



Cheshire West
and Chester



Health and Housing

Professor Helen Bromley
Public Health Annual Report 2024



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Foreword

Welcome to my second Public Health Annual Report as the Director of Public Health for Cheshire West and Chester. This year's report examines the relationship between housing and health.

The relationship between our health and our homes is becoming increasingly clear, with growing evidence that good-quality housing supports our health and enhances our overall wellbeing. In contrast, poor housing contributes not only to a reduced quality of life but also increased pressure on the NHS and greater dependence on social care, increased Local Authority referrals to food banks, a higher risk of household accidents, and a greater likelihood of fuel poverty. Housing is far more than just a physical structure - it is fundamental to our health and quality of life!

Defining what makes a 'healthy' home is difficult and challenges public health departments across the UK. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is defined as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." This holistic view highlights how our living environments impact not just physical health, but also mental and social well-being.

The 2024 Marmot Report - Building Health Equity: The Role of The Property Sector in Improving Health discusses how poor housing conditions lead to a variety of health inequalities. For example, poor quality housing can affect mental health in numerous ways; living in an unsafe or overcrowded environment or struggling with rent or mortgage payments can trigger insomnia, anxiety, and depression. Additionally, even after housing issues are resolved, the mental health impacts can have a lasting effect. These challenges can also lead to reduced opportunities in education and employment, further compounding the long-term effects.

Whilst we have established that being healthy does not simply mean a lack of disease, poor quality housing can still significantly impact an individuals' physical health. Poor living conditions contribute to various health issues such as an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, including heart attacks, high blood pressure, strokes, and respiratory conditions such as asthma and influenza. Inadequate housing increases the likelihood of falls, injuries, and hypothermia, with hazards such as fires and accidents being more common in poorly constructed and poorly maintained homes. People living in homes with poor conditions experience an 11% higher demand for healthcare services, as reflected in the increased number of GP visits.

This report describes the ways in which health and housing services interact across Cheshire West and Chester and shines a light on how various individuals and organisations across both the public and private sectors work together to improve our housing stock. We also explore how these initiatives improve physical and mental wellbeing for many of our residents.

**Professor Helen Bromley, Director of Public Health
Cheshire West and Chester Council**





Progress on past recommendations and priorities from the 2023 report



Our Ageing Population

Recommendation 1: Age-friendly Programme

The Council should complete a review of Cheshire West's Age-Friendly Programme, to identify areas of strength as well as opportunities for development and future funding. This will help to build upon the existing work undertaken and focus future direction of the Age-friendly Partnership.

The review of the Age-friendly Cheshire West Partnership has been completed, and work is ongoing with partners to explore opportunities to recruit an Age-friendly Coordinator. This role will be essential to developing the Partnership with wider stakeholders, implementing the Age-friendly Action Plan, and sourcing new funding to sustain the programme.

Recommendation 2: Age-friendly Survey

Cheshire West's Age-friendly Strategic Group should arrange to undertake an Age-friendly follow up survey in 2025, as per the requirements of membership of the WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities. This will set out to identify the progress that has been made since the Age-friendly baseline survey was conducted, and to identify areas for future focus.

The follow-up survey is currently being commissioned and is due to take place in 2025.



Our Ethnic Heritage

Recommendation 3: Diverse Communities

The Council should work with partners to continually improve its knowledge and understanding of the needs of its diverse communities, so that it can develop further knowledge of vulnerabilities and health conditions. This should be facilitated by reviewing and improving communication, practices, and systems to develop better access and engagement with communities.

The Council has continued to work with our diverse communities by providing relevant support. For new and emerging communities, we have provided funding and help.



- A Health Protection Programme Lead to work with the Health Inequalities Officer at Cheshire Halton and Warrington Race and Equality Centre (CHAWREC) to improve immunisation rates and also participate in community activities to encourage health protection and prevention amongst ethnic minority communities.
- The Council has also worked closely with CHAWREC staff and community representatives, including Hongkongers, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Gypsies and Travellers and Ukrainians.
- As part of our work to challenge low hate crime incidents reporting by vulnerable groups, we supported third sector organisations to deliver hate crime awareness and set up 'You're Safe Here' to better support vulnerable communities.
- The Council worked with Cheshire West Voluntary Action (CWVA) to stimulate a conversation about the specific mental health challenges faced by diverse groups: their particular needs, the barriers they face to getting help, the specialist provision available and prevailing unmet need. The aim is to use professional and lived experience to improve mental health outcomes through "Positive Mental Health for Us" events to develop an ongoing cross-sector community of practice in relation to vulnerable groups.
- The Council funded Minerva Arts to undertake a pilot project to encourage young people with English as a foreign language and young people with additional learning needs living in deprived areas to engage in arts and cultural activities. The focus of the project was in the Lache and Upton areas of Chester as well as the semi-rural location of Malpas, aiming to support inclusion, community cohesion and improve communication.

Recommendation 4: Sanctuary

Work collaboratively to ensure Cheshire West is a place of safety and sanctuary for refugee and migrant communities.

On 28 October 2024 Cheshire West and Chester Council was awarded the Council of Sanctuary accreditation in recognition of its work and ongoing commitment to support those people seeking sanctuary and fleeing war, conflict and persecution. The Council will continue to work with our partners and communities to make Cheshire West a Borough of Sanctuary.

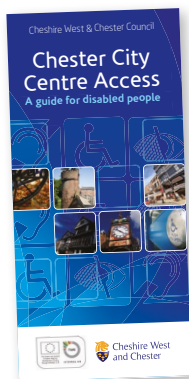
The Council has started to develop a borough-wide partnership strategy to enhance community cohesion, building on the excellent work of communities and local leaders to date.



Access for All

Recommendation 5: Accessibility

The Council should realise accessibility consultancy recommendations in Chester City Centre, with accessible signage, mapping and wayfinding.



The recommendations for improvements identified by the accessibility consultancy report identified Rows access improvements at Pierpoint Lane and at Weaver Street. Both are currently being costed, and it is hoped that a new ramp (Pierpoint Lane) and highways improvements (Weaver St) can be realised as part of the 2024-25 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) allocation.



Similarly, the accessible signage including QR codes and the creation of an accompanying website have been confirmed. It is envisaged that this can also be funded by the UKSPF 2024-25 allocation and will provide disabled visitors to and

residents of Chester with improved accessibility information.

Recommendation 6: Sensory Impairment Provision

The Council should continue to prioritise and improve sensory impairment provision across its services. This is needed to ensure that residents with a sensory impairment can access Council services and receive a positive experience.

The Council has contracted with InterpretersLive! to provide video interpretation services via web-based platforms to facilitate online video interpretation for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Through this technology customers are able to communicate via British Sign Language with Council Officers in real time and without the complication and expense of arranging face to face interpretation services. This pilot programme funded by the Council's Compliance and Assurance service runs until September 2025 and has received very positive feedback so far.

Recommendation 7: Council Workforce

The Council should continue to champion equality, diversity, and inclusion across the organisation and seek to identify if there are any areas of the Council with less diverse representation. Staff training on diversity awareness is integral to continuing to foster an inclusive workplace.

The Council has improved its diversity monitoring through its Be You campaign and continues towards being an organisation which reflects the community we serve. We have expanded the number of colleague networks to include Women's and Neurodiversity alongside Disability, LGBTQ+ and Race, and held several conferences for colleagues to focus on Equality Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I). The training offer has been expanded to cover a range of mandatory and bespoke options so that all colleagues receive relevant information. The Council also marked a range of days and events in the diversity calendar to raise awareness of diversity issues.



LGBTQ+

Recommendation 8: Strengthen Relationships



The Council should build on established relationships with LGBTQ+ organisations to continue to identify key issues affecting communities, so it can support all its residents regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Council has continued to build its relationships with Chester Pride and other local organisations. Very visible support was provided again through participation in the parade and a strong presence in the Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyle Zone. The Council's own LGBTQ+ network has worked hard to link with partners and support the LGBTQ+ community. They have also delivered training to colleagues on a range of relevant issues and will expand this in 2025.

Where We Call Home

Recommendation 9: Traveller Population

The Council should develop a framework or strategy to promote better outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in the borough, including those on unauthorised encampments, and end any discriminatory practices.

Cheshire and Warrington Traveller Team has established a task group to develop a framework for Council staff and partners working with the Gypsy and Traveller communities. This is a priority for 2025.

Recommendation 10: Homelessness

The Council should strengthen links between the housing department and health partners through partnership working in the Homeless Reduction Board and other relevant groups.

The Homelessness Reduction Board membership has been reviewed to ensure stronger links between the housing department and health partners. During 2024 the Board has been responsible for overseeing the development of a new Homelessness Strategy and will continue to be responsible for the monitoring and delivery of the strategy and action plan. There are several plans that build on existing partnerships to prevent and tackle the root causes of homelessness.



Healthy Homes

FACTS:

- ✓ There are approximately 18,147 households (11.4%) in Cheshire West and Chester in fuel poverty (2022 data)
- ✓ 26,700 residents live in neighbourhoods that rank in the top 10% most deprived in England (Decile 1)
- ✓ Approximately 10,796 children live in low-income families which equates to 17.3% of the families in Cheshire West and Chester compared to 20.1% in the UK (2022/23 data)



There is no standard definition of a healthy home, however a home should be a safe and accessible environment, free from hazards, able to be efficiently heated to a healthy temperature, provide a sense of security and have modern facilities.

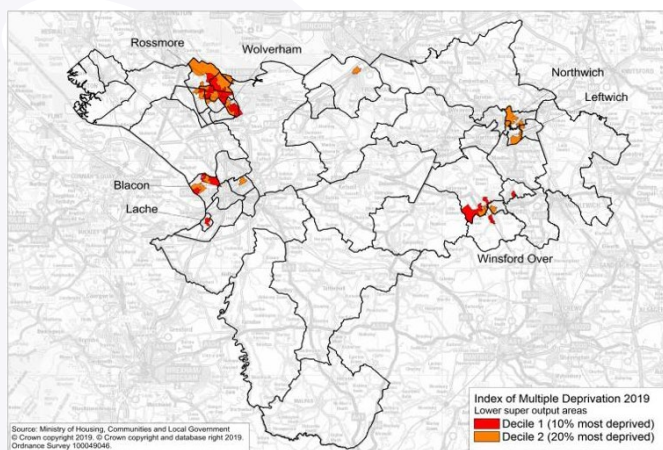
The right home environment is essential to health and wellbeing and enables people to better manage their own health and care needs, live independently for longer, access and sustain education training and employment and participate and contribute to society.

Unfortunately, housing has become less affordable, both to rent and to buy, as incomes have not kept up with price increases. The average cost of a home in Cheshire West and Chester has increased by 148% in the last 10 years, from £165,000 in 2013 to £245,000 in 2023. On average a household can expect to spend 7.41% of their annual income to own a home.

Locally, 30.3% of properties are rented with 15.7% being privately rented and 14.6% being social housing. In December 2024 there were 6,640 applicants on the social housing register of which 1,825 were from Bands A (urgent need) and B (high housing need). The Council's Local Housing Need Figure has increased from 534 dwellings per annum in 2024 to a projected 1,914 dwellings per annum for 2025. In response to this, a major priority of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 is to deliver a sufficient supply of homes with a particular focus on specific groups in the community such as those who require affordable housing, families with children, students and older people.

Within Cheshire West and Chester currently 351 individuals are known to live in unsanitary, unsatisfactory or overcrowded housing conditions and 605 individuals require new accommodation based on medical or welfare grounds.

Across England 3.7 million rented properties are classed as 'non decent'. A decent home is classed as one that meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing, is in a reasonable state of repair, has reasonably modern facilities and services and provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort. Non-decent properties cause avoidable ill health and inequalities and as a result the refurbishment of existing housing stock is listed as a key priority in the Marmot Report: Building Health Equity: The Role of The Property Sector in Improving Health.





Locally, 194 Council owned dwellings were made decent over the last year, however, 205 are still considered to be non-decent. The average Energy Performance Certificate rating of Council owned properties in Cheshire West and Chester is C.

There are various initiatives in Cheshire West and Chester to help residents stay healthier in their homes for longer. Some schemes provide food and white goods whilst others focus on improving air quality within the home and the associated health benefits. Many of these schemes focus on combating the cost-of-living crisis aiding residents to be energy efficient and stay warm during the winter months and beyond.

One such scheme providing financial support is the Housing Assistance Policy discussed below.

Housing Assistance Policy

The Council adopted its new Housing Assistance Policy in April 2024 which sets out a range of financial assistance available to help people live as safely and independently as possible in their homes. The policy includes assistance to provide disabled adaptations as well as improvements to the condition of private sector homes.

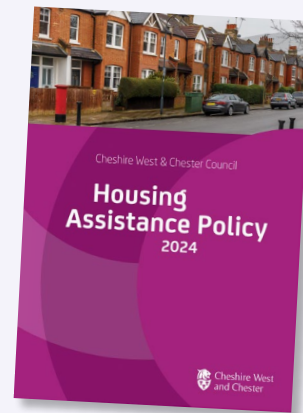
The range of financial assistance offered includes:

- **Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant** - a means-tested grant to provide adaptations such as stair lifts, level access showers, ramps, through-floor lifts amongst others, to enable people to live as independently as possible and have safe access to the main aspects of their homes.
- **Discretionary Urgent Works Grant** - a non-means-tested grant of up to £10,000 to provide an urgent straightforward adaptation where there is either a high-risk situation, to facilitate a hospital discharge, or someone has a terminal illness.
- **Discretionary Relocation Grant** - a means-tested grant of up to £5,000 to help fund the costs of moving house, if the current home is too complex to adapt to meet the identified need.
- **Discretionary Decent Homes Loan** - a means-tested equity share loan for homeowners, to enable them to carry out essential repairs to their property to bring it up to the Decent Homes Standard.
- **Discretionary Safe and Warm Grant** - a means-tested grant of up to £5,000 for homeowners to carry out essential repairs, where a Decent Homes Loan is not appropriate.
- **Discretionary Landlord Energy Efficiency Top-Up Grant** - a grant of up to £5,000 to help private landlords who are accessing the national Home Upgrade Grant or ECO scheme on behalf of their tenant. These schemes help to fund improved heating and energy efficiency measures for people on low incomes and/or with health conditions. As private landlords are expected to contribute towards the cost of works, the Council can provide a grant to help with their contribution and improve the condition of the private rented sector.

The grants and loan (with the exception of the Landlord Energy Efficiency Top-Up Grant) are delivered by the Council's Home Improvement Agency, HomeKey+.

The Council's Occupational Therapy Team work with children and adults and provide personalised plans to promote independence, health and wellbeing through equipment and adaptations.

The case study below provides an example of how financial assistance from the Council has helped to improve the health and wellbeing of one family in Cheshire West and Chester.





Charlotte and Oscar



Charlotte's family were put in touch with the Council's Home Improvement Agency (HomeKey+) by the Occupational Therapy team because they needed some adaptations to their home. Oscar, seven, uses a wheelchair so it is important that his home is future proofed for both him and his family's care needs as he grows and develops.

The family received a series of improvements to their home through a Disabled Facilities Grant, including a new driveway, ramp access to the front and rear of the property, a through-floor lift, and a ceiling track hoist in Oscar's bedroom and the bathroom.

Charlotte said:

"Before the driveway was installed, we had to get Oscar and his older sister out of the car on the side of a busy road, which felt so dangerous. Now we can do this in safety."

Oscar is continuing to grow, and we needed to make sure that we could carry on looking after him in our family home, as well as looking after our own health and wellbeing. The through-floor lift and hoists have made all our lives so much better."

Partner organisations working alongside the Council also provide various support for households across the borough including Citizens Advice Cheshire West and Cheshire Fire and Rescue.





Citizens Advice Cheshire West



Citizens Advice Cheshire West supports households in the borough across several key areas including:

- **Fuel poverty**
- **Income maximisation**
- **Community engagement**
- **Energy efficiency advice**
- **Holistic advice service**

In 2024 they provided support and advice to vulnerable households, some examples of which are below:

- **3,844 households were provided with brief energy saving information**
- **2,826 households were provided with in-depth energy advice**
- **1,349 households were helped financially through the Heating Bank**

Case Study 1:

May lives in privately rented accommodation with oil central heating and electricity as a secondary energy source. May has multiple health conditions affected by cold and was dealing with high energy costs and an electricity bill of £8,000. The Citizens Advice Energy Adviser found that May was on a day and night tariff she didn't need, and her meters had been mis-read by her energy provider. With the Adviser's help, the energy provider corrected the mistake, cleared £3,000 arrears, and placed £5,000 credit on her account. May was then advised to consider switching to a single tariff to save on costs.

May said:

"I can't put into words how grateful I am to you!... Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your understanding, support, concern, for going through this difficult path with me and helping me deal with my provider."

Case Study 2:

Andrew receives a state pension, is partially sighted and lives alone. When Andrew came to us for advice, he was living in fuel poverty, in a cold home with poor insulation and penetrating damp. The Citizens Advice Energy Adviser identified that Andrew would be eligible for free internal wall insulation, and, through the Great British Insulation Scheme, Andrew benefited from £7,000 worth of insulation throughout his home.

Andrew said:

"I am so excited about being warm again in my own home. I am so happy here with my cottage garden being so pretty. Thank you so much for being my champion."



Housing for Everyone

FACTS:

- ✓ 2021 census data shows that there were 155,156 households in Cheshire West and Chester
- ✓ Of those households 37.1% are owned outright, 31.2% are owned with a mortgage or a loan, 15.7% are in the private rented sector, 14.6% are in the social rented sector and 1.4% other
- ✓ The population in Cheshire West and Chester is forecast to increase by 8% by 2033. The greatest increase is expected to be in those aged 65 or above
- ✓ In 2022/23 there were more children and young people under 18 living in care in Cheshire West and Chester compared to the England average



The links between an individual's health and their housing situation can be extremely complicated and work in both directions. An individual in poor health may be unable to care for their home or maintain a job to afford to rent or buy property. Alternatively, as we have discussed, housing conditions, housing stability and housing affordability all have impacts on the health of an individual. The cohort affected most is rough sleepers who experience higher rates of physical and mental illnesses when compared with the general population. Rough sleeping

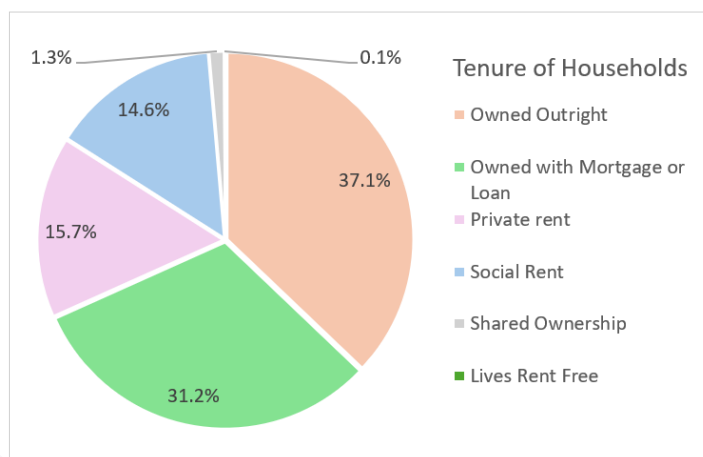
is associated with a variety of health problems such as malnutrition, poor dental health, community acquired pneumonia, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Hepatitis B and C, poor mental health and HIV.

Individuals who are not rough sleeping but are in temporary accommodation or "sofa surfing" are still heavily affected. Households in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation often lack access to healthy food and the ability to cook, and experience inequalities in healthcare such as access to GP services.

Other groups that may have high support needs are asylum seekers, vulnerable children and young people and their families and our ageing population. In many cases, key housing support needs relate to mental ill health, physical ill health and support with life skills.

Within Cheshire West and Chester, we recognise the importance of helping individuals to live as safely and independently as possible in their homes regardless of their circumstances. Factors such as rising rents can make this difficult; of the Cheshire West and Chester Council owned Housing Stock, there are 5,098 properties of which only 221 are Affordable Rent¹ homes. As a result of this the Council is working with landlords in the private rented sector to ensure affordable tenancies that are a good match for both the tenant and the landlord.

Additionally, there are various other schemes in place across Cheshire West and Chester to help all individuals to live independently. Some projects help by assisting individuals to obtain benefits or employment, others help by providing necessary adaptations for people to remain in their own homes.



1. Affordable rent homes are those made available to households eligible for low cost rental housing at a rental level of no more than 80% of local market rents.



In line with the National Planning Policy Framework 2024, many initiatives also try to foster a sense of community and support amongst residents, recognising the importance of promoting social interaction for an individuals' health and wellbeing.

In April this year the Council hosted its first Health and Housing Symposium bringing together a range of stakeholders including Housing and Public Health teams within the Council, NHS colleagues, Local Councillors and representatives from Housing Associations with properties inside the borough. Key themes discussed on the day included affordability, adaptations and housing related support. The themes have all been included in the draft Housing Strategy which is due to be considered by the Council's Cabinet in March 2025.



Cheshire West & Chester Council Housing Strategy Engagement 2024 - 2030



The strategy seeks to set out a collaborative approach, ensuring there is a range of good quality, affordable housing and support that meets the needs of residents in Cheshire West and Chester over the next ten years.

There are three priorities within the strategy:

- 1. Support that enables residents to access the right home and live well**
- 2. Homes that are fit for now and ready for the future**
- 3. Affordable homes of all tenures across the borough**

Grosvenor Hart Homes is an example of a scheme helping individuals to live independently, through providing both properties to vulnerable individuals as well as holistic advice and support.



Grosvenor Hart Homes



Grosvenor Hart Homes (GHH), a social enterprise and registered housing provider, aims to improve the life chances of vulnerable children, young people and their families. Working collaboratively with Cheshire West and Chester Council through a public/private partnership, they provide stable, high-quality, affordable housing in supportive communities alongside tailored employment and rapid access mental health and wellbeing services for young people and families who require additional support.

A key feature of the GHH model is a team of highly skilled family support workers who coordinate and sequence the right support at the right time, tailoring this carefully to the needs of an individual. Their focus is on developing relationships that are based on trust, choice, collaboration and the empowerment of their tenants.

GHH currently has 29 homes and a dedicated community facility in Chester as well as 40 newly acquired family homes in Ellesmere Port. Referrals for GHH homes come via Cheshire West and Chester's Children's and Housing teams. Properties are allocated by a multi-agency housing allocations matching panel to ensure a balanced and sustainable community.

The homes are already benefiting young people across the borough, enhancing their security and wellbeing. One young person whose prior experience included living in unstable semi-independent accommodation has found the move to a GHH home has boosted their overall wellbeing:

"I absolutely love my flat, like it's amazing... I do not want to move. If I could, I'd just buy the place... It's like [in gaming], when you go from like a mythic weapon to a legendary one... it's one of those places where you feel safe not just physically but also mentally."

Similarly, the feedback from families is equally encouraging and points towards the intended improvements in life chances for tenants:

"They are very supportive, very understanding, and caring. And they're there to listen. You feel confident because I'm quite a quiet, shy person, but with the GHH team, you feel like you can just go to them about anything, and they would be there for the family."

Another initiative in Cheshire West and Chester, facilitated by Weaver Vale Housing Trust (WVHT), encourages individuals to foster social connections to help maintain their independence.



Weaver Vale Housing Trust



Weaver Vale Housing Trust (WVHT) is a not-for-profit housing association operating across Cheshire and Warrington, managing more than 6,500 homes, plus garages, shops, community play areas, and green open spaces. They also offer services such as aids and adaptations, supported housing and support for individuals to gain employment.

They recognise the fact that as an individual ages their housing needs may change; some people struggle to maintain the upkeep on a larger home, others have concerns about their safety or feel isolated and lacking a sense of community. As a result, the Trust established four over 55s Independent Living Schemes located in Northwich town centre, Rudheath, Davenham and Weaverham. The aim of the schemes is to work in partnership with other agencies to address an ageing individual's changing needs, sustaining independent living for as long as possible.

As part of the schemes and to tackle social isolation and encourage greater interaction between residents, WVHT provide a programme of arts and crafts sessions to individuals beginning with crafting in clay, making decorative clocks, pottery decorating and card making.

So far, these sessions have proven to be extremely popular and the increase in social engagement because of these sessions have led to residents taking part in other activities together such as games of darts and backgammon. This is advantageous as research suggests that participating in meaningful social activities, may help people maintain their thinking skills better in later life and slow down cognitive decline.

One resident who was struggling to socialise with others due to his autism and the associated communication difficulties that this condition can bring, felt empowered enough by the craft sessions to be able to explain his condition and as a result his communication preferences. His neighbours are now reportedly much more compassionate and understanding towards him and he reportedly seems happier and more content.

In Weaverham, the residents hold weekly bingo sessions in the communal lounge. These are popular and well attended, both by residents and older people from the surrounding community. Many of the individuals that attend report that the activity of playing bingo is incidental to them, with the main attraction being the social interaction and strong sense of community these sessions foster both of which they feel they would be lacking otherwise.



As well as the older persons independent living service, WVHT also provide support to other vulnerable people through various assistance schemes. Their Financial Assistance Fund helps tenants purchase, store and cook food by providing funding for white goods items such as cookers, fridges, freezers, microwaves and slow cookers. Their Money Matters Team delivers financial advice helping to sustain tenancies and access relevant health related benefits. This has generated over £4m in additional income for their customers in the last financial year and almost £2m already this financial year. They also support customers in obtaining employment through their Raising Aspirations Programme. This is a holistic mentoring programme that supports adults to realise their potential, raise their aspirations and improve their quality of life by boosting confidence, self-belief and knowledge.

This programme has supported 293 people since July 2023 achieving approximately £1 million in financial gains and aiding 98 people to secure employment and 57 secure places in training or education. On completion of this programme 81% of participants reported a significant improvement in their health and wellbeing score.

One example of Weaver Vale's holistic support services working successfully is a customer who was supported by their Money Matters team to obtain Personal Independence Payment (PIP), for anxiety and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). When her health subsequently improved, she was then referred over to the employment team as she was keen to get back into work. The team helped her obtain funding to help set up her own photography business. She has now been nominated for awards aiding with both her financial situation and her physical and mental wellbeing.





Working Together

Coproduction is more than another name for consultation. It is about sharing power and undertaking joint decision making. Cheshire West Voluntary Action (CWVA) has developed a Local Voices Framework which aims to standardise the coproduction practices across Cheshire West and Chester. This supports organisations with coproduction and ensures that people with lived experience have a strong voice by setting out principles such as fostering open communication, promoting equality and inclusion and encouraging reflection amongst partners.

Partners across Cheshire West have funded this work and created a network so people and organisations can share best practice. The network has been developed between CWVA, the Council and the University of Chester. The Local Voices Framework has defined co-production as:



“The building of respectful and empowering relationships alongside the sharing of ideas between those with lived experience and other stakeholders. Both contribute their knowledge, skills and experiences to cocreate actionable change. Coproduction is a challenging process that requires reflection and dedication to ongoing collective learning.”

[Find more about the Local Voices Framework >](#)

The initiatives that follow discuss examples of coproduction using members of the community with lived experience of housing instability and highlight how their experiences can be used to help others going forwards.



What home means to us

Working Collaboratively on the Housing Strategy

When we talk about housing, we often hear about rising prices and challenges finding a suitable, affordable home but too often these factors miss the main point: that homes have a big impact on our lives, health, and wellbeing.

In supporting the development of the new Housing Strategy for the Borough, the Poverty Truth Advisory Board and Community Inspirers (volunteers with lived experience of poverty) challenged these debates about 'housing' by asking the fundamental question: "what does 'home' mean to me"?



As a result of the Community Inspirers' support, the engagement and consultation materials used to develop the Strategy were revised, making them more meaningful and accessible to residents. In addition, the emphasis on homes rather than housing drew in the importance of strong communities, access to services and amenities and the importance of decent homes for health and wellbeing.



It's Only Temporary (West Cheshire Foodbank)



It's Only Temporary aims to improve the experience of families and individuals in temporary accommodation by providing access to food, laundry and cooking facilities, as well as activities for children and families.

This group was created when staff at the West Cheshire foodbank noticed that the number of families in temporary accommodation using their service was increasing. As a result, discussions took place with families currently housed in hotels to get a better insight into their needs. The following top priorities were identified:

- **Lack of cooking facilities** - the families either had to buy fresh food daily or eat out, both of which are very expensive leaving families with no other choice but to access the foodbank.
- **Lack of laundry facilities** - the families had nowhere to wash or dry clothes making it difficult to dress children in clean school uniforms.
- **Keeping children in education** - difficulties surrounding both finding school placements and keeping children in their existing schools were discussed with transport being identified as a major barrier.

As a result of this Cheshire West Voluntary Action, West Cheshire Foodbank, Soul Kitchen, Share and Kidsbank as well as Housing and Local Councillors at Cheshire West and Chester Council formed a partnership to support the families in temporary accommodation called "It's Only Temporary."

This group, co-chaired by a volunteer with lived experience and a staff member at West Cheshire Foodbank, has had several successes since it was established. Funding from the Marjory Boddy Charitable Trust has enabled the purchase of activities for families such as swimming, film nights and supporting children to attend Football Coaching at Chester FC. Chester Zoo also donated entry tickets. The aim of this was to improve the mental and physical health of children young people and families during their stay at the hotels. Funding from the Household Support Fund has also enabled the provision of store cupboard foods, toiletries and other food items to the families.

Additionally, with support from key partners such as the owners of a hotel housing a large number of families and Cheshire West and Chester Council, an alternative hotel was offered. The hotel accommodates up to 28 families, has shared, fully fitted kitchen facilities with a breakfast and playroom for children, meaning families were able to cook meals, store food and wash clothes. This has been hugely successful, with families reporting an increased sense of community and greatly improved health and wellbeing.





Accommodation and Care Models 16-64 Programme

Cheshire West and Chester Council has also worked with people living with disabilities to ensure that their supported housing offer is tailored to the residents involved. In 2024, the Council, working in partnership with Cheshire Disabled People's Panel, redesigned accommodation services ensuring that people living with learning disabilities, autism, and mental health needs have housing options that are what they want, in a location they want and living with people they want to live with.



Several focus groups with people with lived experience were held, providing valuable feedback on how the service should be redesigned. This co-production ensured that Cheshire West residents now have access to appropriate accommodation with the right appropriate care and support. The programme contains several pillars with the main outcomes being:

- **Sufficient affordable in-borough supported independent living accommodation options for individuals with learning disabilities, autism and mental health needs**
- **Reduced residential / out of borough placements**
- **Reduced spend per person on care and support**
- **Improved quality of life**

Feedback from people with lived experience included:

"Living with friends and staff, keeps me company."

"I would like a taster day to see what the accommodation is like and if a different housing option would be right for me."

A Specialist Accommodation Project Team has also been formed, sitting across several Council departments including adult social care, commissioning, and strategic housing, and alongside housing providers and specialist health care providers such as Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. The team includes a Health and Housing Officer who works with specialist providers to ensure that when people with learning difficulties, autism or mental health needs are ready to leave community or inpatient care they have the right accommodation and support for their needs. The role also provides support for residents to prevent escalation of their needs and help them remain supported in their existing accommodation.

The next stage of co-design with housing providers will continue into 2025, developing the recommendations from the report.



Priorities and Recommendations

My 2024 Public Health Annual Report has examined the various ways in which housing can affect health and has highlighted some of the brilliant organisations across Cheshire West and Chester that work to promote both good housing and good health. During the compilation of this report, we developed a series of recommendations to enhance our efforts in improving housing locally to provide the best possible health outcomes for our residents.

1

Increase the supply of homes within Cheshire West and Chester, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework 2024. To achieve this, the property sector must collaborate closely with Cheshire West and Chester Council to best understand local needs, ensuring the most effective use of community assets and guarantee an equitable process throughout.

2

Cheshire West and Chester Council should continue to work with registered providers, private landlords and developers to maximise opportunities to enhance the existing housing stock available and ensure that any existing and future stock meets relevant housing and planning legislation. Efforts should be made to minimise number of 'non-decent' properties across the borough, with a particular focus on Council owned dwellings.

3

In collaboration with the NHS and third-sector organizations, Cheshire West and Chester Council should continue to support initiatives that enable vulnerable individuals such as those with disabilities to maintain independence and remain in their own homes for as long as possible. This can be achieved through financial assistance such as the Disabled Facility Grants, home improvement loan schemes, or through the provision of other practical advice and tailored support.

4

When allocating temporary accommodation, the specific health needs and impacts on individuals must be considered carefully, particularly for families with young children or vulnerable adults. The Council should work with healthcare providers and charities to minimise the barriers faced by these individuals when accessing education and employment and where possible ensure essential amenities such as cooking and laundry facilities are provided.

5

Continue to use co-production methods when developing future strategies and workplans such as the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This will enable us to learn from, and capitalise on, the wealth and variety of lived experience available across the borough. This will ensure joint decision-making is at the heart of our future policy decisions and frameworks.



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