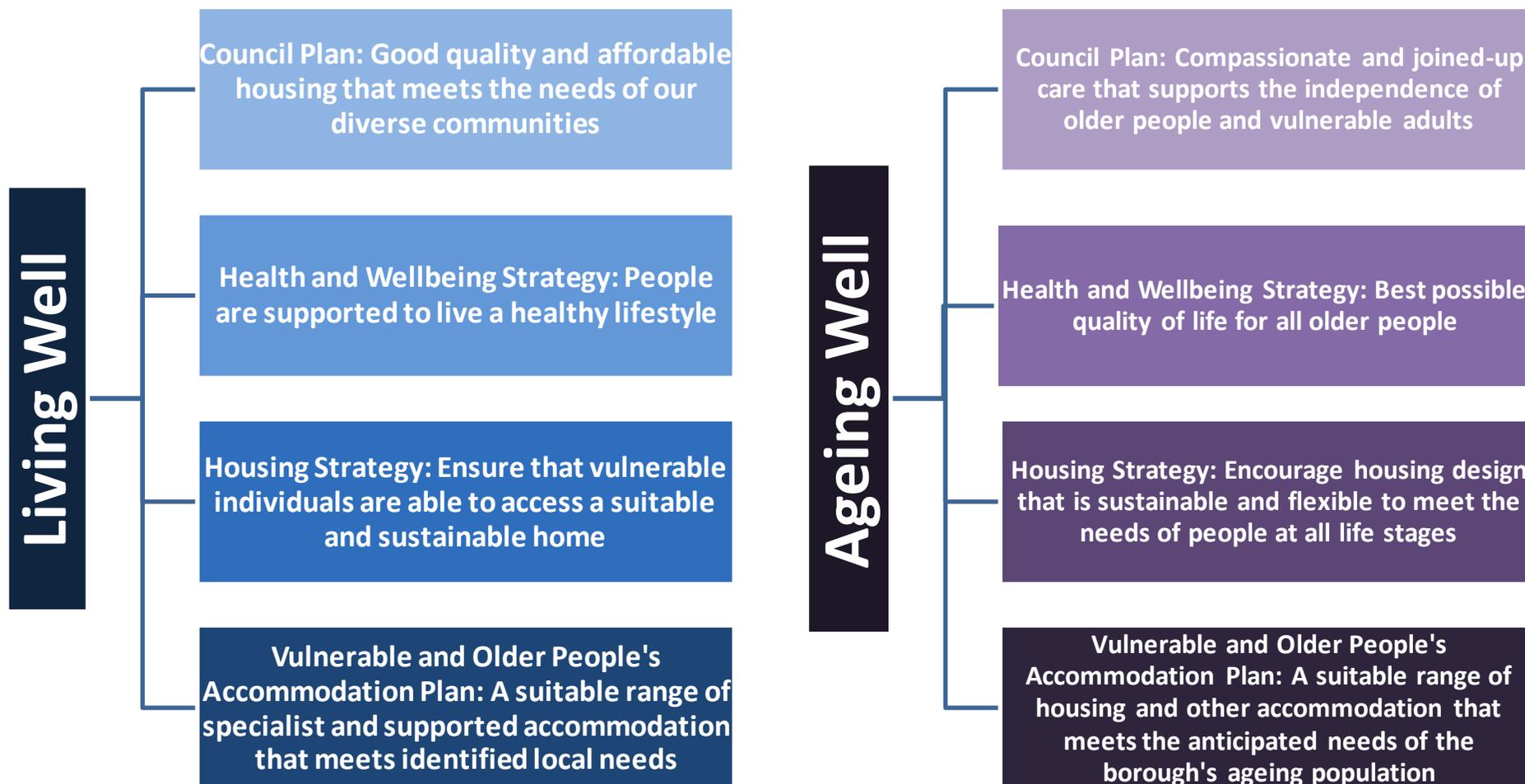
- **Local Plan**

The Local Plan for the borough accords with the national planning policy framework and provides the spatial framework for all new development in the borough, including new housing, employment, retail and leisure development.

Part 1 of Cheshire West and Chester Council's Local Plan was adopted in January 2015. This sets out the broad strategic planning policy framework for the borough. Part 2 policies are currently under development and these will provide more detailed policy guidance, potentially covering issues such as the design of new homes, promoting health and wellbeing in new developments and housing for older people.

It is essential that these policies reflect the evidenced need for housing and other accommodation for vulnerable and older people in the borough and the Council's Health and Housing Group will be instrumental in helping to develop these new policies.

Comparison of relevant priorities from the Council's corporate plan, health and wellbeing strategy, housing strategy and the vulnerable and older people's accommodation plan.



- **Health and Housing Group**

This is a sub-group of the Council's Health and Wellbeing Board and has been instrumental in developing this draft accommodation plan and the review that informed it. The group has members representing Strategic Commissioning, Adult Social Care, Public Health, the local NHS, local Registered Providers, Children's Services and the Leaving Care Team, as well as Strategic Housing and its primary aims are to:

- Improve accommodation outcomes for vulnerable and older people living in the borough
- Promote integration and improved communication between the housing, health and social care functions and
- Raise awareness of the role that accommodation plays in supporting improved health outcomes.

- **Links with other priorities and strategies**

Other strategies and policies that have informed this accommodation plan include the:

- Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Domestic Abuse Strategy
- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment
- Adult Social Care Market Position Statement
- Strategic Commissioning Plan for Adult Social Care and Health.

This accommodation plan does not seek to duplicate any of the priorities and actions already being taken forward through these strategies, but it aims to support and complement work already underway, ensure that the needs of those groups that are not covered elsewhere are not overlooked and to support a co-ordinated approach to tackling the issues identified. Where relevant, we have signposted to these existing strategies for further information throughout this document.

- Care leavers

The importance of a transitional approach to adulthood for those young people leaving care has already been established, together with the need to provide appropriate support to help young people develop the lifeskills needed to reach and maintain independence.

Following a strategic review of leaving care services, the Leaving Care Team will be working with young people at an earlier age (from 15 years), to facilitate successful transition to adulthood, where residential placements are involved.

The Team has worked with a local Registered Provider to source suitable accommodation to enable care leavers to experience living on their own on a semi-independent basis, in a safe and supportive environment, allowing them to develop the necessary skills to prepare for living fully independently in the future.

This arrangement enables the Leaving Care Team to commission accommodation related support to meet the specific needs of these individuals and staff can be based in the premises to provide support on-site where needed.

Key priorities that this accommodation plan supports are to:

- Establish closer links with other Registered Providers active in the borough and other relevant partners to be able to offer local accommodation provision to young people over the age of 16, including single and group accommodation
 - Develop an information sharing protocol with the Leaving Care Team, utilising a robust reporting mechanism, which will enable more effective future planning to meet need
 - Investigate the potential to tap into existing supported house share schemes provided by partners in the borough.
- Homelessness

The Council's homelessness strategy was published in 2015. The term 'homeless' does not only apply to people who are sleeping on the streets; most statistics on homelessness relate to the statutorily homeless i.e. those households which meet specific criteria of priority need set out in legislation, and to whom a homelessness duty has been accepted by the local authority. Such households are rarely homeless in the literal sense of being without a roof over their heads, but are more likely to be threatened with the loss of or unable to continue to live in their current accommodation for some reason.

'Homelessness prevention' means providing people with the ways and means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness.

The prevention work undertaken by the Council's Housing Solutions service has successfully helped to reduce levels of homelessness in the borough, but although homeless applications have been reducing since 2011, they are still high compared to historic records and compared to neighbouring authorities.

Homeless individuals often have a diverse range of support needs and vulnerabilities, including mental health problems, learning disabilities and drug and alcohol dependency; a key focus for preventing homelessness thus includes co-ordinating efforts with partners to identify and address these issues prior to the point that the individual becomes homeless.

Once a person has become homeless, appropriate support may be needed to enable the individual to receive treatment for any issues identified and to return to independent living in sustainable, permanent accommodation as soon as is practicable.

Access to supported housing can play a key role in the treatment of those abusing drugs and/ or alcohol in particular, by providing a stable environment with support that helps to break the cycle of addiction that leads to sustained negative outcomes.

A sufficient supply of supported and move on accommodation is vital to preventing homelessness. Supported accommodation is only the first part of the process of homelessness prevention, however; clients need to be supported to access and sustain permanent accommodation, helping them to reclaim their independence and freeing up resources for new clients coming through.

There are 309 units of specialist accommodation for households who have housing and support needs in Cheshire West and Chester, most of which are funded by the Housing Related Support programme. Of these, just 29 units are supported accommodation for homeless households, but this arrangement is currently under review. Since April 2012 there have been over 2,700 referrals for supported housing and floating support, illustrating the high levels of demand for these services.

The homelessness strategy for the borough aims to maximise homeless preventions and sustain low levels of homelessness and this accommodation plan will help to achieve this through working with partners, providers and other relevant agencies to:

- Promote a joined-up approach to the provision of appropriate accommodation solutions for homeless people and those threatened with homelessness

- Promote and facilitate appropriate accommodation solutions for those with drug and alcohol abuse issues, to help promote rehabilitation
- Review and improve the provision and range of supported accommodation options
- Reduce reliance on short-term supported accommodation and promote the use of more sustainable accommodation options, including increasing access to social housing and private rented accommodation in the borough
- Ensure routes to permanent accommodation and relevant housing information and advice services are well sign-posted
- Review housing options and related support for homeless people with learning disabilities and mental health issues, especially those with complex and chaotic behaviour, to ensure that they can access appropriate help to secure/maintain current accommodation provision.

In addition, the Council's Health and Wellbeing Board has signed up to the Charter for Homeless Health promoted by homeless charity St Mungo's Broadway, which aims to:

- Include information on the health of single homeless people in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, to identify and plan for meeting the health needs of this client group
- Provide visible leadership to improve the health of homeless people
- Ensure health related services are inclusive and can be easily accessed by homeless people.

As part of our commitment to this Charter, the Council's Public Health Team is currently undertaking a health audit of single homeless people in the borough, the findings of which will be used to inform future planning and delivery for this client group.

○ Domestic abuse

The Cheshire West and Chester Domestic Abuse Strategy details the help currently available for those subjected to domestic abuse, including:

- Home Safety Assessments, conducted by the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service

- Provision of accommodation and support for those fleeing domestic abuse and
- The resettlement floating support service, which provides advice and support for those moving back to a permanent home from short-term supported accommodation.

In addition, 'sanctuary' schemes, also referred to as 'target hardening', can be used to enable those subjected to domestic abuse to remain in their own home (where they choose to do so), through the provision of additional security measures such as fitting additional locks to doors and windows and the provision of a 'safe room' where victims can retreat and remain safe until help arrives.

Our pioneering Integrated Early Support (IES) service also helps to support individuals and families with complex needs in the borough, ensuring that those in need of help from more than one agency receive co-ordinated support tailored to their situation, including housing.

A key priority for this accommodation plan is to ensure access to appropriate accommodation, including supported accommodation, for those affected, utilising the resettlement floating support service to help safeguard and support individuals and families at risk.

- Gypsies and Travellers

For the purposes of the planning system, Gypsies and Travellers are defined as 'persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who, on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependents' educational or health needs or old age, have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently but excluding members of an organised group of Travelling Showpeople or circus people travelling together as such. (Source: Planning Policy for Traveller Sites, CLG, March 2012).

Health is a key issue for this client group; people from the Gypsy and Traveller community experience far lower life expectancy and much poorer health outcomes than their peers in the settled population. Their travelling lifestyle often means that they have no regular access to healthcare or GP facilities and they tend to use hospital accident and emergency facilities for any health needs experienced. Providing pitches which enable Gypsies and Travellers to have a permanent base, but still follow their traditional travelling lifestyle enables easier access to healthcare, thus improving health outcomes for this client group.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to undertake an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers living in and travelling through their borough, called a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA).

In Cheshire, the GTAA is commissioned jointly through the Cheshire Gypsy and Traveller Strategic Partnership, which has been in existence since 2004 and comprises representation from the four local authorities in the area, namely Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East, Warrington and Halton Councils, as well as Cheshire Police.

The information in the GTAA enables a planned approach to site provision and Cheshire West and Chester Council recently completed two permanent sites for Gypsies and Travellers in the borough, providing thirty pitches in all: twelve in Ellesmere Port and eighteen in Winsford.

Although referred to as 'permanent' pitches, the families using these sites will still be able to follow their traditional travelling lifestyle as they wish, using the pitches as a permanent base to return to.

The key priority for this client group in terms of this accommodation plan is to continue to support access to suitable accommodation solutions. Monitoring application numbers for the new pitches and continuing to monitor unauthorised encampments in the borough will also help to inform future policy and planning.

The latest GTAA for the Cheshire partnership area was completed in 2014, so it is also recommended that the Gypsy and Traveller position statement for the borough be reviewed in light of the findings of this latest assessment.

4. How will we achieve our aim to improve housing outcomes for vulnerable and older people living in the borough?

This draft accommodation plan will be made available on the Council's website to view and comment on for a period of not less than 12 weeks. Once this consultation period has ended, we will use the feedback we receive to develop a final draft of the accommodation plan, including a series of robust actions, which will be presented to the Council's Cabinet with the recommendation that the plan be adopted.

The Health and Housing Group will take the lead in developing these actions, which will tackle the issues identified in this document and show how housing outcomes for vulnerable and older people will be improved as a result.