

Housing Strategy 2025 – 2028

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Introduction

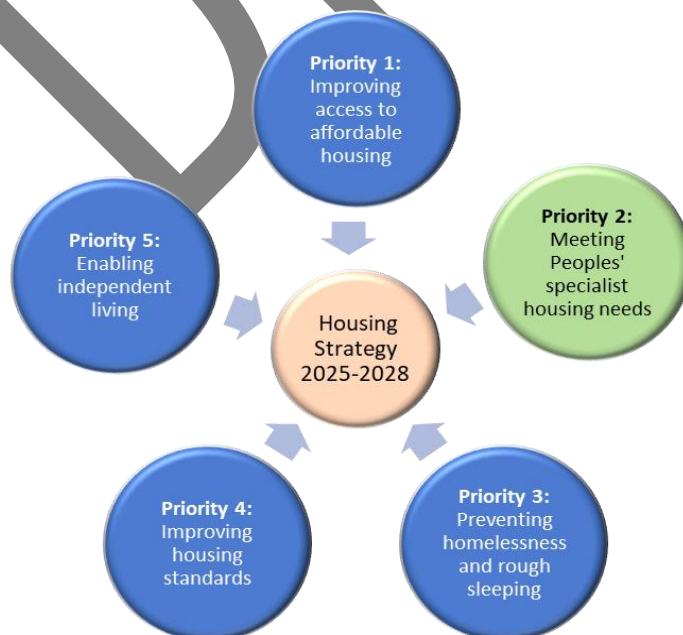
Housing plays a crucial role in peoples' quality of life, health, and wellbeing. The Housing Strategy 2025-2028 supports the Council's aims and objectives for housing in the Borough, to improve the choice, quality, and supply of housing for a diverse population and support people to buy or rent their own home, prevent homelessness, improve options for older people and protect the most vulnerable.

The Housing Strategy has been developed at a time of significant challenges within the housing market, including continuing economic instability and the cost-of-living crisis, a reduction in public funding and the election of a new Government which is setting out its stall at the time this Housing Strategy was being finalised.

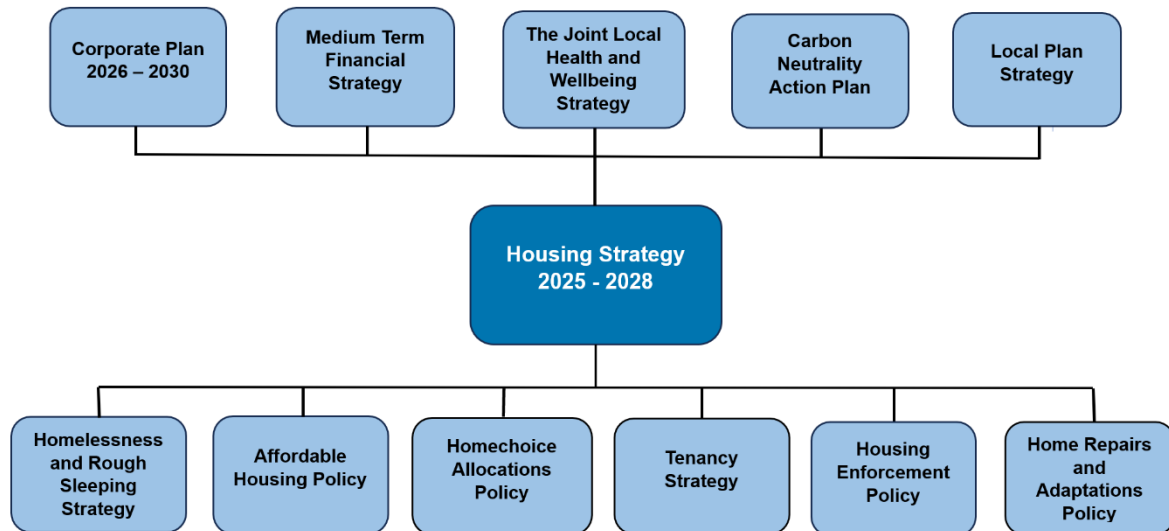
Therefore this strategy has been developed as an interim Housing Strategy , and outlines our priorities over a 3 year period instead of the Council's previous 5 year Strategy, recognising that that we will have to respond to change and merging evidence through the development of the next Local Plan strategy

Despite the tough economic conditions over the last few years, the Council has been working with a wide range of local partners including Registered Housing Providers, Developers, Private Landlords and other organisations, to identify residents' housing needs, maximise the number of affordable homes built across the borough, and improve the quality and choice of homes for all residents. This partnership approach is key to the future delivery and development of affordable and market housing and will help improve the Borough's housing offer.

The key priorities over the next 3 years will focus on the following strategic priorities of equal importance:



The Housing Strategy also brings together the housing priorities within the other key Council plans and strategies. The diagram below shows the relationship between the Housing Strategy and the other key Council Plans, Strategies and Policies.



Cheshire East adopted its Local Plan in 2017 which set out the vision and overall planning strategy for the Borough over a period to 2030. In December 2022 the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) was adopted, bringing forward the second part of the Local Plan, providing further detailed planning policies and site allocations.

The Local Plan and SADPD are the policies which drive forward housing supply to meet the evidenced housing need across the Borough, not only the numbers, but the type of housing which is needed to support the diverse housing needs of the area.

We have started to prepare the Local Plan's replacement because of changes to national planning policy (the National Planning Policy Framework, or NPPF), the requirement to review plans regularly, and the long time it takes to prepare a new plan.

The development of planning policies will be based on robust evidence, which will be established during the development process, including a Strategic Housing Market Needs Assessment, and Housing and Economic Development Policy.

This interim Housing Strategy outlines the approach the Council will take over the next three years and the Action plan (Appendix 1) shows how we intend to achieve our ambitions, sets targeted, realistic and deliverable objectives, and will help focus efforts and limited resources on the right priorities to address the housing challenges identified within this Strategy, whilst at the same time providing flexibility to re-align our plans as Government policy and economic and social circumstances change.

We will continue to focus on our vision set out within the 2018-23 Housing Strategy:

Our Vision: 'All residents in Cheshire East are able to access affordable, appropriate, and decent homes'.

The 2018-2023 Housing Strategy delivered some key achievements. The table below shows just some examples.

Key Achievements and Strategy Review

Strategic Priority	What has been achieved
Affordable homes	<p>2,349 new affordable homes provided, through partnership working between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022, exceeding the Local Plan target by 929.</p> <p>Housing Development Framework established to help bring forward the development of mixed tenure affordable housing on Council owned land.</p> <p>The Housing Supplementary Planning document was adopted in 2022 and work is taking place to engage with Parish Councils to look at rural affordable housing opportunities.</p>
Homelessness	<p>5,555 households prevented or relieved from becoming homeless between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022.</p> <p>Secured £838,857 of external funding for a Rough Sleeper Initiative to provide additional single homelessness interventions until 2025, including specialist homelessness roles to address substance misuse, mental health and social care needs.</p> <p>Established a permanent Rough Sleeper Team within the Housing Options service in 2020, to help provide a responsive outreach and support service to vulnerable rough sleepers in the borough.</p> <p>Through grant funding, commissioned two services to provide 14 units of self-contained supported accommodation for people with a history of homelessness and multiple, complex needs.</p>

	<p>Delivered a Multi-Disciplinary Team Pilot, which has been effective in reducing repeat homelessness for a small cohort of people by overcoming barriers to accommodation and supporting people to sustain accommodation.</p>
Housing quality	<p>1,348 households helped to improve their living conditions between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022.</p> <p>Secured £7.9 million of funding for a domestic energy efficiency project to provide home insulation and low carbon heating for vulnerable residents.</p> <p>Reduced the level of long-term empty homes to less than 1% of the housing stock.</p>
Private rented sector	<p>Commissioned an Affordable Warmth Advice Service for Cheshire, Warrington and Halton to help improve affordable warmth for vulnerable households.</p> <p>3,067 households helped to achieve affordable warmth between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022.</p> <p>Revised Housing enforcement policy adopted in 2019 to take account of new legislation and ensure residents in rented accommodation are supported and housing standards are maintained.</p> <p>Work is ongoing to support the private rented sector through incentives to landlords to provide a supply of affordable private rented sector accommodation.</p> <p>Housing Related Support service was commissioned in 2020 to support tenants at risk of losing their homes and provide floating support as well as supported accommodation.</p> <p>Winter Homelessness Prevention Grant funding accessed and used to identify tenants with rent arrears who were adversely impacted by the pandemic.</p>
Vulnerable groups	<p>1,831 households helped to live independently by adapting their home between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022.</p> <p>Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy updated and adopted in 2021.</p> <p>Updated and adopted the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Policy to provide vital help for low-income households and people with disabilities.</p> <p>Delivered the Housing Wellbeing service to reduce complex hoarding.</p> <p>The Housing Options and Homelessness Team were awarded Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation in June 2022, for their work with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.</p>

National and local context and challenges

The Council is in a period of significant change, with the current Government introducing several new reforms to ensure that not only are the housing shortages being addressed but also the standard of our current housing stock is maintained or improved within both the private and social rented sectors.

In July 2024, the Government launched the new Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) which is central to:

- mission-driven government
- fixing the foundations of an affordable home
- handing power back to communities, and
- rebuilding local governments

The need for radical action to unlock the supply of new homes, and tackling inflation is a critical part of the Government's plan.

The Government has consulted on proposed changes to the NPPF during 2024, including a new Standard Method for assessing housing needs. The Council has responded to this major consultation and will implement any new changes, and has adopted a Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in July 2022 which provides guidance on how housing policies in the Local Plan should be applied.

The Renters Rights Bill, introduced in the King's Speech in July 2024, replaces the Renters (Reform) Bill that didn't pass through Parliament under the former Government. This new legislation aims to enhance rights and protections for renters such as abolition of Section 21, or 'no fault eviction' which enable a landlord to serve 2 months' notice for the tenant to move out, without requiring the landlord to provide a reason why they are seeking possession. The Government is proposing to abolish Section 21 in 2025, along with the introduction of enhanced tenant rights and protections (tenants will gain the power to challenge unreasonable rent increases, and the practice of rental bidding wars will end, easier for tenants to keep pets, subject to landlord approval and potential insurance requirements), and the introduction of Decent Homes Standard.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 brought forward change to the regulation of social housing, the investigation of complaints and the introduction of new powers for the Housing Ombudsman.

The former Government's updated Rough Sleeping Strategy was published in September 2022 and showed the significant progress that has been made since the 2018 Rough Sleeping Strategy was published. The strategy has four key themes: Prevention, Intervention, Recovery and a transparent joined up system. It also placed new duties on Local Authorities to prevent and relieve rough sleeping.

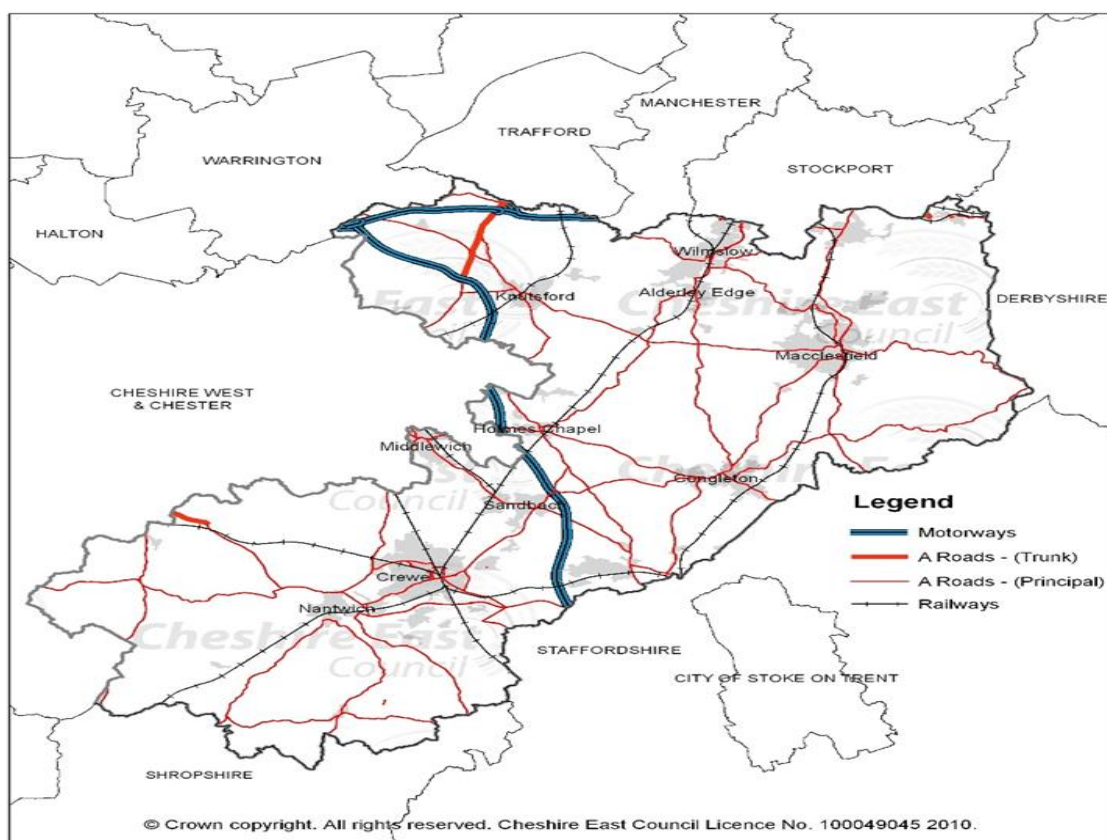
The introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed new duties on Local Authorities to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation.

The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 introduces new regulation of supported exempt accommodation, including the requirements being placed on Local Authorities in relation to oversight and enforcement. The Act's consultation was expected to be published in 2024. We will respond to the consultation, and ensure the requirements of the Act are locally implemented.

With the level of change being brought forward, this Strategy focuses on the priorities for 2025 to 2028 which are based on the local context, and challenges and opportunities whilst ensuring the Council is prepared for different responsibilities being brought forward through the new Government's reforms.

Local context and challenges:

Cheshire East is a unitary authority with Borough status, located next to Cheshire West and Chester to the West, Warrington and the Greater Manchester conurbation to the North, Shropshire and the North Staffordshire conurbation of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme to the south, and the Peak District National Park to the east.



Cheshire East is the third largest Borough in the North West, with many towns, villages, and rural areas, and has over 100 town and parish councils. Towns and villages vary greatly in character, and each faces differing issues and housing needs for the future. The Borough also has an extensive rural area with a successful rural and agricultural-based economy.

Rural

The Cheshire East Rural Action Plan 2022 -2026 says that about two fifths of residents live in rural locations outside of the main towns. There are significant levels of inequality and deprivation to which rural communities are vulnerable. Often there are limited transport options. Circumstances in rural areas can make delivering services particularly difficult. Rural housing is characterised by challenges such as high house prices, high fuel prices, low wages, seasonal renting, a high level of second home ownership, and an ageing population.

Central to addressing deprivation in rural areas is making sure rural housing markets work for their resident populations by providing affordable accommodation across a range of tenures and types of home. Parish councils will continue to be engaged with as we continue to monitor and report on delivery and impact against the challenges just mentioned.

Demographics

The 2021 Census provides us with accurate estimates of all the people and households in Cheshire East and helps us to plan for future needs.

The population figure for Cheshire East recorded within the 2021 Census was 398,772, consisting of 174,856 households, but recent household projections show a population increase to 406,527, consisting of 186,397 households (source: ONS – mid (2022) population estimates for the UK and its constituent countries and local authorities)

The population of Cheshire East's rural areas increased by a much larger proportion over the 2011-21 period (up 12.7%) than that of the Borough's urban areas (up 4.8%).

Whilst Cheshire East is a prosperous Borough, the population is growing and living longer. Recent ONS household projection figures show an ageing population, with the proportion of residents aged 65 and above increasing from 19.4% in 2011 to 22.5% by 2022, whilst the proportion aged 16 to 64 has fallen from 62.8% to 60.0% over that time and the 0 to 15 age group's percentage barely changing since 2011 and currently stands at 17.5%.

Given the fact that future demographic changes will result in greater demands for housing suitable for older people and those with disabilities, there is a clear need for this to be addressed in one of the strategic priorities within this interim Strategy.

There are also other challenges including areas that have high levels of deprivation. This puts additional pressure on services and demand for different forms of housing to meet resident's needs.

The Local Housing Market

Office for National Statistics (ONS) data on dwelling stock shows a total of 188,720 residential properties, broken down by tenure.

Number of dwellings by tenure

Private Registered Provider sector	Other public sector	Private sector	Total
21,786	98	166,836	188,720

Housing Affordability

There are significant differences in income levels across the Borough. Lower income areas are predominantly found within the settlements of Congleton, Crewe, Macclesfield, and Nantwich, whilst the majority of the higher income areas are the smaller towns and rural areas of the Borough, with the highest average earners located in the north of the Borough.

Higher property prices are to be found in the North, which has implications for affordability. However, affordability is a problem throughout the Borough. Work is planned with Strategic Planning to review Borough affordability, as part of the Local Plan review process.

In 2024, Cheshire East had the third highest average house price in the North West. Owner-occupation across all the settlements is performing well, in what estate agents say is a sellers' market. Property prices are steadily increasing across all types and sizes of properties, making them increasingly unaffordable for those on median incomes or below. Private rented properties are being let quickly, with letting agents reporting a landlord market with some quick turnarounds and increasing rents.

Cheshire East Council operates affordable housing schemes for low-cost home ownership properties, in respect of new build housing schemes and each subsequent re-sale of those homes. The schemes are a form of 'intermediate'

affordable housing (different to shared ownership schemes, which are run by Housing Associations for those who meet eligibility criteria).

Affordability models

Mortgage lenders’ guidance states that up to 3.5 times gross income is the level at which housing is available to buy. Shelter, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation state that a household spending more than a third (33%) of their income on their mortgage or rent then find other necessities unaffordable. It is important to note that all homes for sale exceed by many times the mortgage to income ratio of 3.5 / 33%.

Housing affordability is a challenge for many households in Cheshire East. According to the ONS, the median house price in Cheshire East is £255,500 which is 8.14 times the median gross earnings of £31,397. The average price of a home in the lower quartile is £175,000 which is 7.35 times the median gross lower quartile earnings of £23,798. Access to housing for those on lower incomes is only likely to be achieved through the provision of affordable housing at below market price levels. The Local Plan has an important role to play in the delivery of affordable housing and ensuring that the benefits of housing delivery go to a wider section of the community.

Required annual household income to purchase lower quartile housing (3.5 x income)	Required monthly income to rent lower quartile housing (third of monthly earnings)
£50,000	£1,894

The next section sets out in more detail the current issues for owner-occupation, and private rented accommodation. Overall, both owner-occupied and private rented sectors are thriving.

It is important to note that figures will change from month-to-month either up or down, but the current trajectory is up.

Owner – occupied sector

The ratio of median house price to median gross annual workplace-based earnings is 7.93 for Cheshire East. It is slightly below the England ratio (8.26 in 2023), but well above the ratio for the North West region (6.05).

In the year to January 2024, the average price for detached properties and semi-detached properties in Cheshire East rose by 1.7%, while the average price for flats decreased by 1.2%.

The average house price in Cheshire East was £290,000 in January 2024, similar to the revised figure for January 2023. Across the North West, there was also little change in the average house price over the same period.

According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2024 housing affordability data, the average price paid by first-time buyers in Cheshire East was £226,000 in January 2024. This was in line with the average in January 2023 (revised). For homes bought with a mortgage in Cheshire East, the average house price was £303,000 in January 2024. This was similar to the average in January 2023 (revised).

Owner-occupied average property price (£1,000s)

Year	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile
2018-19	154	230	344
2019-20	155	230	345
2020-21	170	257	385
2021-22	170	252	390
% change between 2018-19 and 2021-22	+10%	+10%	+13%

The next 2 tables show the median, and lower quartile, house prices from 2018 – 2023 linked to median and lower quartile gross annual earnings, also comparing Cheshire East to the North West (considerably higher) and England (comparable).

Ratio of median house price to median gross annual residence-based earnings

LA / region / Country name	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cheshire East	7.46	7.42	8.62	7.82	7.56
North West	5.79	5.88	6.68	6.32	6.05
England	7.88	7.87	9.06	8.47	8.26

Ratio of lower quartile house price to lower quartile gross annual residence-based earnings

LA / region / Country Name	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cheshire East	7.23	7.01	7.01	8.19	7.08
North West	5.6	5.6	5.58	6.27	5.76
England	7.34	7.26	7.19	8.16	7.36

The Private Rented sector

Of those unable to buy on the open housing market, some will hope to be able to meet their housing needs in the private rented sector (PRS). In Cheshire East 14% of all tenure is Private Rented. Private rents rose to an average of £846 in February 2024, an annual increase of 5.1% from £805 in February 2023. This was lower than the rise in the North West (8.7%) over the year.

Many households are reliant on market intervention such as benefit payments to make rents affordable. Private rented properties typically exceed the new Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Rates.

In Cheshire East, the average rent for semi-detached properties and flats or maisonettes rose by 5.4%, while for detached properties, it increased by 4.8%.

Average rent for one bed properties rose by 5.5%, while the average for four-or-more bed properties increased by 4.4%.

Data¹ from the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and the ONS shows the following private sector rents for Cheshire East. Mean rents have increased from 2021-2022 by 11.1%, lower quartile by 8.3%, median by 10.1%, and upper quartile by 12.6%.

Year	Rents	Mean	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile
19 - 20	3,810	787	550	675	875
20 - 21	3,400	795	550	675	895
21 - 22	3,780	838	575	700	925
22 - 23	4,000	937	625	775	1,050

¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/privaterentalmarketsummarystatisticsinengland>

Homelessness

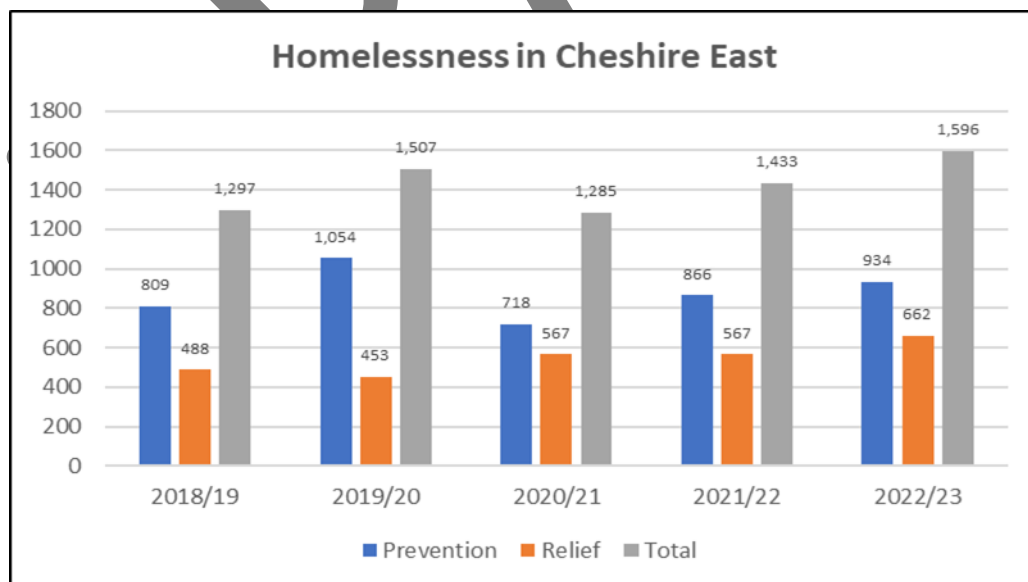
The Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy vision is: *To prevent homelessness, giving residents the ability to access and sustain affordable housing and an improved quality of life.*

Delivering a first-class homelessness service to those requiring assistance is Cheshire East Council's priority, and any person who is homeless or facing homelessness will receive all the advice and support they need, when they need it. They may be rough sleepers, young people who have fallen out with family members, couples facing relationship breakdown, and victims of domestic abuse.

The charts below show:

- The homelessness prevention and relief levels for 2018/19 to 2022/23.
- Main causes of homelessness for 2018/19 to 2022/23 including early 2024 data

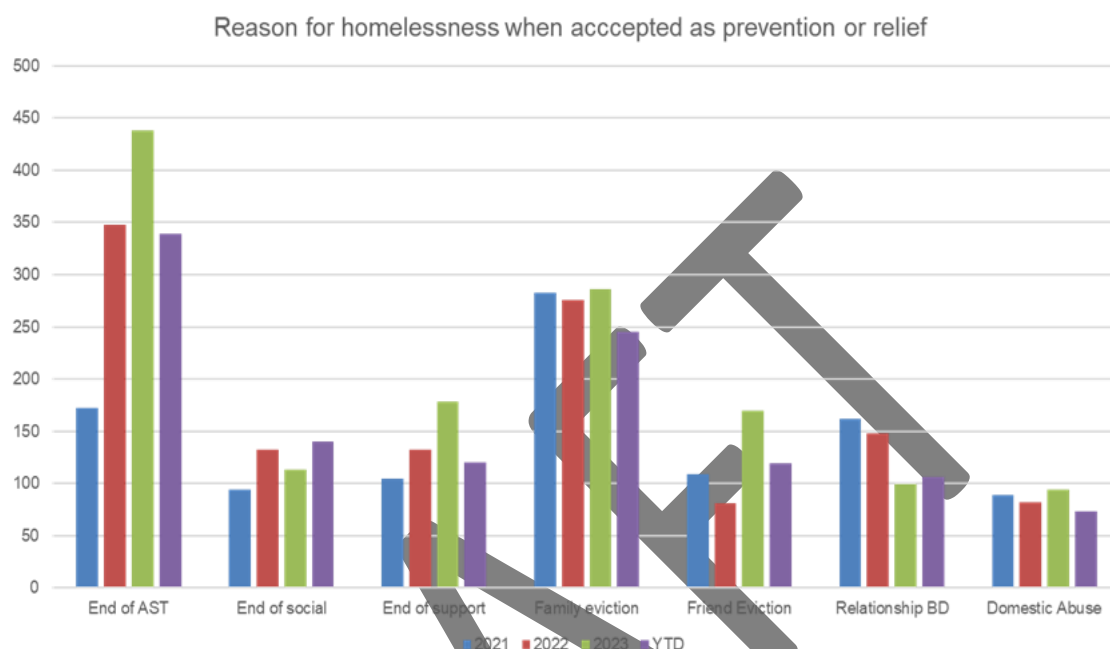
Between 2021/22 and 2022/23 the total number of homeless applications have increased by 11.3%, the duties owed because of the assessments resulted in a 7.8% increase in people owed a prevention duty, a 16.7% increase in people owed a Relief Duty and a 11.3% increase in people owed a full homelessness duty. Homelessness because of private landlords serving a valid Section 21 notice have increased by 52.6%. Duty to Refer cases are increasing as a percentage of all referrals.



The main reasons for people facing homelessness are as seen in the chart below:

- End of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST)
- Family and friend evictions

- End of housing support
- End of social tenancy
- Relationship breakdown
- Domestic abuse



A new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is being produced by 2025.

Gypsies and Travellers

The Council assesses the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople through the commissioning of the Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) which was most recently updated in 2018 and outlined the need for:

- 5 to 10 transit pitches for Gypsies and Travellers
- 32 permanent pitches for Gypsies and Travellers
- 5 plots for Travelling Showpeople.

The identification of land to assist in meeting Traveller accommodation needs was undertaken through the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) process and, following a call for sites and a robust assessment, a number of sites which were assessed as being suitable and available for development.

The need for a transit site has now been addressed with Cheshire East developing a new transit site of 10 pitches for short-stay accommodation which provides security to travelling households and reduces the number of unauthorised encampments.

We are now working on the delivery of other suitable sites, allocated within the SADPD in the ownership of Cheshire East Council.

The revision of the Local Plan will include the reassessment of need for Gypsy and Travellers' accommodation through the commissioning of a new GTAA, which will inform future policies.

Modern Day Slavery

Cheshire East sits as a member of the Strategic Modern Day Slavery Partnership, working with other local authorities to deliver a cross – Cheshire business plan.

Given the seriousness of modern-day slavery, there is a need for joined up working between departments and local agencies, to promote a strategic response and good practice in supporting people in need.

Housing Conditions

Tackling poor housing

Improving the quality of private rented homes

The private rented sector is just under 22,000 properties and therefore plays an important role in meeting housing needs. Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are a vital component, providing accommodation for tenants who are unable to afford to rent a self-contained property, or who enjoy the flexibility that renting a room offers them. A well-managed and good quality private rented sector leads to sustainable tenancies, security of tenure, good health and wellbeing, and cohesive communities.

The quality of private rented housing is diverse, with more affordable properties being disproportionately linked to lower quality standards. We have seen a small growth in HMOs and short-term lets, often concentrating in areas that then creates wider neighbourhood issues with parking, waste management, anti-social behaviour, and community cohesion due to different patterns of occupation, often short term in its nature.

We have been using our powers to intervene in the quality and density of privately rented housing through our housing standards responsibilities, mandatory licensing scheme for HMOs occupied by 5 or more people, and the introduction of Article 4 directions in three wards in Crewe to withdraw permitted development rights in order to introduce controls to the development of HMOs in these wards.

Most private landlords provide well-managed and maintained properties and take action to improve their properties when issues are highlighted to them. There remain gaps in landlords' knowledge of their responsibilities, particularly for 'incidental' landlords (such as people who have inherited a family home) and new property investors, and we educate and support landlords. However, there are cases where we need to take action through issuing penalty notices, carrying out works and recharging landlords, and seeking prosecutions.

Over the lifetime of the previous Housing Strategy, living conditions have been improved for 930 private renting households through our interventions. 407

enforcement notices have been served where landlords have failed to comply with legal requirements and hazard awareness notices.

Case study: housing enforcement

Following a tenant complaint about the housing conditions in their privately rented home, a housing standards inspection found several issues including electrical hazards, and served an Improvement Notice and an Electrical Safety Notice. When the landlord didn't comply, the landlord was issued with financial penalties totalling £10,500, and was still responsible for carrying out the repairs.

Case study: HMO enforcement

Following an anonymous report of a HMO suspected to be operating without a licence, a joint investigation with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service found several breaches of legislation, including fire safety breaches, safety hazards and confirmation that the property required a licence. The property owner was served with enforcement notices and a financial penalty of £12,000. The property was brought up to the standards required for letting as a HMO, after which a licence could be granted.

The Government has proposed a Renters' Rights Bill, building on the Renters' Reform Bill proposed by the previous Government, to transform the experience of private renting. Proposals for improving the private rented sector include:

- applying the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector, providing clear timescales and expectations for property repairs and remediation of hazards
- Creating a digital private rented sector database to bring together key information for landlords, tenants and local authorities in one place, and for landlords to demonstrate compliance with their obligations
- Strengthening local councils' enforcement powers including new investigatory powers.

Empty homes

Empty homes are recognised as a wasted resource, depriving people of much needed accommodation, and contribute to the need for new housing. Properties do become empty at some point as part of the normal operation of the housing market, during the rental or buying process, or when a person's estate is being finalised. There will naturally always be some empty properties to allow household flows in a healthy housing market; vacancy rates of more than 2.5% may be indicative of low demand issues in the market.

It is only when properties stay empty for longer than six months without any obvious signs of renovation or rental that they become 'true' empty homes. When left empty, they have the potential to cause blight to local communities, prevent investment and regeneration, devalue surrounding properties, and attract anti-social behaviour.

During the lifetime of the previous Housing Strategy, we have been successful in reducing the level of long-term empty homes to less than 1% (1,672) of the housing stock, through Council Tax premiums, advice and guidance, direct intervention and enforcement.

Our approach over the next three years will be to continue to provide owners with advice, support and encourage voluntary action to bring their homes back into use and provide homes for local people. Where co-operation fails, we will determine the extent to which the empty home affects its neighbours and use our enforcement powers when the property is having a significant impact on the community.

Case study: Empty Homes enforcement

We investigated a complaint about water leaking through the wall from a neglected empty property into an occupied home. We were able to trace the owner, secure the empty property against unauthorised access, and serve notices requiring the owner to stop the water leak and improve the external appearance of the property. When the owner failed to carry out the work, we were able to carry out the internal work on their behalf and recover all our costs, and successfully prosecute the owner for failing to tidy the external appearance of the property.

Energy efficiency and fuel poverty

The new Government has committed to achieve net-zero by 2050 for the entire country. We have set an ambitious target to do everything we can to help the Borough of Cheshire East to be carbon neutral by 2045. The UK Government has mandated that all social housing achieve a minimum of EPC C by 2035, and the Climate Change Commission (CCC) recommends that EPC is achieved for all domestic property by this date.

Domestic emissions account for 18% of total carbon emissions across the Cheshire and Warrington sub-region, and tackling this is a priority to not only reduce carbon emissions but also to reduce fuel poverty and improve residents' quality of life.

We have delivered a range of Government-funded schemes to improve domestic energy efficiency over the lifetime of the previous Strategy, as well as there being significant uptake of Energy Company Obligation (ECO) grants over a 10-year period, resulting in the installation of thousands of retrofit measures in homes across Cheshire East.

However, despite this, there are a range of challenges to us carrying out systematic retrofit across the entire housing stock. The 180,000-strong housing stock is all privately owned by individuals or social housing providers in Cheshire East, meaning that the Council only has an influencing role rather than direct control of energy improvements. The average EPC score is 62.58 – or a letter ranking of D.

To reach net-zero, decarbonised heating systems such as Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) are required. Given the typical lower operating temperatures of ASHPs versus traditional gas boilers, and the greater unit cost of electricity than gas, these

are only affordable to operate in properties with a minimum EPC score of C, or ideally with an EPC score of B or higher. This could be achieved by

- greater insulation, meaning that more heat is retained and less lost
- by installation of solar panels with battery storage to decrease the unit cost of electricity; or by
- a combination of both.

Only 31% of Cheshire East households meet the minimum EPC score of C, compared to 47% for England as a whole.

Making a home more energy efficient can save the resident money on their fuel bills – and it can also improve their health by making the home warmer too. 11.2 % of households in Cheshire East cannot meet their energy needs at an affordable cost.

The main challenges for householders in making energy efficiency improvements are affordability; navigating the limited funding streams that are available; knowledge and access to trustworthy information and advice; and in the case of tenants, the reliance on a third party (their landlord) to action the improvements. A Green Doctor scheme commissioned to support households between 2019 and 2022 provided energy efficiency and income maximisation advice and signposting to grant schemes for home improvements.

There are a range of grants for heating repairs, renewable heating, and insulation, for those on low incomes. Over the lifetime of the previous strategy we have secured funding from various Government and private sector schemes and provided practical help to arrange heating and insulation in vulnerable people's homes:

- 86 new central heating systems through the Warm Homes Fund project funded by National Grid.
- 151 socially rented homes receiving external wall insulation, heat pumps, solar panels, underfloor insulation, and loft insulation through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
- 496 homes improved through the Green Homes Grant programmes.
- Secured funding for 2022 to 2025 for Home Upgrade Grants for off-gas grid homes.
- Delivered urgent heating repairs to 762 households through packages of Affordable Warmth grants, Gas Safe Charity funding and the Household Support Fund.

Health and Wellbeing

The vision of the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy is to enable people to live a healthier, longer life; with good mental and physical wellbeing; living independently and enjoying the place where they live.

The Strategy sets out the following aspirations:

- Reduce inequalities, narrowing the gap between those who are enjoying good health and wellbeing and those who are not.

- Improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of all of our residents.
- Help people to have a good quality of life, to be healthy and happy.

There have been many studies carried out on the effects of poor quality housing conditions and negative health impacts, many of which indicate a link between the two.

The Housing Strategy will help to achieve these health and wellbeing goals through improved properties and housing choices. Strategic Priorities 4 (Improving Housing Standards) and 5 (Enabling Independent Living) are focused on health and wellbeing improvements.

Meeting peoples' specialist housing needs

Supported Housing

The former Government passed an Act to make provision about the regulation of supported exempt accommodation, to make provision about local authority oversight of, and enforcement powers relating to, the provision of supported exempt accommodation. The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act aims to

- Introduce national supported housing standards, which will provide minimum standards for both the property and the care or support provided in supported accommodation.
- Require local authorities to create local supported accommodation licensing schemes.
- Introduce a strategic planning duty for local authorities, which will include collecting data on the supply of homes, a forecast of future need, and a delivery plan contained in a bespoke strategy.
- Create a national expert advisory panel to monitor the sector and to steer services, which will report to the Secretary of State.

We await consultation on the implementation of the Act and will provide a response to Government in due course. Cheshire East must, under the Act, outline local need and supply of accommodation, carry out a review of the supported exempt accommodation in the district, and in the light of that review, publish a supported housing strategy, for the provision of supported exempt accommodation in Cheshire East.

Adults with Learning Disabilities

In August 2024 the Cheshire and Merseyside Housing Strategy: People with learning disabilities and/or Autism was published with a vision *“to achieve the best quality life we can for people with learning disabilities and /or Autism to live independently , with personalised support and care”*

To achieve this vision the strategy sets out the ways in which this will be achieved:

- Securing the provision of good quality housing and supported housing where people with learning disabilities and/or Autism with care and support needs can live well and thrive.

- Developing a range of housing and supported housing over the next 5 years and beyond, that are tailored to reflect the identified needs within our local communities.
- Ensuring that support and care services, delivered to people within supported housing and those living in general needs housing, are effective in promoting people's wellbeing and independence.

The aim of the strategy is to facilitate and commission a wide range of housing and supported housing that enables people to live independently in their communities including:

- General needs housing for individuals with personalised care and support.
- Supported housing that is suited to people who need their own self-contained housing or shared housing within local communities, with a mix of personalised and shared care and support.
- Housing and supported housing that is adapted in a variety of ways to meet the needs of people who need an accessible home and/or a home that is adapted to meet their support needs.

The strategy outlines the evidence of need and the approach to delivery, which will be taken forward by each Council. In order to influence future commissioning decisions the Cheshire East's Adult Commissioning Team are undertaking a Strategic Review of their existing accommodation offer to determine the type and location of new provision. Once established the Housing Team will work closely with them to identify opportunities to bring this forward.

Mental Health

For people with heightened or enduring mental health issues who are unable to be housed safely within the community or those with a pre-existing housing need (for example, clients with acute depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or latter stage dementia) the right mixture of specialist and supported accommodation is critical. These people have more specific and acute care needs and can often fall victim of social isolation unless properly accommodated. This can entail sheltered accommodation or institutional schemes; however, Cheshire East, as with other client groups, aims to reduce reliance on residential care as a long-term solution, and aspires to instead maximise use of supported accommodation to enable individuals live independently.

The Housing Team will work closely with Mental Health Services to identify individuals who can live independently within general needs provision with support and through the allocations process work with Registered Housing Providers to identify suitable accommodation.

Care Leavers

Appropriate accommodation shapes the variety and experience of placements available to young people, as well as patterning the pathways out of care for by care leavers, which can be abrupt or phased depending on the flexibility of the accommodation menu and associated support services in the area.

Cheshire East recognises the need to deliver a range of housing and housing support options appropriate to the needs and preferences of young people. Whilst children in care have a range of provision especially for them (in the form of residential homes and foster placements), there is substantial cross-over between young people in need and care leavers, who routinely access mainstream housing, generic floating support services, hostels, supported lodgings, as well as settled supported accommodation.

Giving young people in need the same opportunities and quality of life as their peers is a key outcome. Throughout the entire gamut of accommodation options available to young people, Cheshire East aims to support young people to develop the tenancy management and independent living skills required to live on their own in the long-term and void future loss of accommodation.

This entails providing a stepped menu of accommodation that allows planned moves for young people out of care or supported accommodation and into independent living. To achieve this a multi-disciplinary approach will continue to be utilised in determining and addressing the broader needs of young people that may act as barriers to them achieving settled accommodation or independent living.

A 2024 Ofsted report says that since the last inspection of Cheshire East in 2019, when services for children were judged to be “requires improvement to be good”, improvements have been made in some areas of practice. However, the quality of practice and the experience and progress of children and young people are too variable, and for care leavers they are inadequate. The issues concerning young persons and homelessness which were flagged in the report will be addressed by this Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Disability

Many of us are living longer, in better homes, with good social networks and in supportive communities. Nevertheless, one in five people have lived experience of a disability or long term health condition and we are experiencing increasing fragility and vulnerability in older age. A suitable home can help disabled people of all ages to build and sustain their independence and maintain connections in their community. Many homes are however poorly designed for older age or changes in care and support needs. Our ambition is to give more people the choice to live independently in their own homes for longer. Adaptations can reduce the amount of formal care and support a person may need, as well as enabling them to remain living in the home of their choice.

Disabled Facilities Grant funding is paid to local authorities through the Better Care Fund in recognition of the importance of ensuring adaptations are part of an integrated approach to housing, health and social care locally. Over the lifetime of the previous Strategy we have facilitated over £10 million of adaptations for over 1,600 people, delivering walk-in showers, stairlifts, ramps, ground floor living and many other types of adaptations to enable independence, dignity and safety at home. The Disabled Facilities Grant is just one part of the local adaptations system, and a priority for this Housing Strategy is to embed major adaptations into the wider health and social care landscape, ensuring that the local system is seamless and effective.

Registered housing providers are proactive in working with tenants with disabilities, working collaboratively with social care and Cheshire Homechoice to find suitable accommodation where it is an option as an alternative to adapting homes. There are 1,034 households registered with Cheshire Homechoice who are waiting for an adapted property, of which 308 are waiting for a wheelchair accessible home. 68 applicants with disabilities have been allocated properties through Homechoice. More needs to be done to match tenants to suitable properties to reduce the number of requests for adaptations at the start of new tenancies. Housing providers also provide a significant contribution to funding adaptations, delivering minor adaptations to their tenants as well as contributing nearly £2million for major adaptations.

Older People

Cheshire East, much like the rest of the UK, has an ageing demographic. Estimates up to 2035 show an increase of 34%, for those aged 65 and above, raising the total to 118,500. We have an above average proportion of residents within each of the five-year age bands over the age of 40. There is a relatively low proportion of people of working age and a relatively high proportion of older people. This has implications for the housing and support needs of the population, which are likely to rise as household numbers containing an ageing population increase. This includes:

- Supporting residents to make appropriate housing choices earlier in life
- Encouraging a mix of housing options which cater for older peoples' requirements

The main aim is to provide housing options for older people to enable them to retain their independence, ideally in their own home through adaptations, and floating support. When this is not possible then alternative accommodation such as retirement living, sheltered housing, extra care housing, care homes, and nursing homes will be required for ageing households. Adult Social Care is currently reviewing options regarding Extra Care housing, and the Housing Service will work with them to identify and bring forward opportunities.

Each of these will require ease of access to community services, GP and health centres, and leisure facilities, for example.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Strategic priorities above are now set out along with a detailed action plan which shows how the priorities will be delivered. The five Strategic Priorities outlined show how residents in Cheshire East will be able to access affordable, appropriate, and decent home. To achieve our vision to deliver an excellent housing offer, we will focus on the following priorities.

This Strategy outlines a series of interventions which will address housing need in Cheshire East. The priorities require a range of co-ordinated activity. It sets the framework for activities to deliver the priorities, and will both support, and be supported, by strategic documents such as the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and the Tenancy Strategy.

Tying together the strategic priorities for improving services to communities, this strategy will go through consultation with partners in 2024 to establish that the strategic priorities are still relevant, with the opportunity to identify any key tasks required to deliver the priorities of the new Strategy.

The priorities are outlined below and sit alongside the detailed Action Plan which will enable us to achieve these Strategic Priorities.

Strategic Priority 1: Improving access to Affordable housing:

Aim: *Increasing the provision of affordable housing within urban and rural areas by working with key partners:*

- Registered Housing Providers
 - Homes England
 - Parish Councils
 - Developers
- Supporting the development of the new Local Plan strategy to deliver new affordable housing.
 - Using Section 106 money to bring forward additional affordable housing to meet unmet need.
 - Balancing the housing market by providing a range of affordable opportunities for those that cannot access the open market.
 - Exploring alternative opportunities to deliver new affordable housing in Cheshire East.
 - Focusing on delivering Social Rented homes to provide rented accommodation that is genuinely affordable
 - Exploring downsizing schemes to release family accommodation

Strategic Priority 2: Meeting peoples' specialist housing needs

Aim: *Continue to effectively commission and manage programme of Housing Related Support projects across the Borough.*

- Providing direct provision of Key Support Workers to assist individuals at risk of becoming homelessness after being discharged from hospital.
- Working with housing providers in shaping permanent move-on accommodation, with continued measured support to ensure sustainable outcomes.

- To work with Adult Social Care to establish good quality intelligence data for people with complex needs to influence commissioning decisions.
- Responding locally to the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act to implement the new regulations to tackle any poor-quality supported housing and protect residents.
- Continue to deliver specialist support for people with complex hoarding problems in collaboration with Adults Social Care.
- Continuing to develop partnerships with housing providers to enable us to address identified specialist housing needs.
- Addressing the identified housing needs of Gypsy Roma and Traveller households
- Continuing to support the Refugees programme in collaboration with other agencies.
- Supporting the development of the new Local Plan to identify and address specialist housing needs.

Strategic Priority 3: Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping:

Aim: *Implement Action plan in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2021 - 2025.*

- Developing new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025 - 2028.
- Working with our partners to help improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people and identify those who are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Continuing work with partner agencies to deliver our successful 'No Second Night Out' initiative.
- Temporary accommodation **NIC**

Strategic Priority 4: Improving Housing Standards

Aim: Drive up the standards in privately owned housing by engaging with landlords, taking a strong line against poor property standards and management where it is most needed, and deliver the Wider Borough Carbon Action Plan 2024-2029.

- Responding to legislative changes and responsibilities introduced through the Renter Rights Bill
- Keeping the existing Article 4 Directions under review, and monitor the need for further controls in other areas
- Improving landlords' knowledge of their responsibilities to provide well maintained homes.
- Supporting the private rented sector to improve energy efficiency.
- To improve and update our evidence base in relation to the condition of our housing stock.
- Enabling and advising vulnerable households to improve their homes' energy efficiency.

Strategic Priority 5: Enabling Independent Living

Aim: *Promote a housing offer which provides a mix of type, affordability, tenure and size for vulnerable and older households.*

- Supporting the development of the new Local Plan in the provision of housing choice for older people including Extra Care.
- Transforming the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants to improve efficiency and value for money.
- Maximising the best use of accessible social rented housing stock.
- Supporting our care leavers to ensure they have the skills to prepare for and sustain their tenancy.
- Promoting independence for care leavers through the Ignition Panel scheme.
- Work in partnership with Adult Social Care to provide accommodation which promotes independence for residents with learning disabilities/ autism and physical and sensory disabilities.

Appendices:

- Evidence base
- Consultation
- Glossary of terms – *this will be updated when the Strategy is finalised*

ACTION PLAN 2025-2028

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: IMPROVING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING			
TASK	OUTCOME	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME
INCREASE THE PROVISION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS			
Enable the delivery of 355 affordable homes per year through partnership working	Ensure the right mix of small and family sized homes are available to meet housing needs	Hold quarterly review meetings with Registered Housing providers.	2025 - 2028
		Investigate funding opportunities through Homes England and other agencies.	2025 - 2028
		Explore the most effective use of Section 106 (commuted sums) funding.	2025 - 2028
Enable the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas with identified need.	Increase the number of affordable homes in rural areas	Proactively working with the Rural Housing Enabler, Parish Councils who have identified a need for affordable housing and bring forward opportunities.	2025 - 2028
Reduce the number of Empty homes in the borough	Bring empty homes back into use through encouragement, advice and assistance.	Provide advice and guidance, direct intervention and enforcement were necessary to reduce the number of empty homes.	2025 - 2028
REVITALISE THE HOUSING MARKET			
Continue to progress the procurement of surplus Council land assets through the Housing Development Framework	Increase in the number of affordable homes brought forward.	Sites identified for disposal through the Framework are progressed via the mini competition route.	2025

Maintain strategic links with Registered providers to support them to develop within the Cheshire East area	Active number of Registered Housing Providers developing in the Cheshire East area	Establish a programme of regular meetings with developing Registered Housing Providers and explore opportunities.	2025 -2028
Explore collaborative working to bring forward housing opportunities	Support aims and objectives of the Local Plan	Work with Sub Regional Councils, Local Enterprise Partnership, Homes England and Regeneration to bring forward opportunities for housing growth.	2025 - 28
Work with partners on regeneration programmes within the Borough	Increase residential opportunities on brownfields sites and within town centres	Work with the Council's Regeneration team to create residential opportunities, as part of the Town centre regeneration projects in Crewe and Macclesfield.	2025 -2028
Self-build and custom build	Increase self-build and custom build opportunities.	Maintain self-build register.	2025 -2028
		Work with Strategic planning to identify suitable sites within the revision of the Local Plan.	2026-2028
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: MEETING PEOPLES' SPECIALIST HOUSING NEEDS			
COMMISSION HOUSING SUPPORT FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS:			
Continue to effectively commission and manage programme of Housing Related Support across the Borough.	Reduce number of instances of repeat homelessness.	Collate figures quarterly and monitor people who are in sustainable accommodation, 6 months after leaving supported accommodation.	2025 - 2028
Develop robust and clear pathways to assist individuals at risk of becoming homelessness after being discharged from hospital.	Work with the Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health to increase positive move-on from all commissioned pathways.	Decrease delays in hospital discharge through discharge planning.	2025 - 2028

Establish good quality intelligence and useful data for people with complex needs.	Contracts are procured and tailored to meet the changing needs of our customers.	There are a range of housing options available to people and we have less refusals/ rejections from support providers.	2025-2028
Work with housing providers in shaping permanent move-on accommodation, with continued measured support to ensure sustainable outcomes.	A reduction in unplanned outcomes from supported accommodation, with more people moving successfully into appropriate long-term placements. Consequently, reducing the health and wellbeing inequalities experienced by those with complex needs.	The percentage of unplanned ends to support are monitored and the ratio of planned move on outcomes increase.	2025 - 2028
Work with Adult Social Care to establish good quality intelligence to inform housing development opportunities..	Contracts are procured and tailored to meet the changing needs of our customers.	There are a range of housing options available to people.	2025-2028
Implement the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act	<p>Use of new regulations to tackle any poor-quality supported housing and protection of residents.</p> <p>Minimum standards delivered for both the properties and the care or support provided in supported accommodation.</p> <p>Creation of a local supported accommodation licensing scheme.</p>	As part of the remit of the Specialist Housing Group, a workstream will be established to progress the preparation of a Supported Accommodation Strategy, in partnership with Adult Social Care to oversee local delivery of the Act.	2025-2026
Continue to deliver specialist support for people with complex hoarding problems in collaboration with Adult Social Care	People can manage their health and care at home and can sustain their tenancy	Explore and develop innovative approaches to support residents through use of use Housing Led Provision and Floating Support service.	2025-2028

Continue to develop partnerships with housing providers across all tenures, including the private rented sector.	Increase access to permanent safe accommodation for homeless applicants.	Record homelessness preventions and relief on a quarterly basis and analyse data for trends to help address any areas of concern.	2025 - 2028
Continue to support the Refugees programme in collaboration with other agencies.	Deliver housing outcomes and provision for refugees.	Increase prevention outcomes for refugees are evidenced.	2025 - 2028
Support the development of a Care Leavers' Accommodation Pathway to independence.	Reduce care leaver homelessness and increase prevention outcomes for our young people.	The housing options team are integral in the development and delivery of the pathway and incidents of care leaver homelessness are reduced.	2025 - 2028
Support with the delivery and re-procurement of a pathway for domestic abuse survivors.	Deliver housing outcomes and support for survivors of domestic abuse	Increased positive prevention and relief outcomes for domestic abuse survivors and their families.	2025- 2028
To work to address the accommodation needs of our Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeoples' communities	To bring forward the sites within Cheshire East ownership, allocated within the SADPD for permanent residential sites.	Increase the number of pitches in Cheshire East.	2025 - 2026
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: PREVENT HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING			
ANY PERSON WHO IS HOMELESS OR FACING HOMELESSNESS WILL RECEIVE ALL THE ADVICE AND SUPPORT THEY NEED			
Implement the action plan in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2021 - 2025.	Support individuals and households threatened with homelessness to find suitable housing before they become homeless.	Action Plan reviewed bi-annually by the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group.	2025
Develop new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and associated action plan for 2025 - 2028.	A new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is developed which is focused on improved outcomes for the next 3 years	Consult Housing Options officers, Steering Group members, partners to ensure priorities are robust.	2025

Work with our partners to help improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people and identify those who are at risk of becoming homelessness. Integrate our multi-disciplinary support without rough sleeping outreach service.	Personalised pathways are in place to enable access to tailored support and settled accommodation to break the link between homelessness and ill health. Reduce rough sleeping through a range of interventions and provide temporary and longer-term housing solutions, so that people do not need to sleep rough.	Reduced numbers of repeat homelessness and reduced rejections from support providers.	2025-2028
		Reduce numbers of rough sleepers, particularly those with complex needs.	2025 - 2028
Evaluate and develop our in-house temporary accommodation provision to reduce the number of nights households spending in hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation. Enhance the no further night out provision by working with support and accommodation providers to prevent evictions and develop a step-down offer.	The temporary accommodation we provide directly, meets the needs of homeless people in appropriate locations with effective turnover and minimal cost. Unplanned ends to accommodation are reduced and mitigated through alternative offers and creative work.	Increase the capacity to support people with more complex needs in temporary accommodation.	2025 - 2028
		Decreased unplanned ends to accommodation.	2025-2028
Develop relationships with non-commissioned support providers and private landlords to deliver housing options for those people with low support needs	The needs of people at risk of homelessness are met through a variety of housing solutions, mitigating the issues of supply and demand in social housing.	Develop upstream prevention for non-priority single homeless applicants.	2025-2028
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: IMPROVE HOUSING STANDARDS			
CHALLENGE POOR QUALITY HOUSING			
Improve landlords' knowledge of their responsibilities to provide well maintained homes	A well maintained private rented sector reduces the need for housing enforcement activity, and improves health and wellbeing of occupants	Develop information resources for landlords about responsibilities, common hazards and property maintenance.	2025-2028

Respond to legislative changes and responsibilities introduced through the Renters' Rights Bill	Improved controls in the private rented sector	Develop an action plan to utilise all available powers to improve the private rented sector.	2025-2028
Update and improve our evidence base on housing conditions	Improved knowledge of housing conditions will lead to early intervention preventing low demand and poor housing conditions	Engage with Research and Consultation to collate and review all available datasets, and review whether a stock condition survey is required.	2026
Support the private rented sector to improve energy efficiency	Improved living conditions and improved health and wellbeing	Embed energy efficiency information and guidance into housing disrepair and enforcement processes.	2025
Enable homeowners to improve their homes' energy efficiency	Improved living conditions and improved health and wellbeing	Provide guidance and advice to households to publicise the availability of government / industry funding for retrofitting and energy efficiency measures.	2025-2028
		Explore funding opportunities for the retrofit of low energy efficiency homes for vulnerable households.	2025-2028
		Develop and deliver an action plan based on the NICE guidance to prevent excess winter deaths and illness associated with cold homes.	2025-2026
Progress the Towns Fund Warm and Healthy Homes initiative.	Improved living conditions and improved health and wellbeing	Project to be completed by March 2026.	2026
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5: ENABLING INDEPENDENT LIVING			
PROMOTE INDEPENDENT LIVING			

Support the development of the Local Plan in order to increase the provision of housing for older people.	Housing offer is of appropriate specification and age positive.	Work with Spatial Planning to develop appropriate policies.	2025-2028
Explore the potential of a scheme to provide the right size housing offer for an ageing population who are under-occupying their homes and are interested in moving to a smaller home that better fits their needs and are more manageable	Release of homes for families that need more space, and ensure the efficient use of the existing social housing	Explore downsizing housing opportunities with Registered providers and Developers.	2025 - 2028
Transform the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants to improve efficiency and value for money.	People can remain living at home as long as possible	Develop an action plan to reduce waiting times and maximise spending power on Disabled Facilities Grants. Explore opportunities to embed major adaptations in wider health and social care systems.	2025-2028
Preparing clients as tenancy ready and/or to maintain a tenancy.	People are less likely to be admitted to hospital.	Reduction in early tenancy termination.	2025 - 2028
Maximise the best use of accessible housing stock	Help people to live independently in their own homes	Establish protocols with Housing Providers.	2025-2028
Promote independence for residents with learning and/or autism and physical disabilities through the development of new housing models.	Support people to live independently in their own home.	Reduction of residents placed in inappropriate housing.	2025 - 2028

Appendices

Evidence base

Sources:

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ONS House price to workplace-based earnings ration (22 March 2023 release)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/ratioofhousepricetoworkplacebasedearningslowerquartileandmedian>

Glossary of Terms

Text here.....