FEBRUARY 2026

Cheshire West & Chester Housing Needs Assessment

ICENI PROJECTS LIMITED ON BEHALF OF CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER COUNCIL

Iceni Projects Limited on behalf of

Cheshire West & Chester Council

February 2026

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Cheshire West & Chester Housing Needs Assessment

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1. Executive Summary

Housing Market Area

1.1 Migration and commuting data reveal high levels of self-containment, and that Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC) should therefore be a standalone housing market area.

1.2 However, it does have a strong migratory relationship with Flintshire, and house prices align with the southern part of Cheshire East. At the same time, commuting is also strong to Chester East and Flintshire alongside the Wirral. These should inform the discussion of the duty to cooperate.

Housing Stock

1.3 Between 2011 and 2024, Cheshire West & Chester experienced higher growth in dwellings and households than the national and regional average.

1.4 At the same time, the rate of homes without 'usual residents' has increased.

1.5 Whilst the annual housing delivery target set out in the 2015-2030 Local Plan has so far been exceeded, housing delivery rates in Cheshire West & Chester have decreased since 2017.

1.6 The rate of housing delivery in the last 5, 10 and 20 years has been below peak rates achieved by other local authorities in the region, suggesting that there is further headroom for growth.

1.7 Cheshire West & Chester shows high rates of home ownership, and lower private renting and social rented housing than regional and national comparators.

1.8 CWAC has seen an above-average increase in outright home ownership and private renting, compared to the decrease in home ownership with a mortgage, highlighting issues associated with younger generations being able to afford to join the housing market.

1.9 The area is characterised by detached homes and larger residences, with 70% of homes featuring 3+ bedrooms. This has contributed to significant levels of under-occupancy of existing homes.

1.10 All the while, a significantly low level of flats and smaller properties will make it difficult for new entrants to the housing market to both own and rent a property.

1.11 CWAC has a relatively newer dwelling stock than the rest of the North West and England, having built around 18% of its stock since the millennium.

Housing Market

1.12 The median house prices in Cheshire West & Chester are £258,000, which is £38,000 higher than the regional average.

1.13 However, house prices are lower than the national average and have declined over the last year at a faster rate than regionally and nationally.

1.14 Cheshire West & Chester’s housing affordability ratio is higher than the regional averages but below the national average. However, all three areas have seen improving affordability in the last few years.

1.15 The workplace-based ratio is also higher than the residents-based average. This suggests a degree of out-commuting to higher-paid jobs

1.16 Since 2021-22, new build sales have decreased and are now below those seen at the lowest point after the financial crisis in 2008.

Demographics

1.17 As of the most recent published data from mid-2024, the population of Cheshire West & Chester is approximately 371,652.

1.18 This represents an increase of approximately 35,215 residents or 10.5% since 2014, which is a faster growth rate than regionally (8.4%) and Nationally (7.8%).

1.19 Cheshire West & Chester has an older population profile than nationally, with a lower proportion of working-age adults and children.

1.20 The highest total increase was in the working age population, although the highest proportionate increase is amongst those aged 65 and over.

1.21 Internal migration from within the UK has been a consistent source of population growth, although international migration has been notably higher over the last three years.

1.22 The analysis also suggests that when the 2021 Census was published, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) had previously under-estimated population change.

Housing Need

1.23 The housing needs assessment studied the overall housing need set against the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) – specifically the Standard Method for assessing housing need.

1.24 This shows a need for 1,928 dwellings per annum (dpa) as of May 2025. This is based on 0.8% of the current stock of 166,601 (1,333) and a 45% affordability uplift.

1.25 A bespoke population and household projection has been developed to look at the implications of delivering 1,928 dpa from 2025 to 2045. This projects that the population might increase by 54,300 people over the following 20 years (a 14.5% increase). This includes continued population ageing.

1.26 It was further estimated that population growth might be able to support somewhere in the region of 28,600 and 36,400 additional jobs, depending on levels of economic activity rate improvement and assumptions around commuting.

Affordable Housing Need

1.27 The evidence indicates that there is an acute need for affordable housing in the Council area and a need in all sub-areas.

1.28 The majority of need is from households who are unable to buy OR rent and therefore points particularly towards a need for rented affordable housing rather than affordable home ownership.

1.29 Despite the level of need being high, it is not considered that this points to any requirement for the Council to increase the Local Plan housing requirement due to affordable needs.

1.30 The link between affordable need and overall need (of all tenures) is complex, and in trying to make a link, it must be remembered that many of those picked up as having an affordable need are already in housing (and therefore do not generate a net additional need for a home).

1.31 In addition, the private rented sector is providing benefit-supported accommodation for many households in affordable housing need. That said, the level of affordable housing need suggests the Council should maximise the delivery of such housing whenever possible.

1.32 Although a clear need for rented forms of affordable housing was identified, the study also considers different types of intermediate housing (or Affordable Home Ownership (AHO)), as these may have a role to play.

1.33 Shared ownership is likely to be suitable for households with more marginal affordability (those only just able to afford to rent privately) as it has the advantage of a lower deposit and subsidised rent. There was no strong evidence of a need for First Homes or, more generally, discounted market sale (DMS) housing, given the high cost of new-build housing relative to the second-hand market.

1.34 There is, however, likely to be a demand for DMS, and this may be a reasonable tenure to provide in some instances (such as where no Registered Provider is available).

1.35 Additionally, the Council could consider rent-to-buy housing, as this does have the potential to meet affordable needs. In all cases of AHO, the affordability of a scheme can only be tested on a site-by-site basis, and it will be important to ensure that any housing is ‘genuinely affordable’ in a local context.

1.36 When determining the appropriate mix of affordable housing, including the balance between rented and ownership products, the Council should consider both the level of need and scheme viability.

1.37 While affordable home ownership options may be more viable and enable higher delivery, it is important to recognise that households requiring rented accommodation typically have more acute needs and fewer alternative housing options.

1.38 Overall, the analysis identifies a notable need for affordable housing, and it is clear that the provision of new affordable housing is an important and pressing issue in the area.

1.39 We have also identified a need for affordable housing options, including Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) for Essential Local Workers. The council should therefore work with developers to support this group's attraction and retention through an improved housing offer, which may require policy intervention.

1.40 It does, however, need to be stressed that this report does not provide an affordable housing target; the amount of affordable housing delivered will depend on the amount that can be viably provided.

1.41 The evidence does, however, suggest that affordable housing delivery should be maximised where opportunities arise.

Housing Mix

1.42 Analysis of the future mix of housing required takes account of demographic change, including potential changes to the number of family households and the ageing of the population.

1.43 The proportion of households with dependent children in Cheshire West & Chester is below average, with around 26% of all households containing dependent children in 2021.

1.44 There are notable differences between different types of households, with married couples (with dependent children) seeing a high level of owner-occupation. In contrast, lone parents are particularly likely to live in social and private rented accommodation.

1.45 There is a range of factors which will influence demand for different sizes of homes, including demographic changes, future growth in real earnings, households' ability to save, economic performance and housing affordability.

1.46 The analysis linked to future demographic change concludes that the following represents an appropriate mix of affordable and market homes, which takes into account both household changes and the ageing of the population, as well as seeking to make more efficient use of new stock by not projecting forward the high levels of under-occupancy (which is notable in the market sector).

1.47 In all sectors, the analysis points to a particular need for 2- and 3-bedroom accommodation, with varying proportions of 1- and 4+-bedroom homes.

1.48 For rented affordable housing, there is a clear need for a range of different sizes of homes, including 35% to have at least 3-bedrooms, of which 10% should have at least 4-bedrooms. Our recommended mix is set out below.

Table 1.1 Suggested size mix of housing by tenure – Cheshire West & Chester

	Market	Affordable home ownership	Rented affordable housing
1-bedroom	5%	10%	30%
2-bedrooms	30%	45%	35%
3-bedrooms	45%	35%	25%
4+-bedrooms	20%	10%	10%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Iceni analysis

1.49 The strategic conclusions in the affordable sector recognise the role which the delivery of larger family homes can play in releasing a supply of smaller properties for other households.

1.50 Also recognised is the limited flexibility which 1-bedroom properties offer to changing household circumstances, which feed through into higher turnover and management issues.

1.51 The conclusions also take account of the current mix of housing by tenure and the size requirements shown on the Council's Housing Register.

1.52 The Council should also consider the potential role of bungalows as part of the future mix of housing. Such housing may be particularly attractive to older owner-occupiers, which may help encourage households to downsize. Bungalows will also be suitable for households containing someone with a disability (across all age groups).

1.53 The mix identified above could inform strategic policies although a flexible approach should be adopted. For example, in some areas, registered providers of affordable housing find it challenging to sell 1-bedroom affordable home ownership (AHO) homes.

1.54 Therefore, the 1-bedroom elements of AHO might be better provided as 2-bedroom accommodation. That said, given current house prices, there are potential difficulties in making AHO genuinely affordable.

1.55 Additionally, in applying the mix to individual development sites, regard should be had to the nature of the site and character of the area, and to up-to-date evidence of need as well as the existing mix and turnover of properties at the local level. The Council should also monitor the mix of housing delivered.

Private Rental Sector

1.56 Nationally, supply and demand are imbalanced; fewer people can buy homes, and landlords are exiting the market, driving up rents.

1.57 Cheshire West and Chester has seen steady rental growth since 2015, in line with regional averages.

1.58 In the year to August 2025, the overall Median Rent in CWAC was £934 per calendar month (pcm), which was above the regional (£916 pcm) but below the national (£1,403 pcm) medians.

1.59 CWAC's Private Rental Sector (PRS) accommodates a wide range of people, but the most prevalent groups are young individuals, with fewer families and older renters.

1.60 There are a large number of Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in CWAC, with a particular concentration in central Chester.

1.61 While it is difficult to quantify the future need for HMOs, they serve a clear need for lower-cost rental options as well as accommodating many students.

1.62 There is evidence of Build to Rent (BtR) demand in CWAC with a strong supply in Ellesmere Port. The Council may wish to develop a policy around this type of housing, including an affordable housing contribution.

Student Accommodation

1.63 According to HESA, the University of Chester enrolled 14,215 students in the 2023/24 academic year, while the University of Liverpool's Leahurst Campus had approximately 450 students.

1.64 Student numbers in Cheshire West and Chester have declined since 2017/18, and the University of Chester does not anticipate future growth.

1.65 In contrast, the University of Liverpool is considering a modest increase in student numbers at its Leahurst Campus, though any significant expansion would depend on substantial facility investment, which is not currently planned.

1.66 Around 46% of students at the University of Chester are in their own residence or living with parents or guardians. The remaining 54% require accommodation, and there are reports of significant constraints in its supply.

1.67 Although there is no overwhelming evidence of a need for additional PBSA, there are clear benefits of providing it, including releasing existing HMOs.

1.68 If the Council does seek to expand the portfolio of PBSA in the borough, then it should also develop a policy which clearly sets out its expectations, including built-form, location and affordable housing contributions.

Older and Disabled Persons

1.69 The data show that CWAC has a slightly older age structure than is seen regionally and nationally. Generally, it also has lower levels of disability across all age groups compared with the regional and national position.

1.70 The older person population shows high proportions of owner-occupation, and particularly outright owners who may have significant equity in their homes (76% of all older person households are outright owners).

1.71 The older person population is projected to increase notably moving forward. An ageing population means that the number of people with disabilities is likely to increase. Key findings for the 2025-45 period include:

- a 31% increase in the population aged 65+ (potentially accounting for 47% of total population growth);
- a 56% increase in the number of people aged 65+ with dementia and a 46% increase in those aged 65+ with mobility problems;
- a need for around 3,300 additional housing units with support (sheltered/retirement housing) – 61% in the market sector;
- a need for around 1,700 additional housing units with care (e.g. extra-care) – around 86% in the market sector;
- a need for additional nursing and residential care bedspaces (around 2,300 in the period); and
- a need for around 1,600 dwellings to be for wheelchair users (meeting technical standard M4(3)).

1.72 This would suggest that there is a clear need to increase the supply of accessible and adaptable dwellings and wheelchair-user dwellings, as well as providing specific provision of older persons' housing.

1.73 Given the evidence, the Council could consider (as a starting point) requiring all new dwellings (in all tenures) to meet the M4(2) standards and around 5% of homes meeting M4(3) – wheelchair user dwellings in the market sector (a higher proportion of around 10% in the affordable sector).

1.74 Where the authority has nomination rights, the supply of M4(3) dwellings would be wheelchair-accessible dwellings (constructed for immediate occupation). In the market sector, they should be wheelchair-user-adaptable dwellings (constructed to be adjustable for wheelchair use).

1.75 It should, however, be noted that there will be cases where this may not be possible (e.g. due to site-specific circumstances).

1.76 In framing policies for the provision of specialist older persons' accommodation, the Council will need to consider a range of issues. This will include the different use classes of accommodation (i.e., C2 vs. C3) and the requirements for affordable housing contributions (linked to this, the viability of the provision).

1.77 There may also be some practical issues to consider, such as the ability of any individual development being mixed tenure, given the way care and support services are paid for.

Other Specific Groups

Self and Custom Build

1.78 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act made amendments to the way demand/need and supply of self and custom-built dwellings are calculated.

1.79 Need must be calculated cumulatively, with the council having three years from the end of each base period to meet that need, with supply permissions needing to be able to demonstrate that they will result in a self or custom-built dwelling.

1.80 The Council are currently meeting the need for self and custom build housing. They should, however, continue to monitor this, and a guide for future needs suggests that around 70 plots per annum.

1.81 The Council should continue to be supportive of opportunities for Self and Custom build development within Local Plans, and could consider a number of policy levers to address need, such as a percentage contribution on larger sites.

Looked After Children and Care Leavers

1.82 In CWAC, the number of children in residential care is increasing and above national rates and accounts for 0.8% of all under 18s.

1.83 Population projections linked to CWAC's housing need show a declining population aged under 18. This would suggest little need for additional housing, though it is not the only factor in demand, and there may also be a desire to reduce costs to independent providers and repatriating some out-of-area placements could justify further provision.

Service Personnel

1.84 Cheshire West and Chester has approximately 410 military and civilian personnel, down from 700 in 2012.

1.85 However, Dale Barracks are due to close in 2030, and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) is currently preparing disposal plans for the site. There may be a need for housing for families who want to stay in the area.

2. Introduction

2.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council has commissioned Iceni Projects to prepare a Housing Needs Assessment ("HNA"). This HNA aims to provide a robust evidence base for the local plan and other Council strategies, and inform the appropriate mix and type of housing to be sought through planning applications.

2.2 This document will be brought together with other evidence-based documents to inform the future strategy for the scale and distribution of housing growth within the borough, with reasonable alternatives tested through the plan-making and Sustainability Appraisal process.

2.3 This assessment does not set targets but provides robust evidence to inform those in the Local Plan.

2.4 The report is based on the best and most up-to-date information available at the time of drafting – this was around November 2025.

National Planning Policy Framework

2.5 The Government published the latest version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

2.6 Paragraph 7 in the NPPF states that the purpose of planning is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. It sets out that planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but, in doing so, should take local circumstances into account to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.

2.7 Paragraph 17 of the NPPF states that development plans must include strategic policies to address each local planning authority's priorities for the development and use of land in its area. Plans should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development and for plan-making. This means that plans should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change.

2.8 Paragraph 20 states that strategic policies should, as a minimum, “set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places and make sufficient provision for…homes (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development”

2.9 Paragraph 11 reiterates that

“strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring area, unless…the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area.”

2.10 To support the Government’s objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, Paragraph 61 in the NPPF states it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, and that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed. That land, with permission, is developed without unnecessary delay.

2.11 Paragraph 62 sets out that to determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the standard method in national planning guidance – unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach which also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals.

2.12 Paragraph 63 goes on to set out that within this context, the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies including, but not limited to, those who require affordable housing, families with children, looked after children, older people (including those who require retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes), students, people with disabilities, service families, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes.

2.13 Paragraphs 64-68 address affordable housing provision. They set out that where an affordable housing need is identified, planning policies should specify the type of affordable housing required and expect it to be met on-site unless off-site provision or a financial contribution in lieu can be robustly justified, or the agreed approach contributes to the objectives of creating mixed and balanced communities.

2.14 Paragraph 65 states that the provision of affordable housing should not be sought for residential developments that are not major developments[1], other than in designated rural areas.

2.15 Paragraph 66 sets out that “Where major development involving the provision of housing is proposed, planning policies and decisions should expect that the mix of affordable housing required meets identified local needs, across Social Rent, other affordable housing for rent and affordable home ownership tenures.”

2.16 The NPPF’s Glossary (Annexe 2) provides an updated definition of affordable housing, as well as definitions of Build to Rent development, local housing need, older adults, and self-build and custom housebuilding.

Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023)

2.17 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill was introduced to the House of Commons on 11 May 2022 and received Royal Assent on 26 October

[1] The NPPF defines major development “For housing, development where 10 or more homes will be provided, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more”

2023, and in doing so became the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA).[2]

2.18 Although the Act initiated several laws which affect planning, none of these laws directly impact the production of this report in relation to the overall need.

2.19 However, it did impact specific groups, including those wishing to self or custom-build their own home, and this is set out in the relevant chapter of the report.

The Planning Practice Guidance

2.20 The Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) includes several sections which are relevant to the assessment of housing need. This sub-section summarises the relevant sectors.

2.21 Guidance on Housing and Economic Needs Assessments[3] explains that housing need is "an unconstrained assessment of the number of homes needed in an area" and should be undertaken separately from assessing land availability, establishing a housing requirement figure and preparing policies to address this, such as site allocations.

2.22 The guidance also examines affordable housing need (as does the PPG relating to the Housing Needs of Different Groups). The PPG sets out how affordable housing need can be assessed.

2.23 The PPG makes clear that affordable housing need (and the housing needs of individual groups) may well exceed, or be proportionally high in relation to, the overall housing need figure calculated using the standard method, as these will often be calculated having consideration of the whole population as opposed to new households.

[2] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/55/enacted
[3] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments

2.24 The PPG for Housing for Older and Disabled People[4] describes the need to provide housing for older people as critical, given that people are living longer and the older population is increasing. It sets out that the health, lifestyle, and housing needs of older people will differ greatly, ranging from accessible, adaptable general needs housing to specialist housing with high levels of care and support.

2.25 The PPG provides guidance on how the housing needs of older and disabled people can be assessed and sets out that this should inform clear policies within plans, which may include specific site allocations to provide greater certainty to developers.

2.26 Separate guidance is provided on optional technical standards[5] including accessible and adaptable housing, the use of national space standards, and wheelchair-accessible housing.

2.27 Separate PPGs have also been prepared, which address Build to Rent[6] and Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding[7]. The Build to Rent Guidance requires authorities to assess need and, where a need is identified, to include a planning policy setting out the circumstances and locations where Build to Rent development will be encouraged.

2.28 The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Guidance sets the requirements of the Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (as amended), including the requirement for Councils to maintain a Register of those interested in self-build housing and to grant consents to meet the need shown. It also sets out that needs assessments can consider other secondary data sources.

[4] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-for-older-and-disabled-people
[5] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-optional-technical-standards
[6] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/build-to-rent
[7] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/self-build-and-custom-housebuilding

Other Legislation

2.29 Wider legislation affecting housing need includes the 1996 Housing Act (as amended), the Housing and Social Care Act 2012, the 2014 Care Act and the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act.

2.30 The 2014 Care Act sets out local authorities' duties in relation to assessing people's needs and their eligibility for publicly funded care and support.

2.31 Under the Act, local authorities must assess anyone who appears to require care and support and focus the assessment on the person's needs and how they impact their well-being, and the outcomes they want to achieve.

2.32 Local authorities must also consider other things besides care services that can contribute to the desired outcomes (e.g., preventive services, community support and specialised housing needs).

2.33 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places legal duties on English Councils so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help.

2.34 Local Authorities have a duty to produce homelessness strategies to prevent homelessness in their respective areas.

Structure

2.35 The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section 3: HMA and Sub-Areas;
- Section 4: Housing Stock and Supply Trends;
- Section 5: Housing Market Baseline;
- Section 6: Demographic Review;
- Section 7: Overall Housing Need;

- Section 8: Affordable Housing Need;
- Section 9: Need for Different Sizes of Homes
- Section 10: Private Rental Sector;
- Section 11: Student Accommodation;
- Section 12: Older and Disabled Persons.
- Section 13: Other Specific Groups

3. HMA and Sub Areas

3.1 This section considers the housing market geography and the 'housing market area' (HMA) in which Cheshire West and Chester sits, as well as the sub-areas within it which are used for analysis in later sections of this report.

Policy Guidance

3.2 Paragraph 39 of the Plan Making Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)[8] Indicates that strategic policy-making authorities will need a clear understanding of housing needs in their area.

3.3 This includes working with neighbouring authorities and key stakeholders to establish the housing market area, or geography, which is the most appropriate to prepare policies for meeting housing needs across local authority boundaries.

3.4 Housing market geographies are thus particularly relevant for considering the apportionment of any unmet housing needs.

3.5 Paragraph 18 of the Plan Making PPG defines what a Housing Market Area (HMA) is and sets out the approach local authorities should take when defining these.

3.6 According to the Guidance, a housing market area is a *"geographical area defined by household demand and preferences for all types of housing, reflecting the key functional linkages between places where people live and work."* The PPG goes on to add:

"These can be broadly defined by analysing:

- The relationship between housing demand and supply across different locations, using house prices and rates of change in

8 Reference ID: 61-018-20190315

house prices. This should identify areas which have clearly different price levels compared to surrounding areas.

- Migration flow and housing search patterns. This can help identify the extent to which people move house within an area, in particular where a relatively high proportion of short household moves are contained (due to connections to families, jobs, and schools).
- Contextual data such as travel to work areas, retail and school catchment areas. These can provide information about the areas within which people move without changing other aspects of their lives (e.g. work or service use)."

3.7 This slimmed-down guidance notably omits any self-containment threshold for defining HMAs. This is unlike the previous version of the PPG, which stated that migration self-containment of "typically 70 per cent", excluding long-distance moves, can help identify a suitable HMA. However, it is considered that the Government's previous advice remains of some relevance.

3.8 It is also worth noting that HMA boundaries do not stop and start at administrative boundaries. Despite this, it is often commonplace (and indeed practical) for housing market areas to be defined using local authority boundaries.

3.9 This is because many of the key datasets used in both defining housing market geographies and considering housing need (such as the affordability ratios and demographic projections) are only published at a local authority level.

3.10 A pragmatic response is therefore to define HMAs at a local authority level but recognise that the functional geography likely goes beyond administrative boundaries.

3.11 These issues were touched upon in the Planning Advisory Services Technical Advice Note on Objectively Assessed Housing Need and Housing Targets (July 2015), which concluded that:

"It is best if HMAs, as defined for the purpose of needs assessments, do not straddle local authority boundaries. For areas smaller than local authorities, data availability is poor, and analysis becomes impossibly complex. There may also be 'cliff edge' effects at the HMA boundary, for example, development allowed on one side of a road but not the other."

Previous Definition

3.12 The Cheshire West and Chester Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA, 2013) included an assessment of housing market interactions and self-containment.

3.13 Data from the household survey carried out for the SHMA indicated that approximately. 66% of households that had moved home in the preceding five years originated within Cheshire West and Chester, and around 34% originated from outside the area.

3.14 Furthermore, survey data revealed that of the households that intend to move over the next five years, over 70% intend to remain in Cheshire West and Chester.

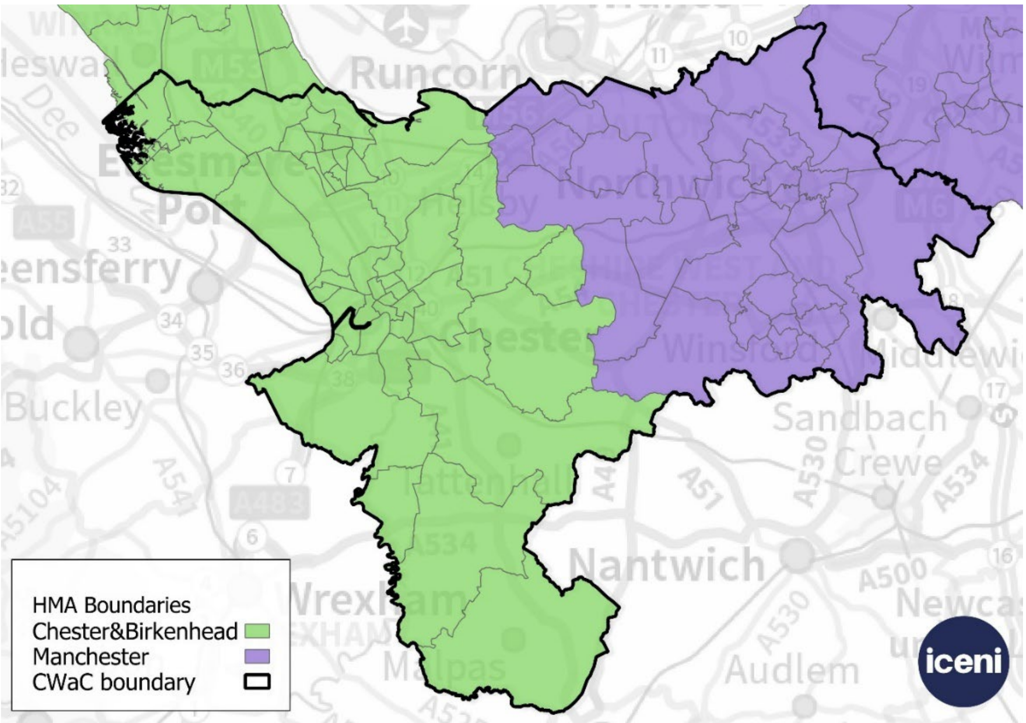
3.15 The report also provided details on commuting patterns derived from the household survey undertaken for the SHMA. This indicated that about 65% of employees worked within Cheshire West and Chester and around 35% commuted to other areas, most notably to elsewhere in Cheshire (12.4%), Greater Manchester (5.5%), the Wirral (4.1%) and Wrexham/Flintshire (4.1%).

3.16 The Inspector's Report (Dec 2014)[9] supported the view that the borough is likely to have a self-contained housing market, stating that "I consider that available evidence supports the view that the Borough can be described as a largely self-contained HMA. There is no evidence which would substantiate a specific alternative boundary for the HMA".

3.17 Previous definitions of HMAs have also been produced by the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) at the University of Newcastle, which identified two strategic HMAs across CWAC.

3.18 One of these covered the east of the Borough and was connected to Manchester, while the West of the Borough was more self-contained in the Chester and Birkenhead HMA.

Figure 3.1 : Housing Market Areas (2011)



Source: Iceni, based on CURDs data, based on ONS Census 2011

[9] CWAC Council – Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part One) Strategic Policies, Inspector's Report, December 2014

Review of the Latest Data

3.19 We turn next to consider what the latest data indicates regarding the housing market geography, such as migration and commuting statistics from the 2021 Census.

Migration

3.20 Migration flows from the 2021 Census have been analysed as an indicator of the housing market geography. However, it should be noted that the 2021 Census was conducted during a period of partial Covid-19 lockdown; therefore, dynamics in both migration and commuting may have been affected by these conditions.

3.21 Gross migration flows (the sum of flows in both directions) between areas have been used to understand the relative strength of the housing market interactions between different local authorities.

3.22 Gross flows are divided by the combined population size of the two authorities to understand the relative strength of links while correcting for the variability in size between different authorities. This recognises that two larger authorities will have a larger absolute flow than smaller authorities.

3.23 The table below shows the ten local authorities in terms of three types of migration relationships with Cheshire West & Chester: gross migration per 1,000 population, in-migration and out-migration.

Table 3.1 Authorities with most migration to and from Cheshire West & Chester

	Gross migration per 1,000 population		Out migration		In migration	
1st	Flintshire	3.81	Cheshire East	1,194	Cheshire East	1,251
2nd	Cheshire East	3.23	Wirral	1,178	Flintshire	1,042
3rd	Wirral	3.14	Flintshire	909	Wirral	952
4th	Wrexham	1.75	Liverpool	713	Liverpool	757
5th	Liverpool	1.74	Warrington	587	Manchester	441
6th	Warrington	1.54	Trafford	472	Wrexham	405
7th	Halton	1.44	Wrexham	456	Halton	316
8th	Trafford	1.01	Manchester	446	Shropshire	297
9th	Manchester	0.98	Halton	381	Warrington	288
10th	Shropshire	0.80	Shropshire	245	Leeds	233

Source: Iceni analysis of ONS 2021 Census

3.24 In terms of gross migration per 1,000, the strongest relationships are with the neighbouring authorities of Flintshire, Cheshire East and Wirral; with relatively weaker migration to and from the authorities Wrexham, Liverpool and Warrington.

3.25 There are relatively minor differences between the in-migration and out-migration results, with the same authorities (Cheshire East, Wirral, Flintshire and Liverpool) featuring at the top 4 of both. However, there is net in-migration from Cheshire East, Flintshire and Liverpool and out-migration to Wirral and Warrington.

Self-Containment Rates

3.26 Although this rule is no longer explicitly set out in the PPG, as a rule of thumb, a housing market area would typically have a self-containment rate of at least 70% when long-distance moves are excluded.

3.27 Longer distance moves are excluded as they would include people moving to university and to retire, which would not be expected to be retained in the same area.

3.28 Including all moves, CWAC has a self-containment rate of 62% for moves from the authority (i.e. 62% of moves from the authority were internal), and 60% for moves to the authority (i.e. 60% of moves to the authority also originated in the authority). These are relatively low self-containment rates, and well below an indicative 70% self-containment threshold.

3.29 However, once long-distance moves are excluded, the self-containment rate increases to 78% for moves from the authority and 74% for moves to the authority. These are relatively high self-containment rates, well above the indicative 70% threshold.

3.30 As shown in the table below, CWAC has a self-containment rate when only moves to/from neighbouring authorities and their neighbours are included, which increases to between 71% and 73%.

Table 3.2 Self-Containment Rates – CWAC (2021)

	Out Migration Based Self-Containment	In Migration Based Self-Containment
All Moves	31,247	32,272
Internal Moves	19,335	19,335
Self Containment Rates	62%	60%
Excluding Long Distance Moves	26,484	27,250
Self Containment Rates	73%	71%

Source: Iceni based on ONS Census 2021

3.31 While this would justify CWAC being considered a self-contained HMA, it is only the case if neighbouring authorities can also do the same. The following table compares CWAC's migration self-containment rate to those in other authorities, mostly nearby and adjoining.

3.32 Self-containment rates range between 67 – 81%, with only Flintshire and Warrington achieving rates below 70% when long-distance moves are excluded (outside Wales and the North West).

3.33 We therefore considered it appropriate for Flintshire and Warrington to be grouped with their closest neighbours in order to achieve a higher (and acceptable) level of self-containment.

Table 3.3 Migration self-containment rates for CWAC and the surrounding and nearby authorities

	Moves from LA	Moves to LA
Cheshire West and Chester	71%	69%
Flintshire	68%	68%
Cheshire East	79%	73%
Wirral	79%	81%
Wrexham	74%	76%
Liverpool	75%	73%
Warrington	67%	70%

Source: Iceni analysis of ONS Census 2021

Note that only moves within the Wales and North West Region are included.

3.34 In the case of Warrington, its strongest relationships are with its neighbouring HMA authorities of Halton and St Helens. These areas comprise the Mid-Mersey HMA and have a self-containment rate of 75% to 76%.

3.35 Flintshire’s strongest relationships are with CWAC, followed by Denbighshire and Wrexham. Combined CWAC and Flintshire have a self-containment rate of 68% to 70%, which is partially below the threshold.

3.36 In contrast, the combined Denbighshire and Flintshire area is 72% to 73%. This increases further, to 86%-87% when moves outside Wales are excluded.

3.37 This migration data would thus support a standalone housing market area covering CWAC. Although the relationship with Flintshire is noteworthy, it has a greater self-containment rate when paired with Denbighshire.

3.38 Viewing CWAC as an HMA in its own right is a reasonable conclusion to make, despite the reality that HMA boundaries rarely stop and start at administrative boundaries.

3.39 It is also important to remember that many of the key datasets used in assessing housing needs (such as household estimates and affordability ratios are only published at a local authority level.

3.40 As such, a pragmatic response is to define HMAs at a local authority level but to continue to have a duty to cooperate discussions with those areas where there is an overlap.

3.41 This approach was advised by the Planning Advisory Services (PAS) Technical Advice Note set out earlier in this report and was also ratified by the planning inspectorate.

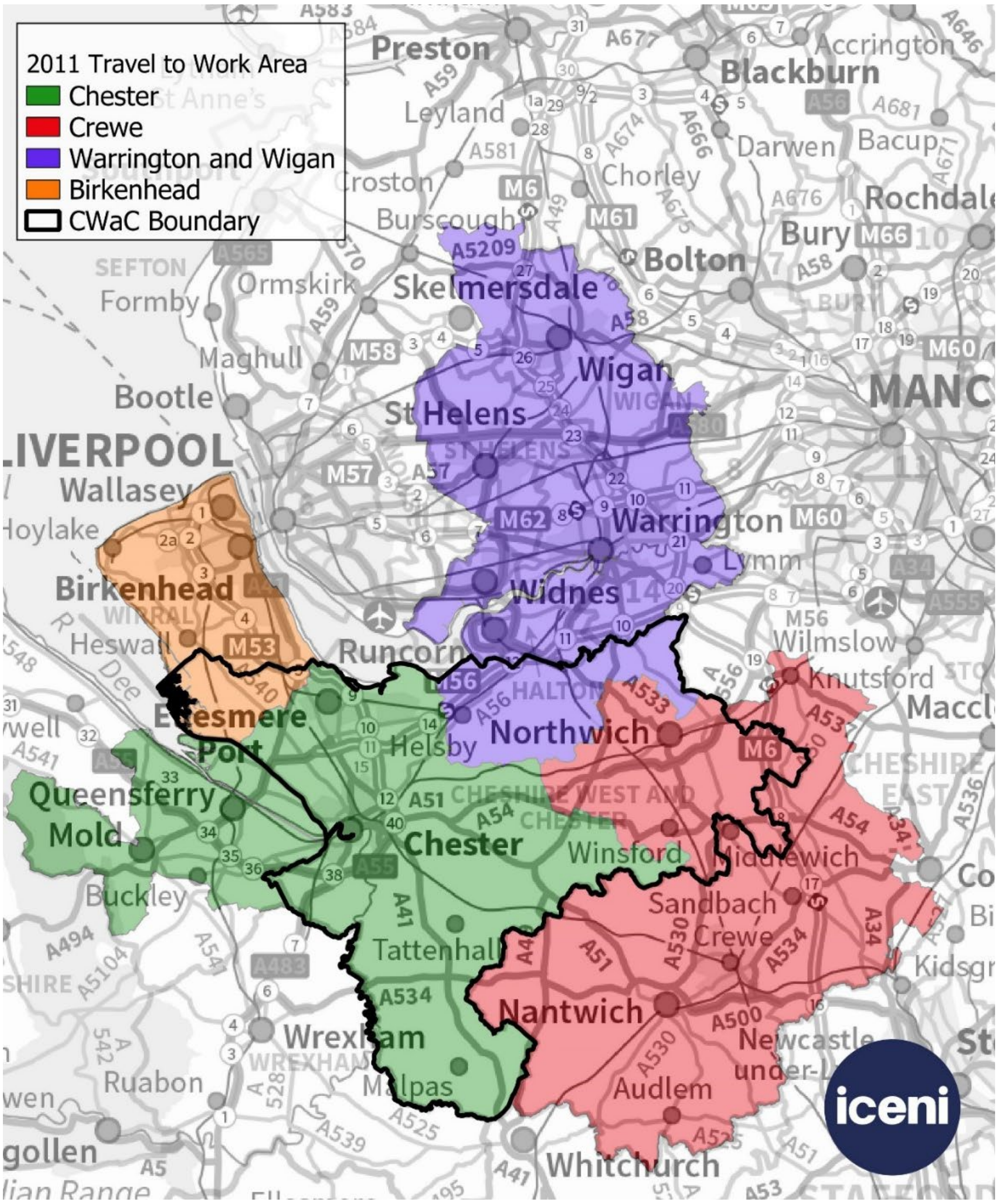
Commuting

3.42 In 2015, ONS produced Travel to Work Areas (TTWA) for England based on 2011 census data. These remain the latest available TTWA data set. As illustrated below, Cheshire West and Chester falls within four TTWAs:

- The east of CWAC, including Northwich and Winsford, falls within the Crewe TTWA.
- The west of CWAC, including Chester and Ellesmere Port, lies within the Chester TTWA, which extends into North Wales.
- The north-west of CWAC, including Neston and Willaston, falls within the Birkenhead TTWA.
- The north-east of CWAC, including Helsby and Frodsham, forms the southern end of the Warrington & Wigan TTWA.

3.43 This is a consolidation from the previous TTWA, where there was a rural area to the south linked with Wrexham and Ellesmere Port, which formed part of the Wirral and Ellesmere Port TTWA. This might indicate an increasing level of self-containment in this area.

Figure 3.2 : 2011 Travel to Work Areas in Cheshire West and Chester



Source: MHCLG

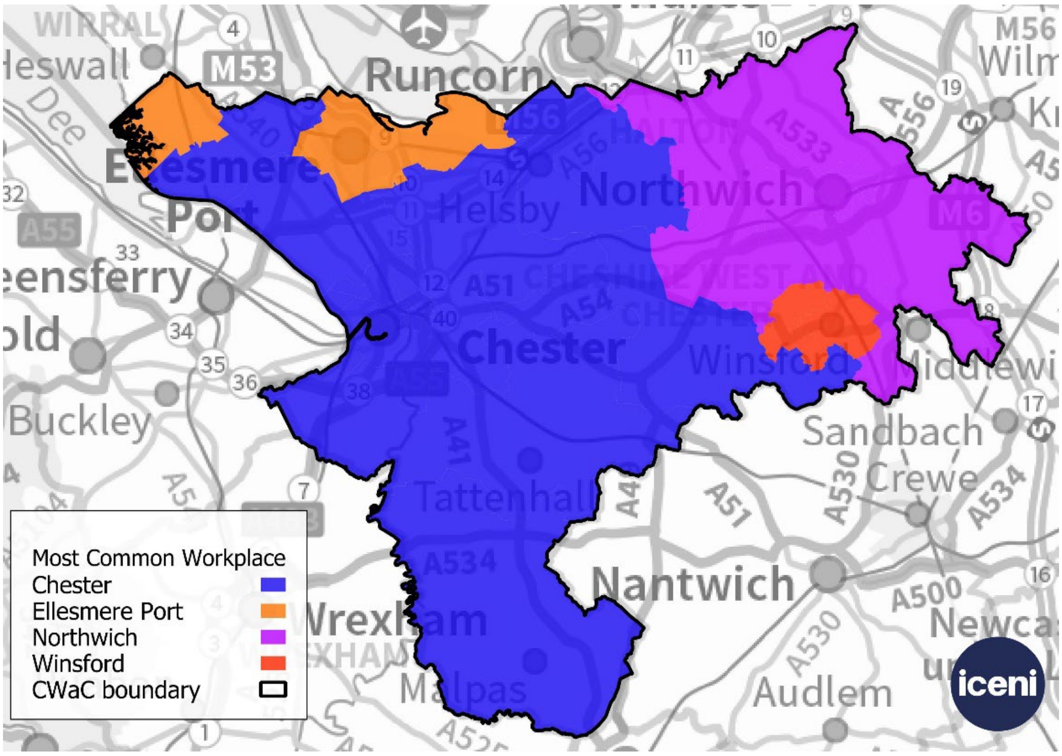
3.44 The Travel to Work Areas have not yet been updated to use the 2021 Census Data. However, commuting data has been published, and we have examined this for CWAC.

3.45 It should be noted that the Census 2021 collected responses during a period of partial lockdown, which affected the information gathered for several topics, including working from home. This fundamentally affected census travel-to-work patterns, making it difficult to compare to the 2011 census; however, despite its limitations, it is the most reliable and up-to-date data available.

3.46 Firstly, we have looked at internal commuting, i.e. where the borough's residents are employed within the borough. As shown for large parts of CWAC, Chester is the most common employment centre.

3.47 Chester's influence extends to the northwest of CWAC, with the exception of small areas around Ellesmere Port and Neston. Northwich is the most common location for eastern CWAC, except for the Winsford MSOAs group. This points to slightly different functionality between the east and west of the Borough, i.e. they are both served by different centres.

Figure 3.3 : Main Internal Commuting Destination



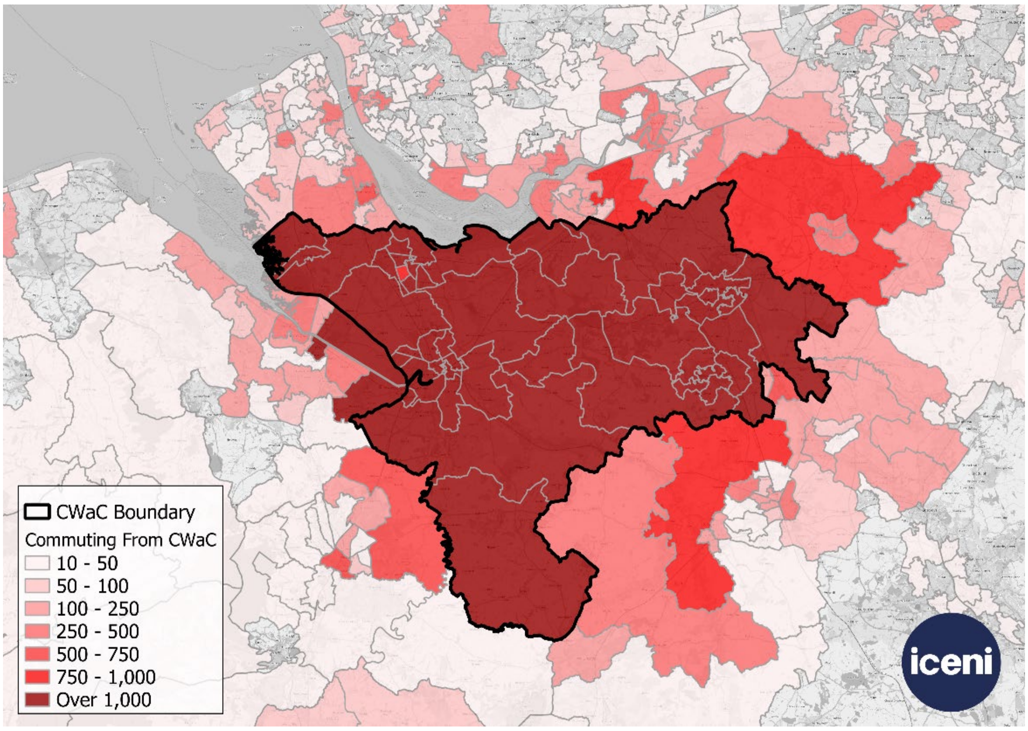
Source: Iceni Analysis of ONS, Census 2021

3.48 We have also looked at where the borough's residents find employment outside the borough using 2021 Census data. This analysis does include those who work from home.

3.49 Again, it should be noted that the Census 2021 collected responses during a period of partial lockdown in which a greater proportion of people are likely to have been working from home, and people may have been commuting further afield for office-based jobs. Despite its limitations, it is the most reliable and up-to-date data available.

3.50 As shown, the highest number of commuters originating from CWAC also work in CWAC. There is also a level of out-commuting to parts of Cheshire East (Preston Brook, Nantwich, Middlewich), North Wales (Broughton, Deeside, and Wrexham), and the Wirral (Bromborough).

Figure 3.4 : Out Commuting from CWAC



Source: Iceni Analysis of ONS, Census 2021

3.51 While there are commuters to Manchester and Liverpool City Centres, these are few, with most commuters only travelling in large numbers to the immediately surrounding areas. This aligns with a substantial degree of self-containment.

3.52 In total, the 2021 Census states that there are 169,090 residents in employment in Cheshire West and Chester. Of these, 132,381 work in Cheshire West and Chester (including those working from home). This is the equivalent of a residents-based self-containment rate of 78.3%. This exceeds the 75% threshold used by ONS to define TTWAs and would support CWAC being an HMA in its own right.

House Prices

3.53 The final consideration for assessing the Housing Market Area is house prices. For this, we have analysed price-paid data from the Land Registry and aggregated it for the 2020 to 2024 period to increase the sample size. This data is only available for England and therefore excludes Wales.

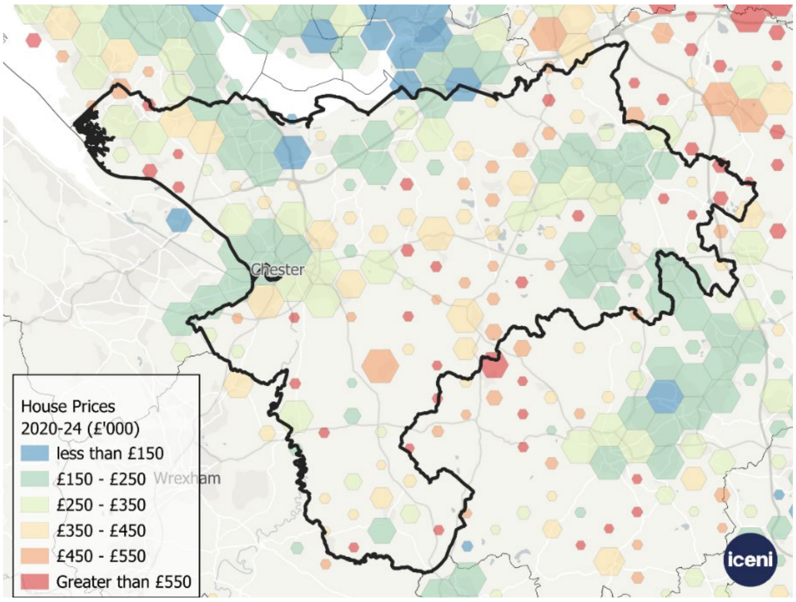
3.54 As shown in the table below, house prices in CWAC are generally higher than those in Merseyside and less expensive than those in the northern part of Cheshire East.

3.55 However, there is an alignment between the rural parts of CWAC and those to the South of Cheshire East and the Urban parts of CWAC and those in Chester East.

3.56 These notable differences between the surrounding areas to the North do provide a distinction for CWAC, but they do suggest some alignment with the southern parts of Cheshire East.

3.57 The difference between areas within Cheshire West and Chester is also helpful in identifying sub-areas within the area. We can distinguish between rural and urban areas, as well as different values within them: Chester, Neston, Winsford and Northwich have higher house prices, while Ellesmere Port, Helsby and Frodsham have lower values. Larger hexagons indicate areas with a higher concentration of sales, while smaller ones show lower concentration.

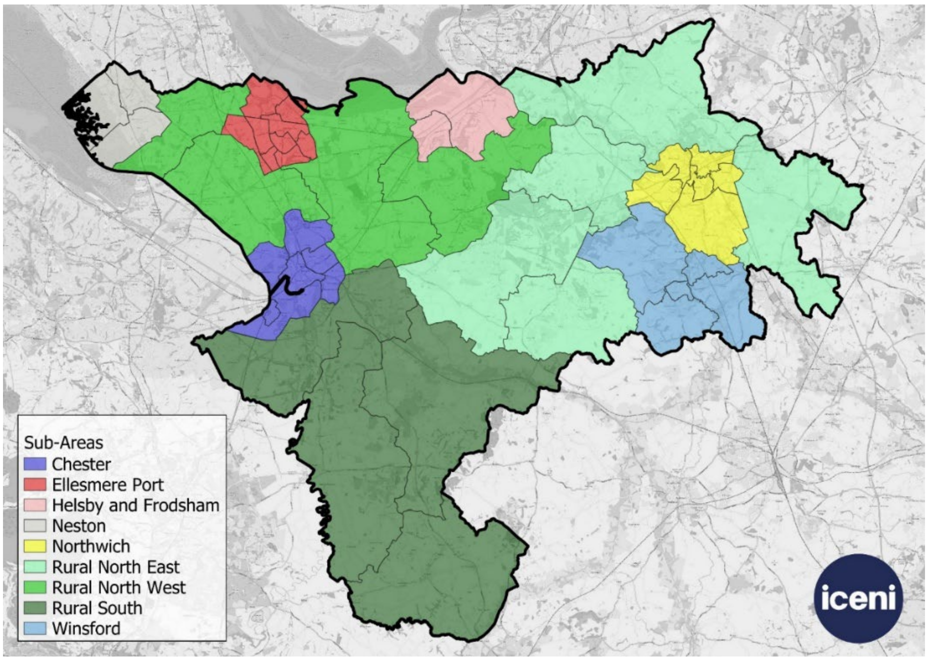
Figure 3.5 : Median House Prices (2020-2024) – Cheshire West and Chester boundary



Source: Iceni Analysis of HM Land Registry Data

3.58 These distinctions have helped inform the sub-areas set out below, which form the basis of the analysis set out in this report.

Figure 3.6 Suggested Sub-Area – Cheshire West and Chester boundary.



Source: Iceni Projects, 2025

Housing Market Area - Summary

3.59 Migration and commuting data reveal high levels of self-containment, and from this, we conclude that CWAC should be considered a standalone housing market area.

3.60 However, it does have a strong migratory relationship with Flintshire, and house prices align with the southern part of Cheshire East. At the same time, commuting is also strong in both areas alongside the Wirral. These should inform the discussion with neighbouring authorities on strategic issues.

4. Housing Stock and Supply Trends

4.1 This section of the report moves on to consider the housing stock profile and housing supply trends.

Dwellings and Households

4.2 In 2024, there were 166,601 dwellings in Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC). This is an increase of just over 19,000 additional dwellings since 2011.

4.3 At 12.9%, Cheshire West and Chester has experienced faster growth in the number of dwellings between 2011 and 2024 than was seen nationally (11.5%) or regionally (6.7%), although as we see later in this section, there are parts of the region with much higher rates of growth, including Cheshire East.

4.4 The difference in growth rate is even more significant when compared to the regional growth figures of 6.7%.

Table 4.1 Dwellings Stock Growth, 2011-24

Area	2011	2024	Change	% Change
Cheshire West & Chester	147,568	166,601	19,033	12.9%
North West	3,143,898	3,355,089	211,191	6.7%
England	22,976,066	25,617,413	2,641,347	11.5%

Source: MHCLG Dwelling stock live tables 2024

4.5 The table below sets out household growth between 2011 and 2021 (more recent data in line with dwelling data above is not available). As shown, household growth in CWAC (9.7%) also outpaced the regional (4.8%) and national (6.2%) rates by a significant margin.

Table 4.2 Household Growth, 2011-21

Area	2011	2021	Change	% Change
Cheshire West & Chester	141,442	155,154	13,712	9.7%
North West	3,009,549	3,153,403	143,854	4.8%
England	22,063,368	23,436,085	1,372,717	6.2%

Source: ONS Census 2011, 2021

4.6 Based on the difference between the number of households (155,154) and dwellings (162,357) in 2021, the implied rate of homes without 'usual residents' in Cheshire West & Chester is calculated at 4.4%, an increase from 4.2% in 2011.

4.7 This figure will include vacant homes, but also second homes and holiday properties. Whilst this has grown slightly faster than the regional average, it is lower than the 8.5% of homes without usual residents across England.

4.8 According to the latest Census, only around 145 dwellings across the borough are second homes used as holiday homes. Therefore, vacant homes used as short-term lets, along with truly vacant homes, will comprise the majority.

4.9 The table below sets out dwellings and households within Cheshire West and Chester's sub-areas. Chester has the largest number of dwellings at 44,418, which accounts for 27% of all dwellings in the borough.

4.10 Ellesmere Port follows this, and then Rural North East and Northwich. Due to a change in ward boundaries, historical data from the 2011 Census is not available for these subareas.

4.11 This data also implies that Chester (6.0%) has the highest number of homes with non-usual residents. The lowest rates are found in Winsford (3.4%) and Ellesmere Port (3.3%).

Table 4.3 Dwellings and households, by sub-area (2021)

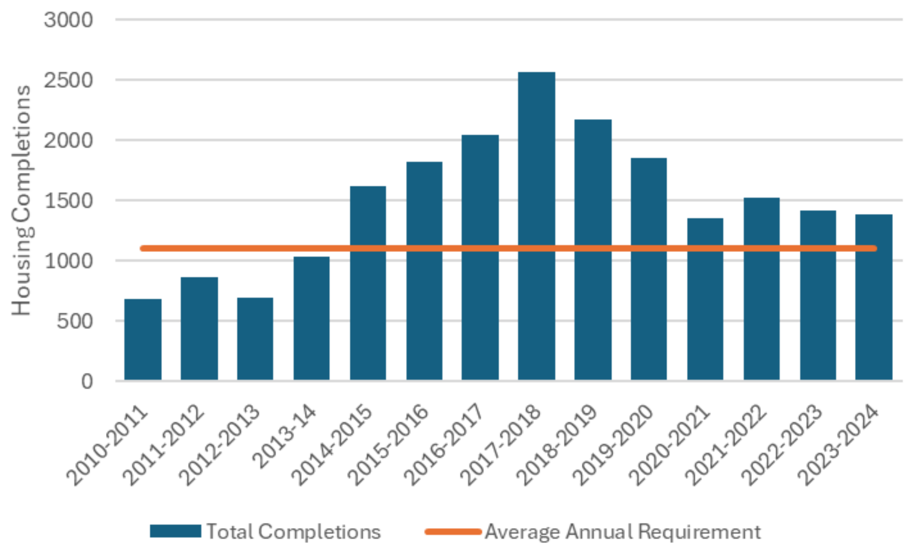
Sub-Area	Dwellings	Households
Chester	44,418	41,758
Ellesmere Port	29,190	28,232
Helsby & Frodsham	6,866	6,561
Neston	7,332	7,005
Northwich	20,320	19,540
Rural North East	21,276	20,456
Rural North West	10,993	10,505
Rural South	6,725	6,363
Winsford	15,245	14,731

Source: ONS 2021

Housing Delivery Trends

4.12 The figure below shows housing delivery in CWAC since 2010/11. Delivery increased significantly between 2012/13 and 2020/21, reaching a peak in 2017/18. Since then, deliveries have decreased year on year, although the figure has been fairly stable since 2020/21 and has exceeded the Local Plan annualised requirement of 1,100 dwellings.

Figure 4.1 Housing Delivery in Cheshire West & Chester Compared to Annual Target



Source: Cheshire West & Chester Council AMRs

4.13 The current Local Plan, adopted in 2015, set an annual average net requirement of 1,100 dwellings to the end of the plan period in 2030. Up to 2023/24, this target has been exceeded with an average annual delivery of 1,500 dwellings.

4.14 To compare Cheshire West & Chester's rate of housing development with other areas, Iceni has calculated the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in housing stock over time. This allows a like-for-like comparison across different areas, taking into account their relative sizes.

4.15 Over the five years from 2019 to 2024, Cheshire West & Chester (9^{th}, 6^{th}, 9^{th}) achieved a housing stock CAGR of 0.99%. Cheshire West & Chester's 10-year growth rate has been 1.08%, and its 20-year growth rate has been 0.89%. Recent delivery has thus been lower than the 10-year average.

4.16 The table below shows the top six authorities in terms of housing stock growth rate for each time, with Cheshire West & Chester also shown for comparison alongside its rank for growth out of the 36 North West Local Authorities.

4.17 The analysis shows that Cheshire West & Chester is lagging behind other regional authorities, whilst neighbouring authority, Cheshire East (4^{th}, 3^{rd}, 3^{rd}), has some of the highest growth rates.

Table 4.4 Maximum housing stock CAGRs achieved in North West authorities since 2004 compared to Cheshire West & Chester.

	5-year		10-year		20-year	
	Authority	Growth rate	Authority	Growth rate	Authority	Growth rate
1	Salford	2.42%	Salford	1.92%	Salford	1.44%
2	Ribble Valley	2.13%	Ribble Valley	1.44%	Manchester	1.14%
3	Preston	1.86%	Cheshire East	1.42%	Cheshire East	1.02%
4	Cheshire East	1.42%	Preston	1.86%	Preston	0.98%
5	Manchester	1.38%	Knowsley	1.18%	Eden*	0.95%
6	West Lancashire	1.17%	Eden*	1.10%	Chorley	0.93%
	Cheshire West & Chester	0.99%	Cheshire West & Chester	1.08%	Cheshire West & Chester	0.89%
	CWAC Ranking	9th	CWAC Ranking	6th	CWAC Ranking	9th

Source: Iceni analysis using MHCLG Live Table 125

**Cumbria local authorities, based on 2003-2023, due to data availability*

4.18 To achieve 1,100 dpa starting from the 2024 stock level (the most recent available data), Cheshire West & Chester would need to achieve a CAGR of 0.65% over five years, 0.64% over 10 years and 0.62% over twenty years. In all cases, this is less than the 0.8% growth per annum used in Step 1 of the Standard Method for calculating housing need.

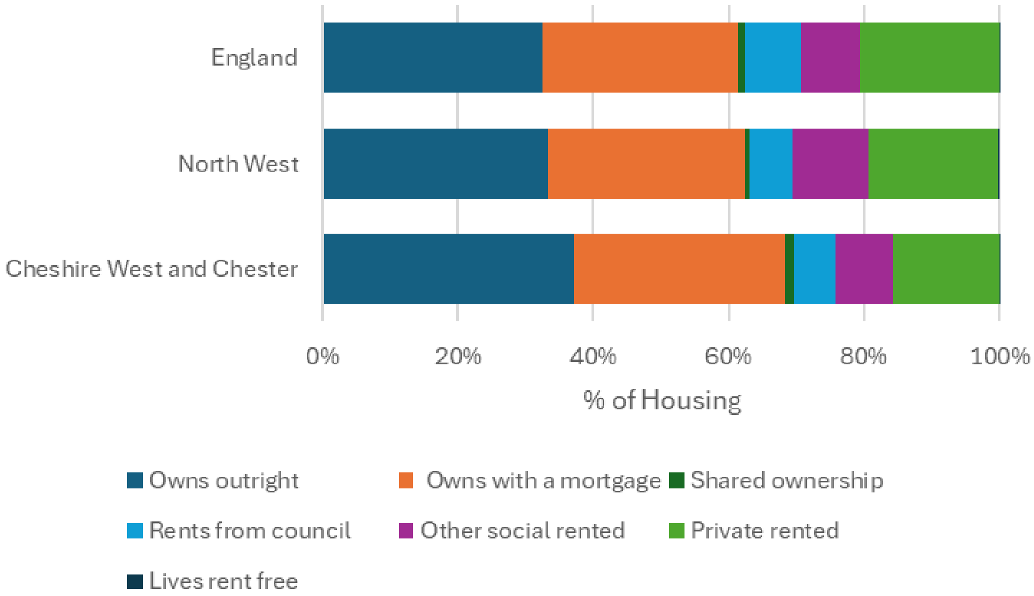
4.19 This is below the levels already being achieved by Cheshire West & Chester, implying that the council is on track to achieve the current Local Plan delivery target by 2030.

Tenure

4.20 Based on the 2021 Census data, Cheshire West & Chester has slightly higher rates of homeownership than regionally and nationally, with 68.3% of households being privately owned, including 37.1% owned outright.

4.21 In contrast, the proportion of households renting privately in Cheshire West & Chester is 15.8%, lower than benchmark areas. Social rented housing (14.7%) is also less common nationally and regionally.

Figure 4.2 Housing composition by tenure, 2021



Source: ONS Census 2021

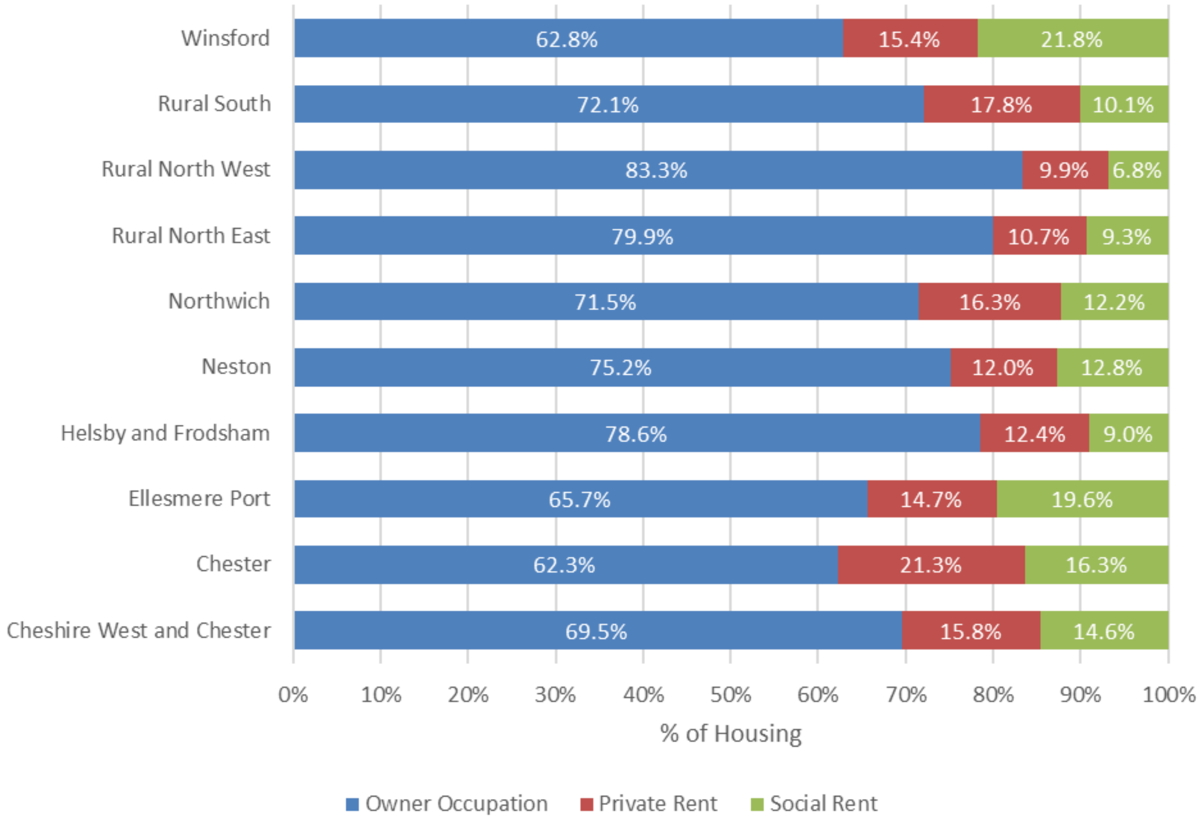
4.22 The figure below sets out tenure variation across the sub-areas. The owner-occupation figure includes outright ownership, ownership with a mortgage, and shared ownership, the last of which is small in number. Those in Private Rental include those living rent-free.

4.23 The rural subareas, Rural North West and Rural North East, have the highest proportion of homeownership of all of the subareas, at 83% and 80% respectively. The Rural South, Northwich, Neston and Helby and Frodsham all have home ownership rates above the borough’s average.

4.24 Private renting is highest in Chester at 21%, followed by the Rural South (18%), and particularly low in the Rural North West (10%) and the Rural North East (11%).

4.25 Higher levels of social rent can be seen in Winsford (22%), Ellesmere Port (20%) and Chester (16%). The lowest rates were in the Rural North East (7%) and Helsby and Frodsham (9%).

Figure 4.3 Tenure by sub-area, 2021



Source: ONS Census 2021

Change in Tenure

4.26 In CWAC, home ownership with a mortgage fell by 4.8% between 2011 and 2021. This is a slightly greater decrease than seen regionally and nationally. Shared ownership increased by 0.5%, compared with just 0.2% in the North West and in England.

4.27 Social rent remained unchanged despite reductions seen in benchmark areas. However, private rent grew at a slower rate of 2.1% than that seen nationally and regionally.

Figure 4.4 Change in tenure, 2011-2021

Source: ONS Census 2011, 2021

4.28 The trends between 2011 and 2021 of outright home ownership and private rent becoming more common are not unique to CWAC. An ageing population influenced the former, while mortgage ownership became much less common as households' ability to afford home ownership weakened.

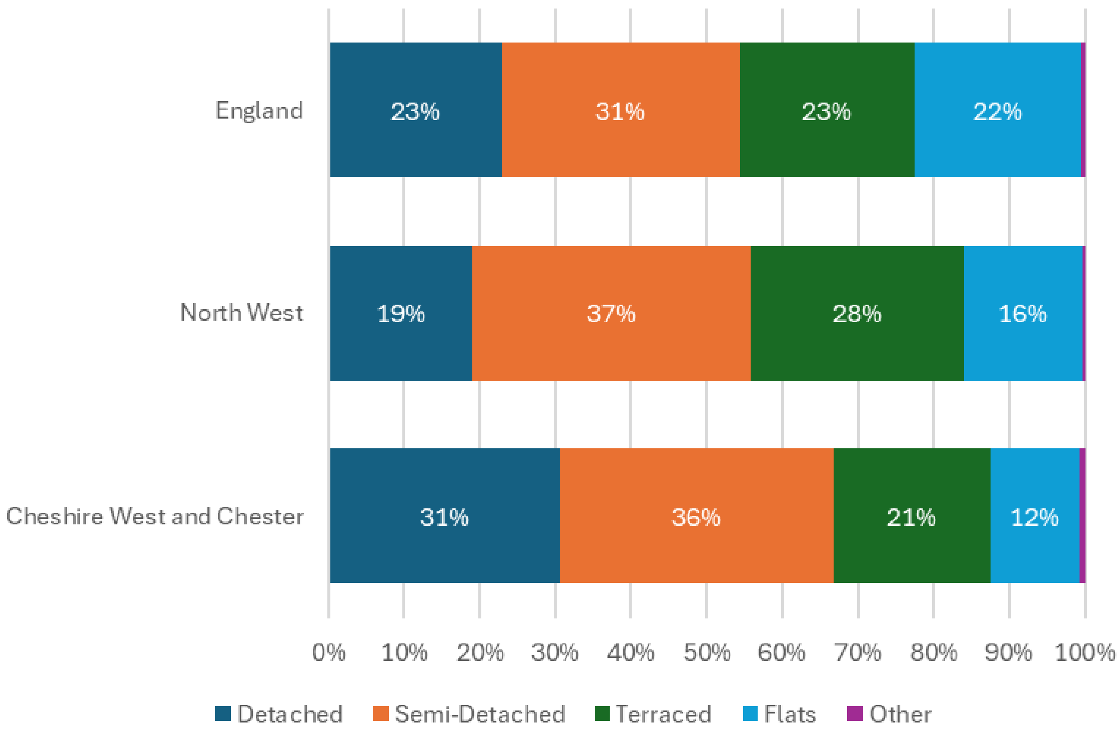
Dwelling Type

4.29 Data from the 2021 Census shows the housing stock in Cheshire West and Chester to be dominated by a combination of semi-detached and detached homes, with 36% and 31% of properties falling into this category, respectively, higher than the wider comparators (as shown in the figure below), particularly for detached homes.

4.30 The proportion of semi-detached homes is broadly in line with the region, exceeding the average in England. However, there is a lower proportion of terraced properties and a much lower proportion of flats when compared to comparator areas.

4.31 Overall, the housing offer is more focused towards larger property types. This reflects the more rural or suburban character of CWAC when compared to regional and national comparatives.

Figure 4.5 Housing type, 2021

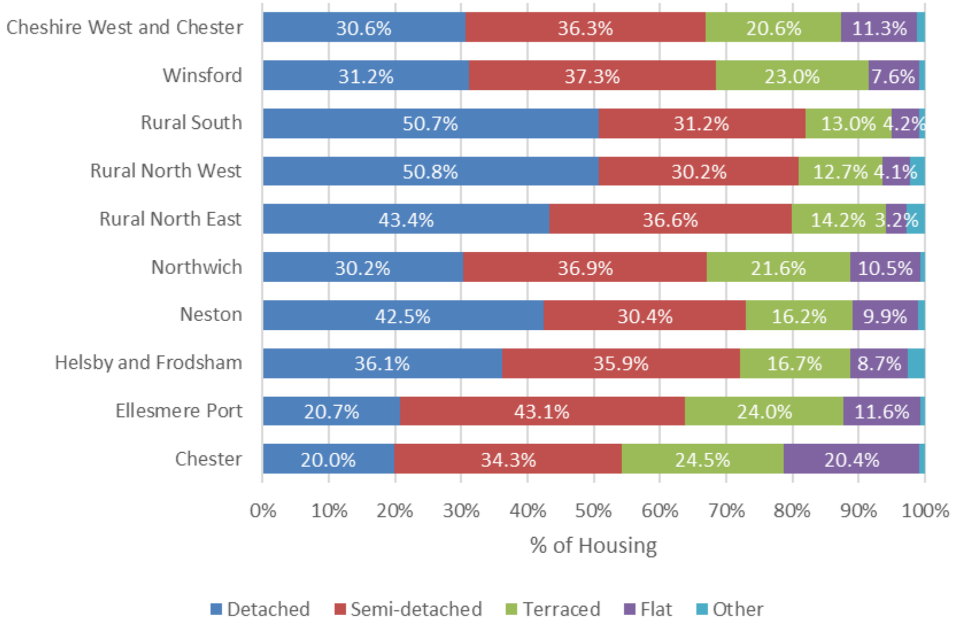


Source: ONS Census 2021

4.32 Figure 4.6 below sets out the housing composition for each sub-area. Rural areas in the North West and South of the Borough have the highest proportion of detached homes, at over 50%, compared with less than 21% in Ellesmere Port and Chester.

4.33 Across all three rural subareas, at least 80% of homes are either detached or semi-detached. Chester, Northwich, Ellesmere Port and Winsford have the highest proportion of terraced houses at over 22%. Chester has significantly more flats than any other subarea at 20%. In all three rural subareas, the proportion of homes that are flats is below 5%.

Figure 4.6 Housing composition by type, 2021



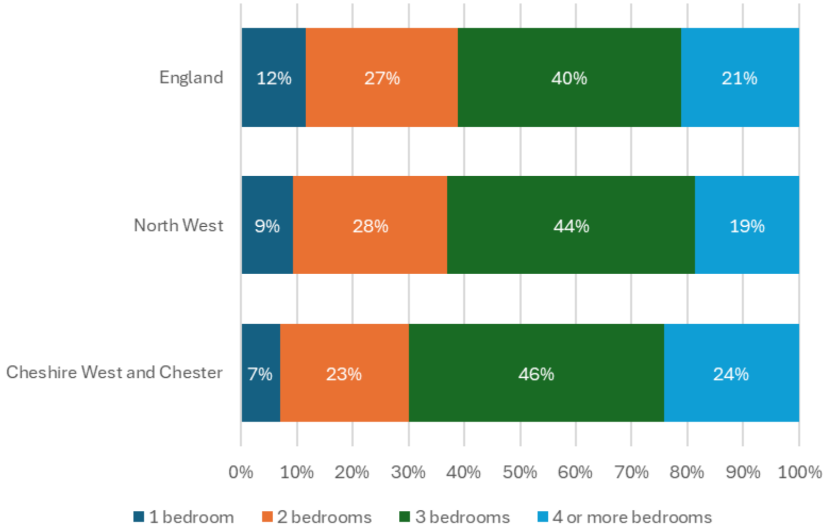
Source: ONS Census 2021

4.34 The Rural North West, Rural North East and Helsby and Frodsham all have slightly raised numbers of “other” household types in comparison to the other areas, which include caravans and houseboats.

Size of Properties

4.35 Linked to the type of housing and character of the area, Cheshire West & Chester’s housing size is characterised by larger homes compared to the wider comparators, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 4.7 Housing composition by number of bedrooms (2021)



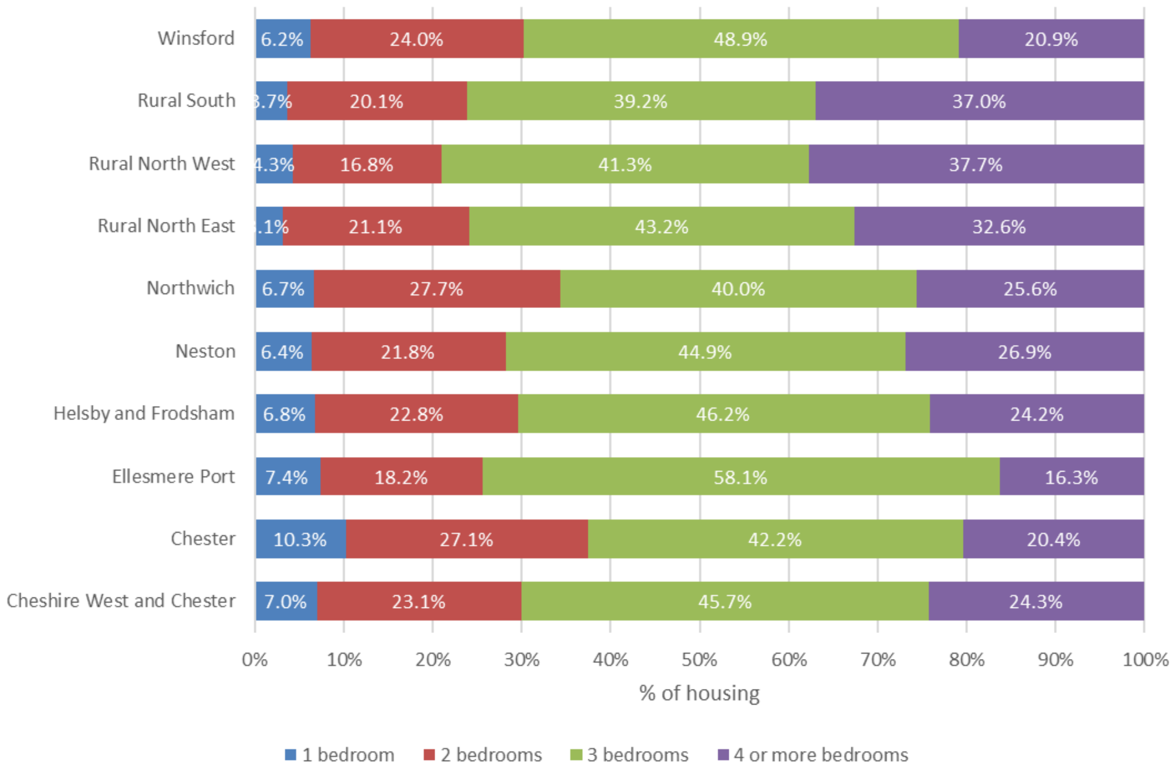
Source: ONS Census 2021

4.36 The proportion of 4+ bed homes is 24%, a rate higher than broader benchmarks (19% in the North West and 21% nationally). The proportion of homes with 3+ bedrooms is also higher than average at 46%.

4.37 In contrast, CWAC has a lower rate of smaller properties, with 30% of properties having one or two bedrooms compared to 37% in the North West and 39% across England as a whole. Across the Borough, the majority of homes are family-sized with 3+ bedrooms at 70%.

4.38 The figure below sets out the housing composition by bedrooms across the sub-areas. Consistent with their rural nature and high proportion of detached homes, Rural North West, Rural South and Rural North East all have a high proportion of 4+ bedroom homes at over 32%.

Figure 4.8 Housing composition by number of bedrooms (2021)



Source: ONS Census 2021

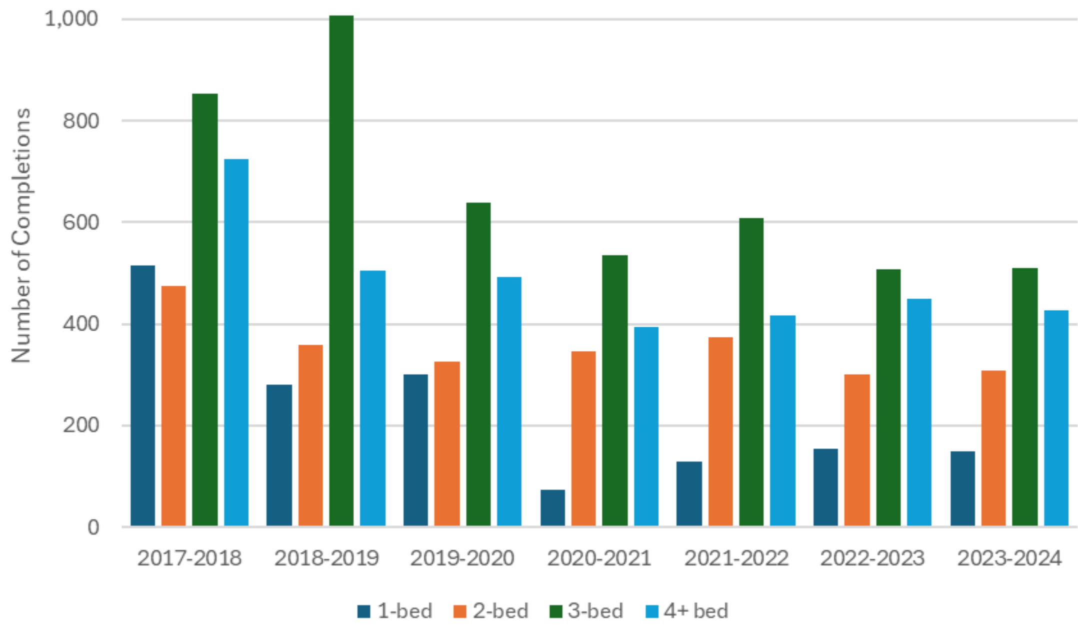
4.39 Ellesmere Port, Chester and Winsford have comparatively low levels of larger homes. However, Ellesmere Port has the highest proportion of 3-bedroom homes at over 58%.

4.40 Chester, Northwich, and Winsford have the highest proportion of 2-bedroom properties at over 24%. Despite having the lowest proportion of 4+ bedroom properties, only 18% of properties in Ellesmere Port are two-bedroom.

4.41 As expected for a city, Chester has the highest proportion of 1-bedroom properties at over 10%, although this is still lower than the 12% nationally.

4.42 Since 2017/18, there has been some variation in the sizes of new homes delivered, likely as different schemes are delivered. This is illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 4.9 Housing completions, by number of bedrooms



Source: Cheshire West & Chester Annual Monitoring Report 2024

4.43 Two- and three-bedroom properties have been the most frequently constructed overall. Consistently, each year, 3-bedroom properties have been the most commonly delivered property type, followed by 4-bedroom properties.

4.44 However, the disparity between the delivery of 3-beds and other types of properties has narrowed since 2018/19, when over 1,000 were delivered. In 2023/24, this reduced to 509 3-beds.

4.45 The yearly delivery of 1-bed properties has increased since 2020/21 from 74 to 148 in 2023/24. However, overall housing delivery has decreased significantly over the period; therefore, the proportion of 1-bed homes has notably increased. Over the five years 2019-24, 11% of completions were 1-bed properties, 22% 2-bed, 38% 3-bed, and 29% 4+ bed, which is more balanced towards larger properties.

Occupancy

4.46 The occupancy rating is assessed in the 2021 Census by comparing the number of bedrooms each household requires to the number of available bedrooms. The required number of bedrooms is based on the age, gender and relationship of the members of each household.

4.47 Overcrowded or over-occupied housing means that households have fewer bedrooms than required. In comparison, under-occupation means that the household has more bedrooms than it requires (in the figure below, two or more bedrooms, as one extra bedroom is sometimes required, e.g., for an overnight carer or for children who live with two separate parents).

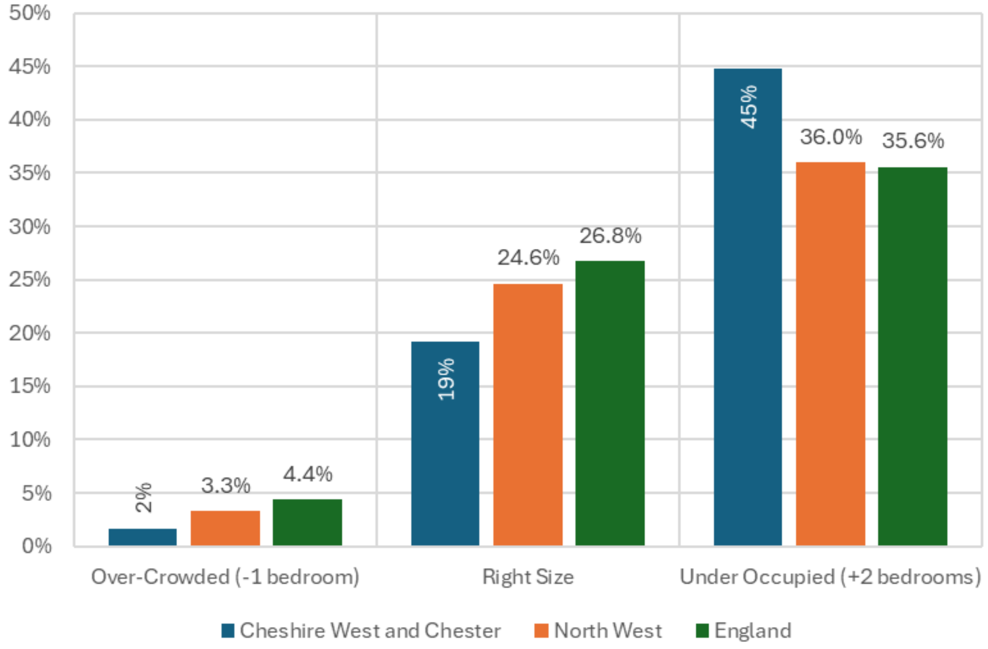
4.48 Cheshire West & Chester has a higher level of underoccupancy and a lower rate of overcrowding than benchmark areas, as shown in the figure below.

4.49 At a national level, higher levels of under occupation are typically seen in areas with an elderly population (empty nesters), and this is exacerbated by a larger housing stock. As such, it is typically more common in rural areas than in urban areas.

4.50 High underoccupancy in Cheshire West & Chester can be attributed to the relatively high proportion of larger properties and the focus of the tenure profile towards home ownership (as in the private sector, house sizes reflect more what households can afford than the household size and what they might ‘need’).

4.51 Nonetheless, the significant level of underoccupancy suggests potential for schemes that appeal to older households looking to downsize, thereby releasing larger family homes for other households. The transactional costs of moving (including high Stamp Duty) are, however, a particular barrier to doing so.

Figure 4.10 Occupancy Rate

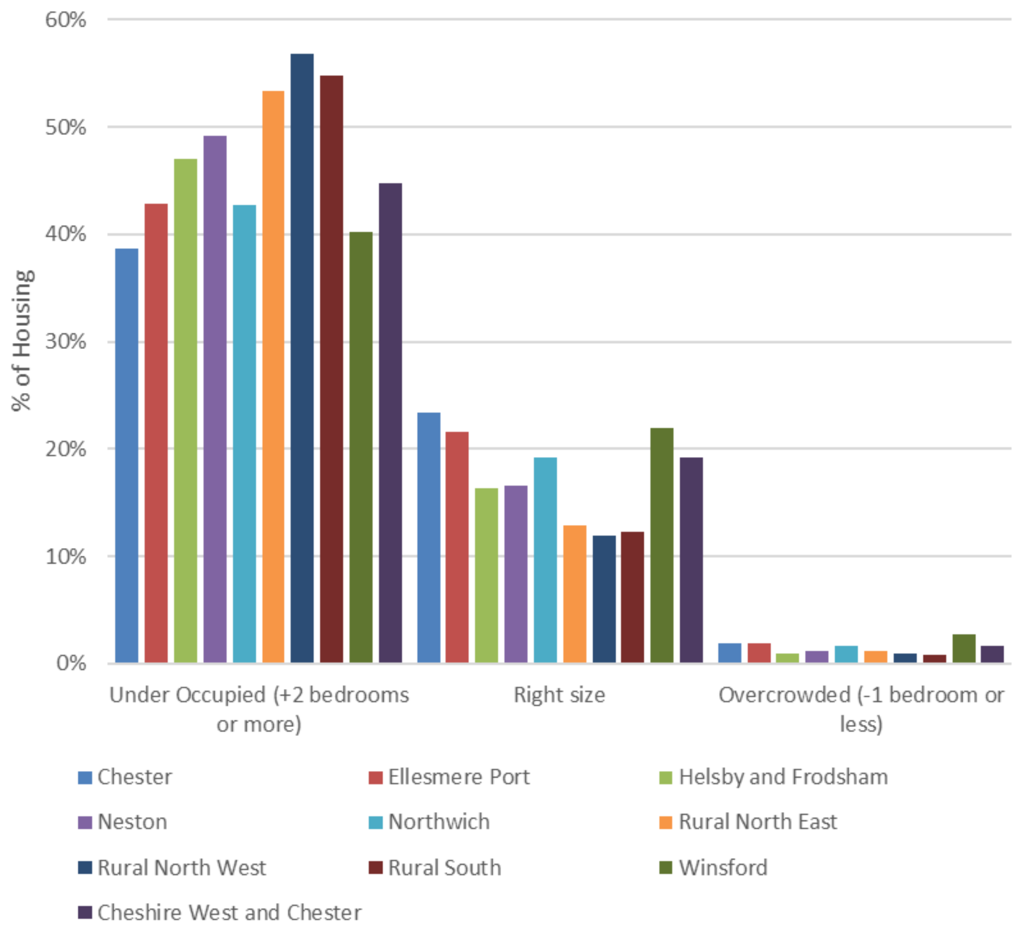


Source: ONS Census 2021

4.52 The figure below shows the occupancy rate across the sub-areas. Given their large housing stocks, the three rural sub-areas have the highest level of under-occupation.

4.53 All subareas have low levels of overcrowding, with the highest being in Winsford at 2.7%, followed by Chester and Ellesmere Port, both at 1.9%.

Figure 4.11 Occupancy Rate, by sub-area



Source: ONS Census 2021

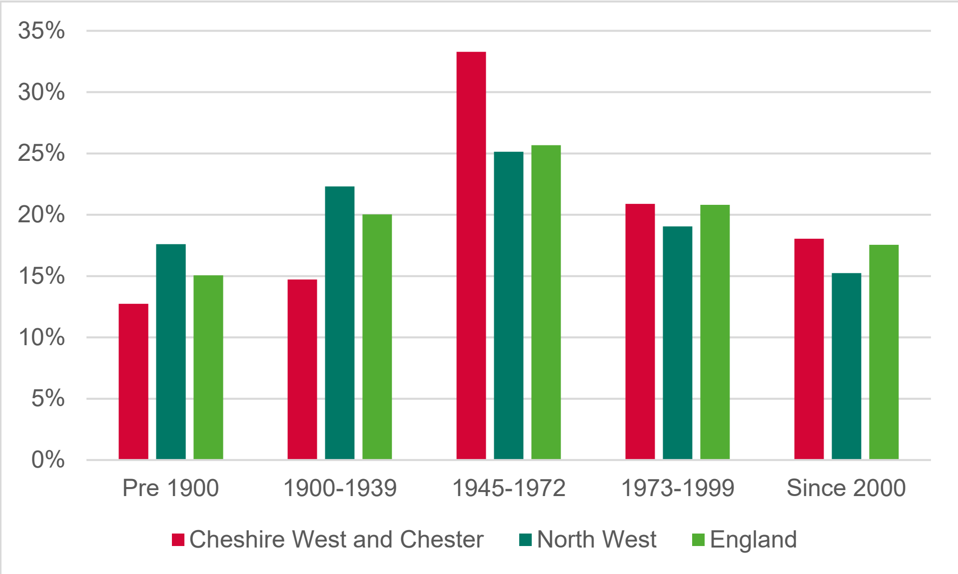
Age of Stock

4.54 According to VOA data, Cheshire West and Chester has a relatively younger housing stock than the north west region or England, with only 27% of the stock built before the war, compared to 40% and 35% respectively.

4.55 Conversely, 18% of the housing stock has been built since 2000, which aligns with the England figure (17.5%) but is above the regional figure of 15.2%.

4.56 The highest number of dwellings in CWAC dates from the post-war period to 1972, with around one third of all dwellings built then. This compares to around one quarter for England and the North West.

Figure 4.12 Percentage of Properties by Build Period (2024)



Source: VOA, Number of properties by Council Tax band, property build period and administrative area (2025)

Housing Stock - Summary

4.57 Between 2011 and 2024, Cheshire West & Chester experienced higher growth in dwellings and households than the national and regional average.

4.58 At the same time, the rate of homes without 'usual residents' has increased slightly from 4.2% to 4.4%.

4.59 Whilst the annual housing delivery target set out in the 2010-2030 Local Plan has so far been exceeded, housing delivery rates in Cheshire West & Chester have decreased since 2017.

4.60 The rate of housing delivery in the last 5, 10 and 20 years has been below peak rates achieved by some other local authorities in the region, suggesting that there is further headroom for growth.

4.61 Cheshire West & Chester shows high rates of home ownership, and lower private renting and social rented housing than regional and national comparators.

4.62 CWAC has seen an above-average increase in outright home ownership and private renting, compared to the decrease in home ownership with a mortgage, highlighting issues associated with younger generations being able to afford to join the housing market.

4.63 The area is characterised by detached homes and larger residences, with 70% of homes featuring 3+ bedrooms. This has contributed to significant levels of under-occupancy of existing homes.

4.64 All the while, a significantly low level of flats and smaller properties will make it difficult for new entrants to the housing market to both own and rent a property.

4.65 CWAC has a relatively newer dwelling stock than the rest of the North West and England, having built around 18% of its stock since the millennium.

5. Housing Market Baseline

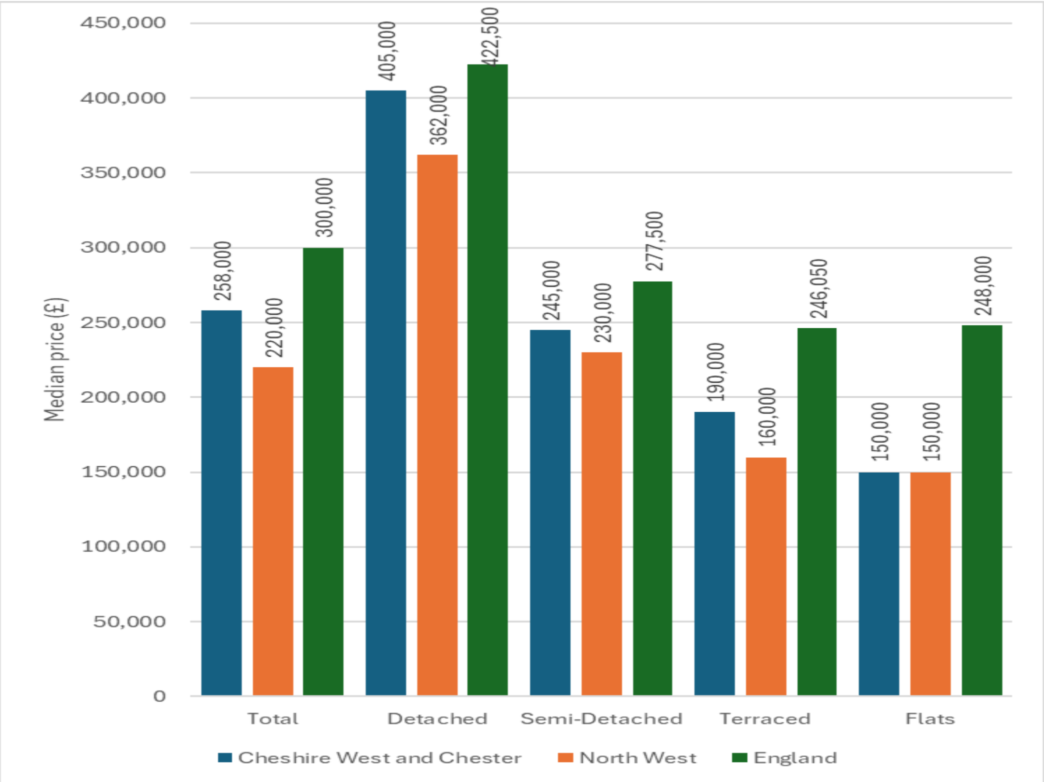
5.1 This section provides an updated analysis of housing market dynamics, addressing the sales market. The rental market is looked at separately.

House Prices

5.2 Despite having a higher-than-average proportion of detached and semi-detached properties and larger homes than average, median house prices in Cheshire West & Chester are lower than the national average for all types of properties.

5.3 However, overall house prices in Cheshire West & Chester at £258,000 are £38,000 higher than the regional average, although for flats the price aligns with regional averages.

Figure 5.1 Median House Prices (Year ending March 2025)



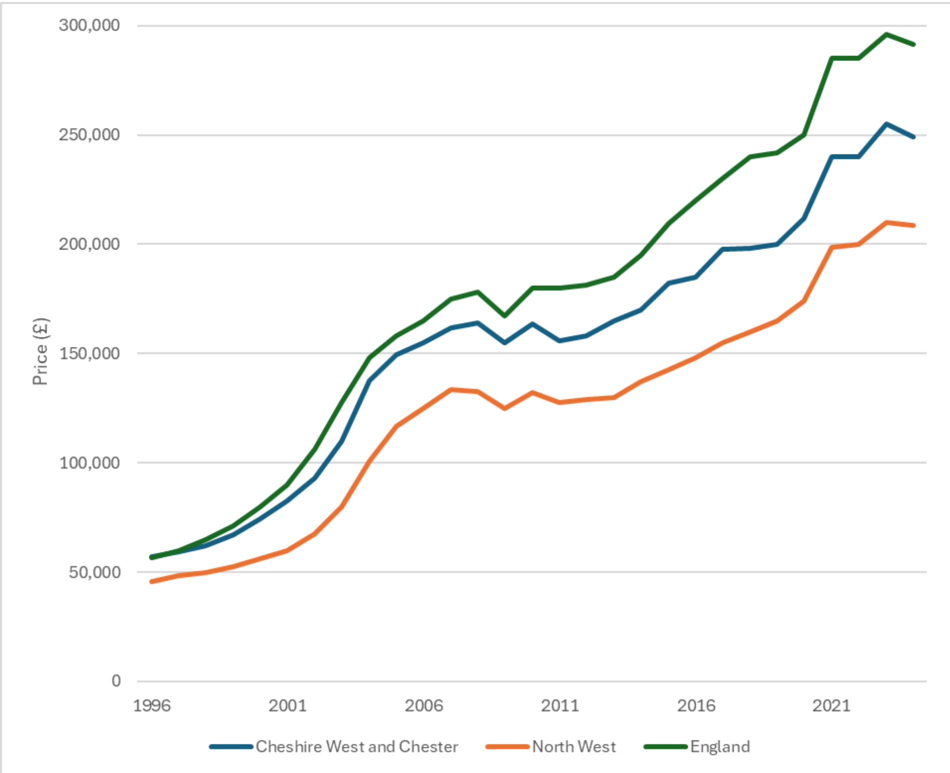
Source: ONS Median House Price for Administrative Geographies (HPSSA Dataset 9)

5.4 The figure below shows the median house prices between 1996 and the end of 2024. Cheshire West & Chester has consistently had higher property prices than the North West, although not the wider national average.

5.5 Prices have increased across the period shown, with a dip following the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, followed by a recovery starting around 2012.

5.6 Prices peaked around 2023 (linked to the stamp duty holiday), followed by a slight decline, which may be attributed to rising interest rates, inflation, and economic uncertainty after the COVID pandemic.

Figure 5.2 Median House Prices (January 1996 to December 2024)



Source: ONS Census 2021

5.7 The table below sets out house price growth over time, with price growth expressed as a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR). The figures show that Cheshire West & Chester has underperformed its regional and national comparators over the last year, with a larger price decrease. Whilst the 10-year price growth is below that seen regionally and nationally, 5-year growth has outperformed the national average.

Table 5.1 House Price Change over time – Annual Growth (CAGR)

	1 year (2023-2024)	5 year (2019-2024)	10 year (2014-2024)
Cheshire West & Chester	-2.38%	4.47%	3.89%
North West	-0.71%	4.79%	4.29%
England	-1.60%	3.77%	4.09%

Source: Iceni analysis of ONS Data

5.8 The table below sets out the median house prices by sub-area. The relative proportions of each housing type influence the overall median price.

5.9 The sub-areas with higher proportions of detached housing and lower proportions of flatted developments tend to have higher overall median prices.

Table 5.2 Median House Prices by sub-area (2024)

	Overall	Detached	Semi-detached	Terraced	Flats
Chester	£267,750	£425,000	£295,000	£220,860	£162,250
Ellesmere Port	£200,000	£310,000	£200,000	£149,000	£105,000
Helsby and Frodsham	£270,000	£420,000	£250,000	£212,500	£120,000
Neston	£305,000	£450,000	£265,000	£190,000	£96,500
Northwich	£242,500	£404,000	£245,000	£161,625	£125,000
Rural North East	£300,500	£435,000	£257,500	£195,750	£149,000
Rural North West	£347,000	£450,000	£301,000	£239,000	£197,750
Rural South	£362,500	£472,500	£280,000	£237,000	£360,000
Winsford	£192,000	£279,998	£185,000	£150,000	£78,500
Cheshire West & Chester	*£250,000*	*£405,000*	*£240,000*	*£190,000*	*£140,000*

Source: Iceni analysis of Price Paid Data

5.10 The Rural South has the highest median property prices overall at £362,500, as well as the highest prices for detached properties and flats, where the difference in price compared to other subareas is significant. This is potentially due to sales being luxury retirement flats.

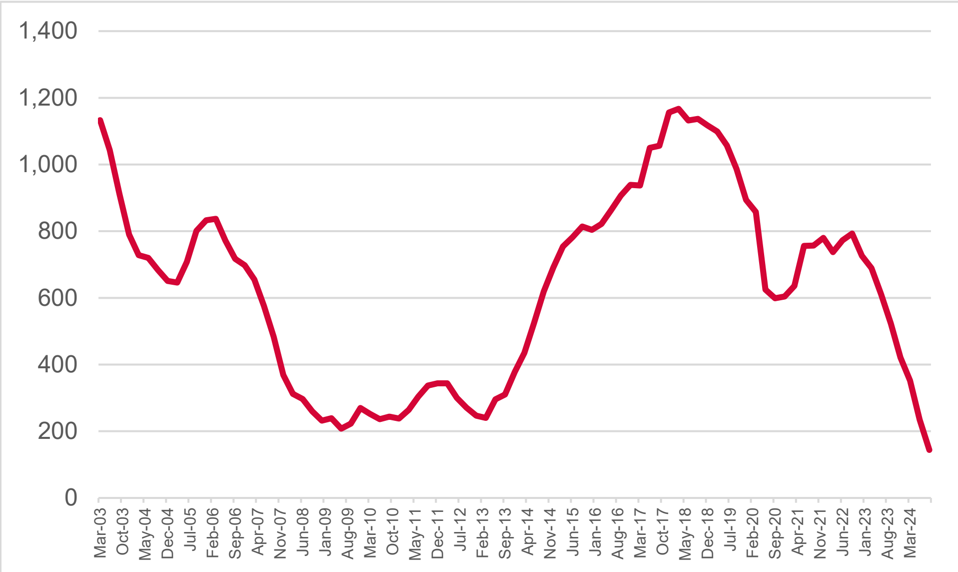
5.11 Prices are relatively high across the board in all three rural subareas. Despite having smaller properties, Chester has relatively high median prices across all housing types, indicating high demand.

5.12 Winsford and Ellesmere Port have significantly lower median house prices than other subareas. In Winsford, the overall median house price is as low as £192,000, and flats are only £78,500.

New Build Market

5.13 Trends in the number of new build sales in Cheshire West & Chester over the last 15 years, as reported in ONS data, are illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 5.3 New Build Sales Per Quarter (2003 – 2024)



Source: Iceni analysis of ONS data, 2024

5.14 The sales rate peaked around 2017 – but declined in 2020 in line with the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite a slight recovery in 2021-22, new build sales have since decreased and are now below those seen at the lowest point after the financial crisis in 2008.

5.15 As well as the effect of planning for higher housing delivery (as considered in Section 4), the increase in the new-build sales rate from 2015 onwards may have reflected the impact of the Help to Buy (HTB) scheme.

5.16 Help to Buy was a Government equity loan program intended to help first-time buyers purchase a property. Buyers were required to put down a minimum cash deposit of 5% of the property value, with a leading mortgage provider covering at least 75% of the purchase price.

5.17 The Government then offered a loan of up to 20% of the property's value, meaning a smaller deposit was required. The equity loan period lasts until the property is sold or the mortgage is paid off, or for a maximum of 25 years, whichever comes first.

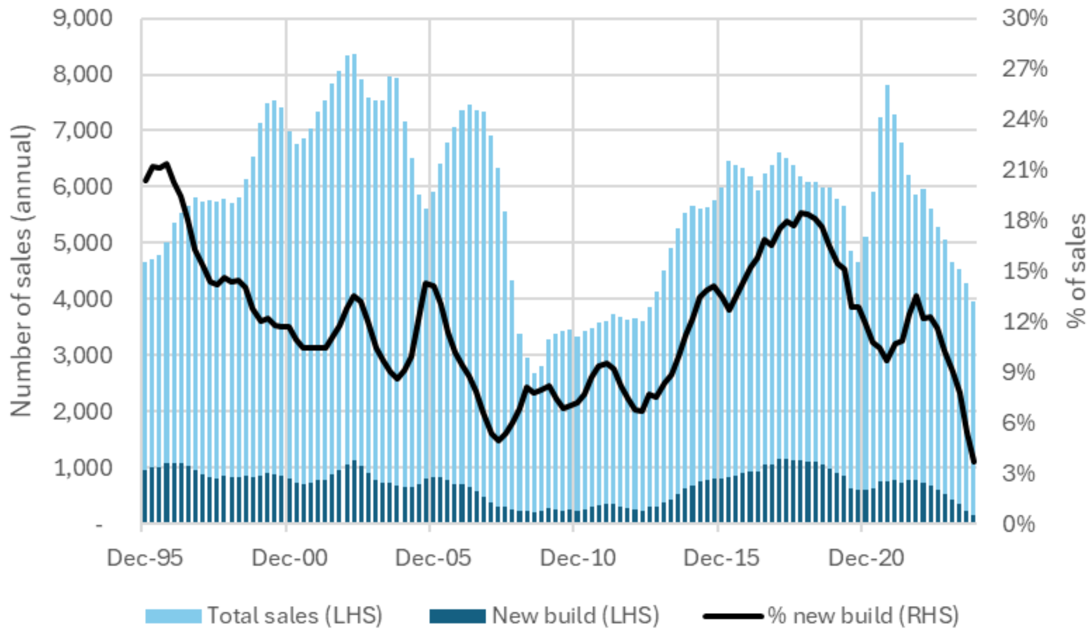
5.18 The HTB scheme was documented to increase new build sales rates in England. In Cheshire West & Chester, there have been 9,369 HTB loan sales since the scheme launched in 2013.

5.19 As the HTB scheme has now been closed in England, its support to new build sales rates will not be available going forward, which is more likely to have an impact during periods of slower market activity or during economic downturns.

5.20 The number of new-build sales in Cheshire West & Chester can be benchmarked against the total number of home sales as a gauge of the rate of new-build development in the Borough. As shown in the figure below, the proportion of sales which are for new builds in Cheshire West & Chester has fluctuated over time.

5.21 During a period of high housing delivery before 1997, new builds made up around 21% of housing sales. This fell to between 5% and 14% during the 2000s and the first half of the 2010s, before rising to 18% in 2018. From here, this has decreased to just 4% by September 2024. This coincides with an overall reduction in sales since 2022.

Figure 5.4 New Build Sales (1995 – 2024)

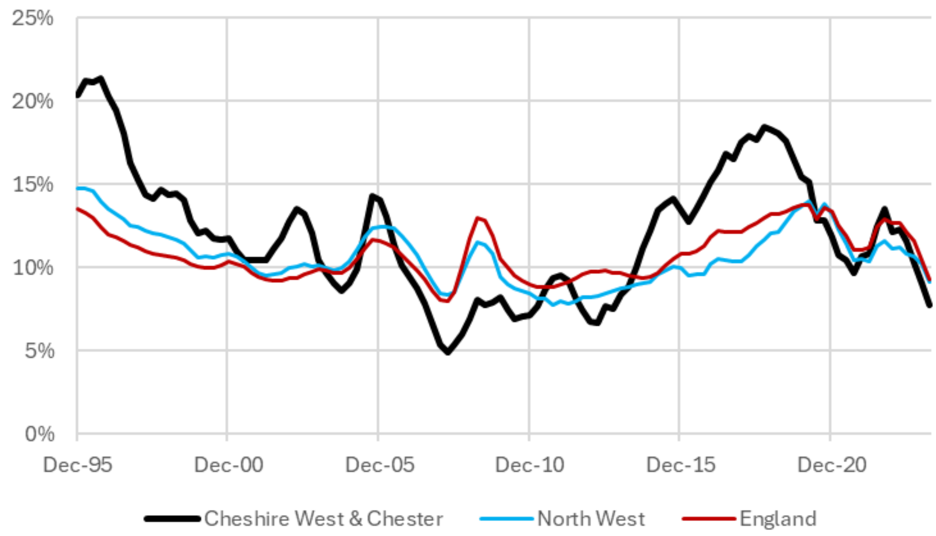


Source: Iceni analysis of ONS data, 2024

5.22 The figure below compares the proportion of sales that are for new builds in Cheshire West and Chester to the broader region and nation. This illustrates that Cheshire West & Chester performed below benchmark values in the late 2000s and for most of the early 2010s, meaning that new build housing delivery was below what would be expected given the housing market.

5.23 Cheshire West and Chester then surpassed the regional and national averages of proportion of new build sales until around 2019, after which this has remained mostly in line with national averages.

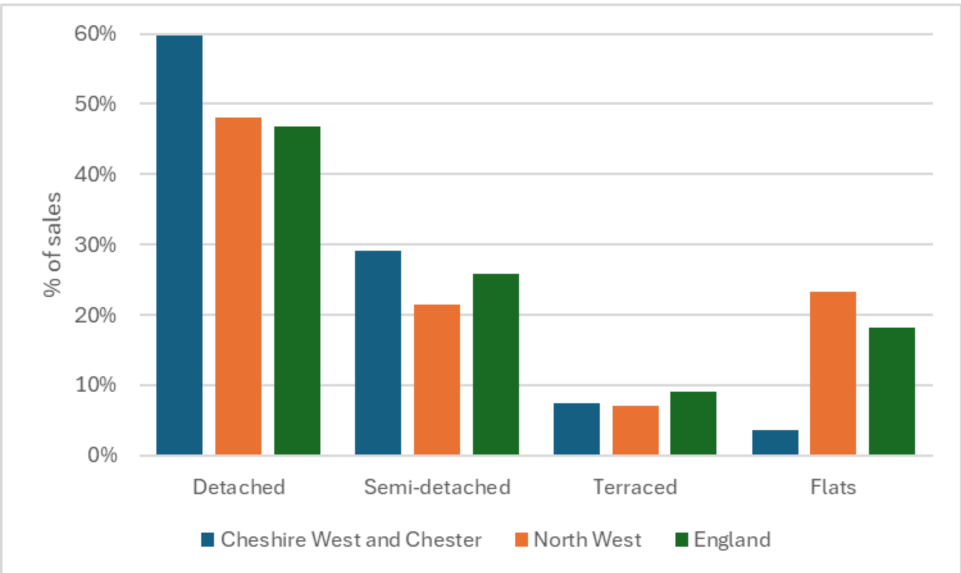
Figure 5.5 New Build Sales as a proportion of housing sales in Cheshire West & Chester and comparator areas



Source: Iceni analysis of ONS data, 2024

5.24 The figure below compares the type of newly built dwellings sold in Cheshire West and Chester to comparator areas. Cheshire West and Chester delivered substantially more detached homes and slightly more semi-detached homes than the broader areas, but significantly fewer flats. This is consistent with the profile of market demand and the area's housing stock.

Figure 5.6 New Build Sales, by Type (Year to March 2025)



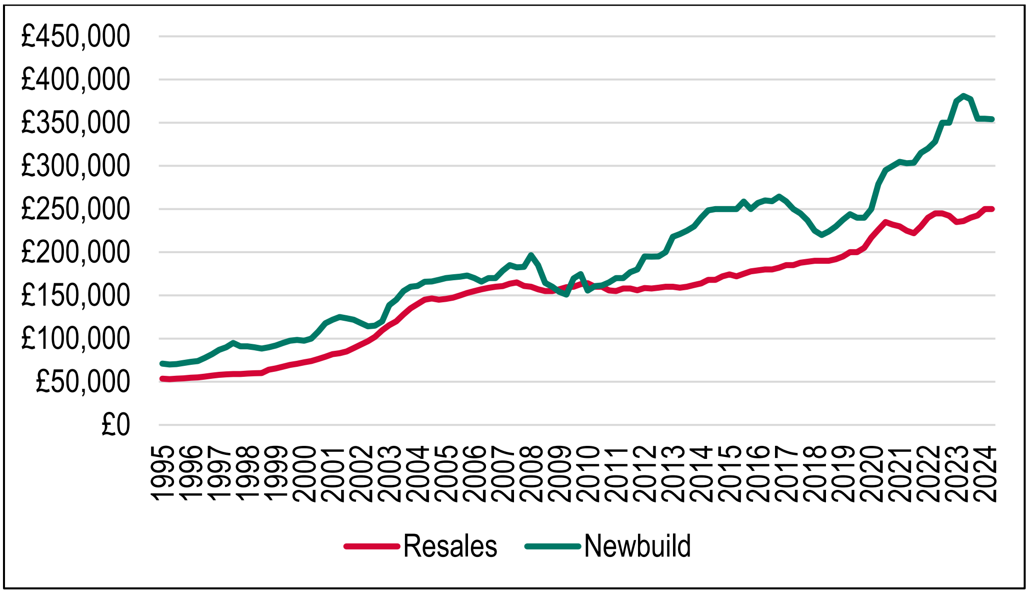
Source: Iceni analysis of ONS Data, 2025

5.25 A final analysis of newbuild homes looks at prices, with the figure below showing the median existing and newbuild price (across all types) back to 1995. The newbuild price can be quite variable as it is influenced by the number and type of sales, as well as the location.

5.26 Looking at data for the past few years, it is clear there is consistently a notable 'premium' (difference) between new and second-hand sales in CWAC.

5.27 For the most recent period available (year to March 2025), the average newbuild price stood at £354,000, some £104,000 more than the average existing home – this is also equivalent to a newbuild premium of 42%.

Figure 5.7 Trends in Median Newbuild and Second-hand Property Prices – Cheshire West & Chester



Source: ONS

Affordability

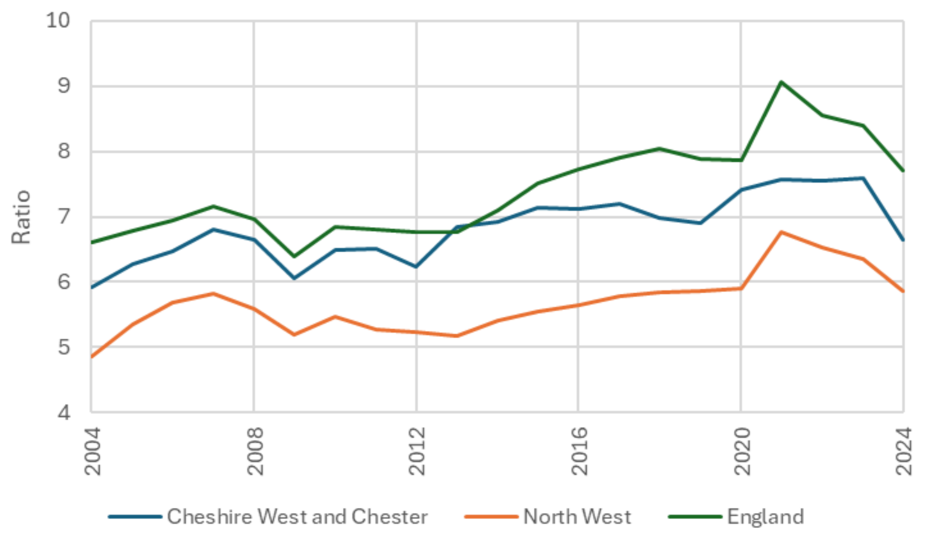
5.28 The figure below shows median workplace-based affordability ratios over time against its wider comparators. The affordability ratio is the ratio of median house prices to median gross annual workplace-based earnings.

5.29 Cheshire West and Chester's ratio has almost consistently remained above that seen in the North West but below the national average over the period 2004-2024.

5.30 The median workplace affordability ratio in Cheshire West & Chester has been rising since 2018 after a brief drop. The gap between Cheshire West & Chester and England's ratio has widened over the period.

5.31 However, most recent figures show a significant drop in the affordability ratio in Cheshire West & Chester to below 2013 levels at 6.65. This drop was also seen regionally and nationally. This indicates an improvement in affordability.

Figure 5.8 Median workplace-based affordability ratio



Source: ONS, 2024

5.32 While the median workplace-based affordability ratio is the most widely used and features in the standard method for calculating housing need, the ONS also produces other affordability ratios:

- Lower quartile ratios, which use the lower quartile instead of median incomes and housing prices. As a result, they illustrate typical affordability levels for lower-income workers or residents

- Residence-based ratios, which compare incomes for residents of an area to house prices, instead of the incomes of those who work in an area

5.33 The table below sets out the affordability ratios for Cheshire West & Chester. While the lower quartile ratio is lower than the median ratio, both figures highlight affordability issues for those on lower and moderate incomes.

Table 5.3 Affordability ratio values – Cheshire West & Chester

		2024	5-year average
Workplace based	Median	6.65	7.35
	Lower quartile	6.17	6.74
Residence based	Median	6.25	6.93
	Lower quartile	6.1	6.5

Source: ONS House price to workplace-based earnings ratio, House price to residence-based earnings ratio

5.34 The workplace-based ratios are also higher than the residence-based ratios, meaning that the area is likely to see a number of high-earning residents living in CWAC but commuting elsewhere.

Agent Engagement

5.35 Agent engagement was conducted over the course of the week commencing 22nd September 2025, with a range of estate agencies across Chester, Northwich, Ellesmere Port, Neston, Winsford, Helsby and Frodsham to understand local market conditions.

5.36 To note, local agent viewpoints reflect individual experiences and business focus and should therefore be considered alongside market data.

5.37 The following agents were spoken across all areas: Thornley Groves, Currans Homes, Carman Friend Estate Agents, Cavendish Estate Agents Ltd, Jordan & Halstead, Jackson-Stops Estate Agents, Rickitt

Partnerships, Ashton & Grosvenor, Fine & Country, Northwood Chester, Marshall Tonks, Reeds Rains Estate Agents, Beresford Adams, Chester Place Lettings, Humphreys of Chester, Cavendish Rentals, Thomas Property Group, Town & Country Estate & Lettings Agents, Royal Fox Estates, Vincent James Estate Agents, Belvoir Lettings Agents, Clive Watkins Estate and Letting Agents, Hunter Estate & Letting Agent, Bridgfords Estate Agents, Swetenhams Estate Agents, Butters John Bee Estate & Lettings Agent, LMS Property Lettings, Hewitt Adams, Vista Abode and Grosvenor Properties.

Sales Market

5.38 The sales market across Cheshire West and Chester in 2025 is defined by demand from families, professionals and first-time buyers.

5.39 There is a quick turnover in the most affordable brackets, while investor activity has slightly slowed down.

5.40 The main themes standing out across Northwich, Ellesmere Port, Neston and Winsford are that there is a limited stock, ongoing homeworking trends and affordability pressures forcing households to seek value for money.

Chester

5.41 There is strong demand in the sales market in Chester, which is driven by families, young professionals and first-time buyers looking to move to and within the City.

5.42 Estate agents report a broad mix of buyers and repeatedly highlight the dominance of family homes and properties suitable for homeworking.

5.43 While most moves are local, there is also a steady stream of relocations from further afield, including from as far afield as London.

5.44 Three-bed semi-detached homes are particularly popular and tend to sell quickly, with properties often achieving their asking price, which has steadily grown since the pandemic.

5.45 Within the City, Hoole is an attractive neighbourhood offering a quiet, green setting close to the train station.

5.46 Within the Roman walls, i.e. within the City Centre, homes are rare and come at a premium, reflecting the desirability and limited supply in the historic core.

5.47 Areas such as Handbridge and Curzon Park are also sought after. Properties along the River Dee also attract a premium. Locations such as Saltney offer more affordable options while retaining good access to Chester.

5.48 Agents noted that investor activity is subdued at the moment due to economic pressures and higher costs, coupled with increased regulation. In the main, this has led landlords to sell rather than buy, reducing the presence of investors in the local market.

5.49 Buyer demand is increasingly influenced by the need for extra bedrooms or dedicated office space, a trend driven by homeworking preferences. Access to transport remains essential for those relocating to the City.

5.50 Retirement properties move more slowly than general housing, as there is limited demand from older buyers and those seeking to downsize.

Northwich

5.51 According to agents, prices are either steady or rising slowly over time. One agent suggested that around 75% of the homes sold are between £250,000 and £500,000.

5.52 According to agents, stock in Northwich moves quickly, particularly for homes priced under £200,000. There is a particular gap in the market for homes below the £250,000 stamp duty threshold.

5.53 Economic conditions (such as stamp duty) play a significant role in shaping buyer preferences, especially in higher price brackets. Agents thought that the market was slowing due to economic uncertainty.

5.54 The buyer mix includes first-time buyers, upsizers, downsizers and investors, with demand for home office space especially strong among families.

Ellesmere Port

5.55 First-time buyers, singles and couples are the most active in the town, especially for homes under £250,000, and three-bed properties are the most in-demand.

5.56 The top end of the market is slower, especially as investors become less visible, and as is the case elsewhere, many landlords are exiting due to economic pressures.

5.57 While affordability remains the key consideration for buyers, factors like proximity to transport or office space requirements are less pronounced in the town than elsewhere in CWAC, as many who live in the town work in industrial jobs and drive there.

Neston

5.58 Neston exhibits a rapid turnover of homes under £200,000, with slower movement and gaps in the £200,000 to £300,000 price band owing to stamp duty thresholds.

5.59 Buyer profiles are diverse, including first-time buyers, upsizers, downsizers and investors supported by the area's attractive nature. Prices remain steady or are increasing slowly.

5.60 The appeal of home office space is rising, especially for families. Economic changes have had some influence but have not dramatically slowed the market.

Winsford

5.61 Winsford’s market is particularly popular for first-time buyers and upsizers targeting four-bed detached properties and rapidly moving three-bed semi-detached homes. This is characterised by those seeking value for money

5.62 Economic changes have not notably affected local buying patterns in the area.

Frodsham

5.63 Frodsham has a steady demand for properties in the £150,000 to £300,000 range, especially two-bed and three-bed family homes.

5.64 Agents noted that more expensive properties tend to remain on the market for longer.

5.65 Economic challenges have moderated sales activity, and working from home trends have increased the appeal of properties with office space.

5.66 The area attracts workers commuting to nearby employment areas such as Liverpool and Manchester.

Rural Chester

5.67 The upper quartile market (from £700,000 to £800,000 upwards) in the rural areas behaves differently, often not impacted by mainstream market pressures.

5.68 Rural villages such as Saughall and Farndon are especially desirable with both areas attracting families, but properties come to market less frequently.

5.69 General stock shortages persist across the rural areas, particularly for three-bed homes and homes suitable for specialists such as key workers and older persons' accommodation.

Housing Market – Summary

5.70 The median house prices in Cheshire West & Chester are £258,000, which is £38,000 higher than the regional average.

5.71 However, house prices are lower than the national average and have declined over the last year at a faster rate than regionally and nationally.

5.72 Cheshire West & Chester's housing affordability ratio is higher than the regional averages but below the national average.

5.73 The workplace-based ratio is also higher than the residents-based average. This suggests a degree of out-commuting to higher-paid jobs

5.74 Since 2021-22, new build sales have decreased and are now below those seen at the lowest point after the financial crisis in 2008.

6. Demographic Review

6.1 This section of the report reviews demographic trends in Cheshire West and Chester, including population and age structure. It draws on published ONS data.

Population

6.2 As of the most recent published data from mid-2024, the population of Cheshire West & Chester is approximately 371,652.

6.3 This represents an increase of approximately 35,215 residents, or 10.5%, from the estimated population in 2014. Reflecting dwelling and household growth, this is a higher growth rate than the regional (8.4%) and National (7.8%) rates.

Table 6.1 Population change (2014-2024)

Location	2014	2024	Change	% Change
Cheshire West & Chester	336,437	371,652	35,215	10.5%
North West	7,141,096	7,737,414	596,318	8.4%
England	54,370,319	58,620,101	4,249,782	7.8%

Source: ONS mid-year population estimates

6.4 The figure below compares population growth in Cheshire West & Chester to benchmark areas using an indexed population (indexed to 1 in 2001).

6.5 Cheshire West & Chester experienced stagnant population growth from 2005 to 2011, followed by a faster rate of increase than seen regionally or nationally after 2011, which reduced the gap between the national average that formed in the early 2000s. It also broadly coincides with a period of higher housing delivery.

Figure 6.1 Indexed population change (2001-2024)

Source: ONS Mid-year population estimates

6.6 As shown in the table below, the most significant proportion of the population in Cheshire West & Chester resides in Chester, where 99,892 people account for 27% of the population. This is followed by Ellesmere Port (18%), Rural North East (13%) and Northwich (13%).

Table 6.2 Population by sub-area

Location	2014	2024	Change	% Change
Chester	91,089	99,892	8,803	10%
Ellesmere Port	61,289	67,759	6,470	11%
Northwich	39,986	47,073	7,087	18%
Rural South	12,878	15,247	2,369	18%
Helsby and Frodsham	14,448	14,745	297	2%
Rural North West	24,351	25,418	1,067	4%
Neston	15,382	15,532	150	1%
Rural North East	44,343	48,911	4,568	10%
Winsford	32,671	37,075	4,404	13%

Source: Iceni analysis of ONS mid-year population estimates

6.7 The smallest subareas are Neston, Rural South and Helsby & Frodsham, each with a population of less than 16,000 and each equivalent to approximately 4% of the total population.

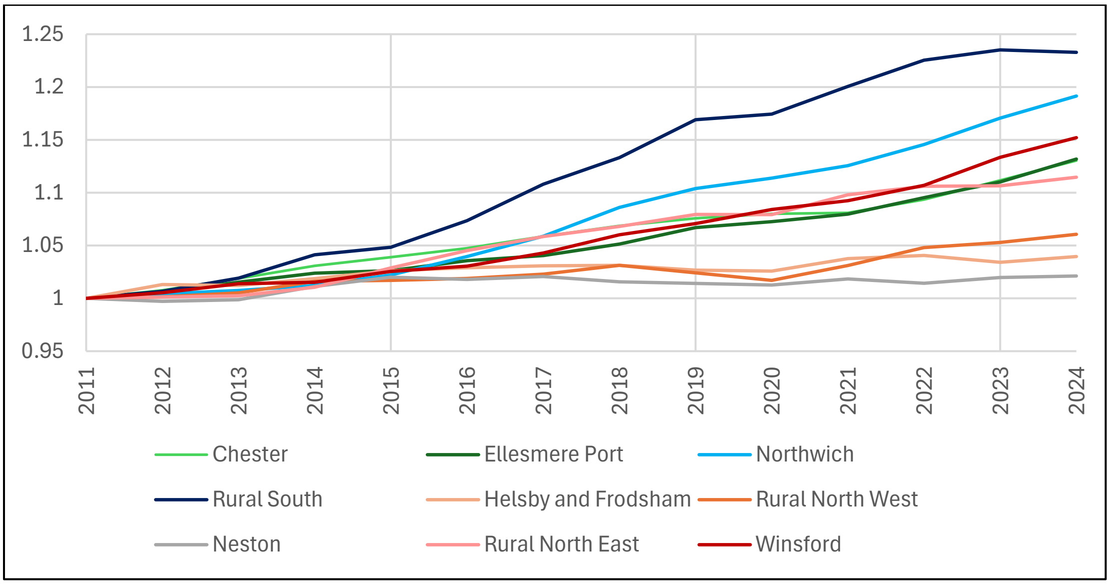
6.8 Chester has seen the most significant influx of people over the last decade, with the city's population increasing by 6,482 people. This is followed by Northwich, Ellesmere Port and Rural North East – the four largest subareas.

6.9 However, looking at these changes by percentage growth, the most significant growth was in Rural South at 21%, followed by Northwich (14%) and Rural North East (10%). Helsby & Frodsham and Neston have both experienced population growth of less than 500 people, equivalent to less than 3%.

6.10 By comparing the indexed population growth between each subarea in Cheshire West & Chester (as shown in the figure below), it is clear that growth has been more stagnant in Neston, Rural North West and Helsby and Frodsham.

6.11 Conversely, Population growth in Northwich has been higher than in other areas since 2018, and Rural South has been growing at a much faster pace since 2015.

Figure 6.2 Indexed Population Growth by Subarea (2011-2024)



Source: ONS mid-year population estimates

Age Structure

6.12 The table below sets out the age structure for each area by assigning population to three broad age groups, which can generally be described as a) children, b) working age and c) pensionable age.

6.13 The figures show Cheshire West & Chester has a larger 65+ population profile than benchmark areas, with a slightly lower proportion of working-age adults and children.

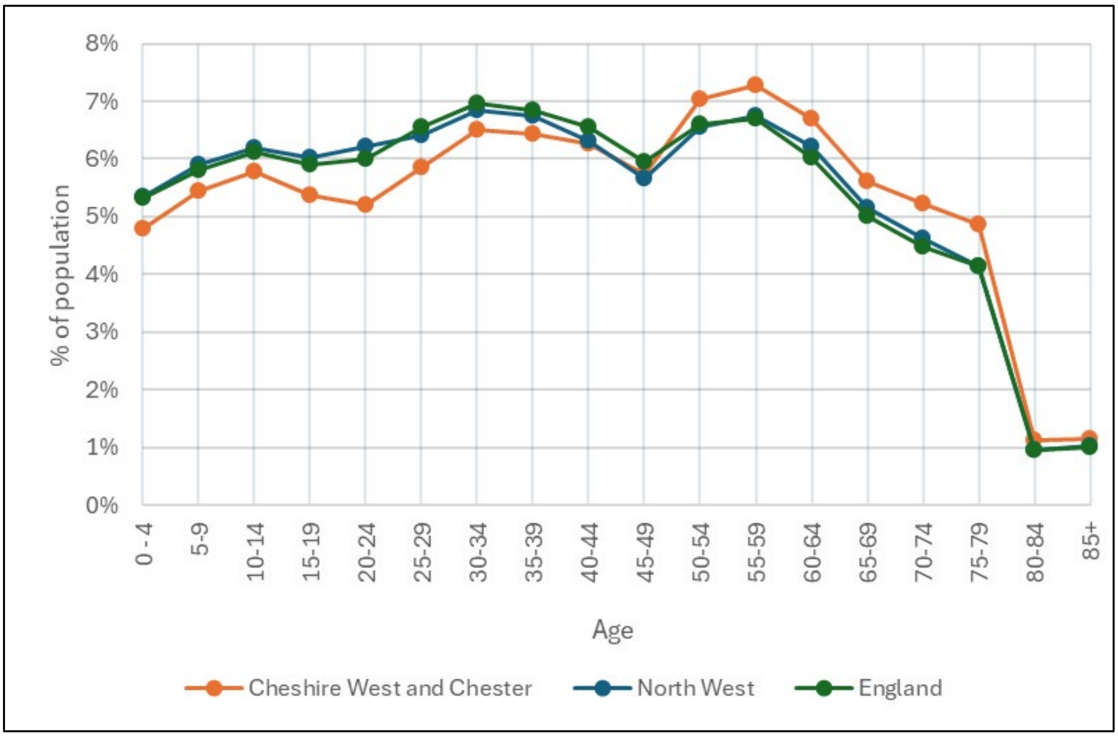
Table 6.3 Population profile (2024) – summary age bands

	Cheshire West & Chester		North West	England
	Population	% of population	% of population	% of population
Under 16	63,122	17.0%	18.6%	18.4%
16-64	228,247	61.4%	62.6%	62.9%
65+	80,283	21.6%	18.8%	18.7%
All Ages	371,652	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: ONS mid-year population estimates

6.14 The figure below provides a more detailed look at the age structure in Cheshire West & Chester and benchmark areas. As noted above, Cheshire West & Chester has a slightly older population profile between the ages of 50-79, with fewer adults under 40 and fewer children than in its benchmarks.

Figure 6.3 Population age distribution (2024)



Source: ONS mid-year population estimates

6.15 This is despite the presence of the University in Chester, which would typically result in above-average levels of 18-24 year olds. This may be because Chester and its student population are only a small component of the overall population. It may also reflect issues with student retention, possibly due to affordability concerns.

6.16 Other factors influencing an older age distribution could include the attractiveness of rural areas to retirees, coinciding with the unattractiveness of these areas for young people looking for employment opportunities, and reduced birth rates.

6.17 The figure below shows the age distribution of the subareas in Cheshire West & Chester. As illustrated, Winsford, Northwich, and Ellesmere Port have the highest proportions of children under 15, and Neston has the lowest.

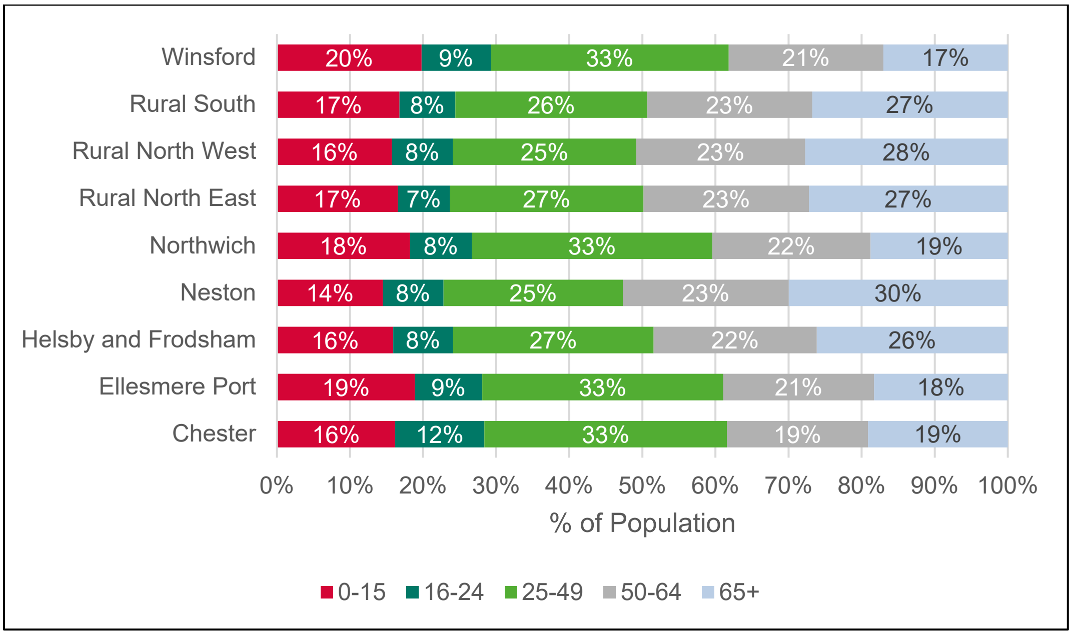
6.18 Despite having less children, Chester has the largest proportion of its population aged 16-24, which would be expected of a city with a university.

6.19 Around 33% of the population in Winsford, Northwich, Ellesmere Port and Chester are aged 25-49, in comparison to only 25% in Rural North West and Neston.

6.20 However, Neston has the largest proportion of its population aged over 65 (30%), followed by the three rural subareas. This could have implications for sustaining businesses and services, including health services, adult social care, public transport and accessibility, and could put pressure on the local workforce as a result of a smaller working age population

6.21 Ellesmere Port has the highest proportion of its population of working age (16-64) at 65%. This is lowest in Winsford and Northwich.

Figure 6.4 Population Age Distribution by Subarea (2023)



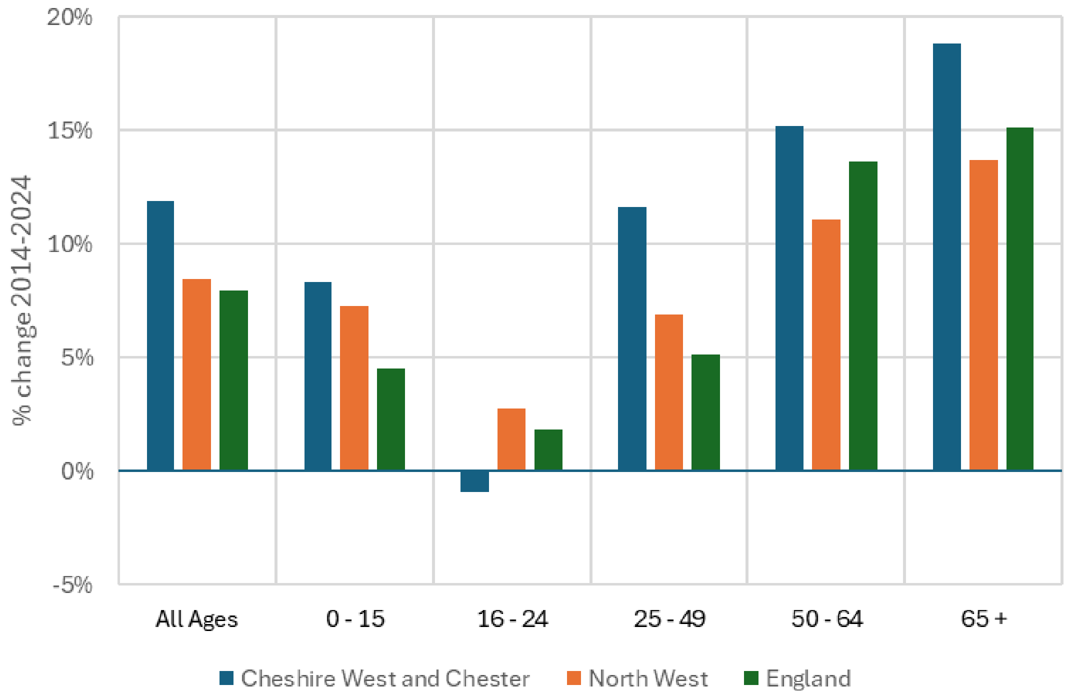
Source: ONS mid-year population estimates

Age structure changes

6.22 The figure below shows how the age structure of the population has changed in the period from 2014 to 2024. There have been some changes in the age structure, including above-average increases in the share of the population aged 25, 50, and 65 and older.

6.23 There have also been slightly above-average increases in the population of children compared to nationally. However, the population aged 16-24 has decreased slightly.

Figure 6.5 Population age structure (people) (2014 and 2024) – Cheshire West & Chester



Source: ONS

6.24 Again, the information above is summarised into the three broad age bands to ease comparison. This shows population increases across all age bands, with the largest increase in the working-age population: 21,869, accounting for 55% of total population growth.

Table 6.4 Change in population by broad age group (2014-24) – Cheshire West & Chester

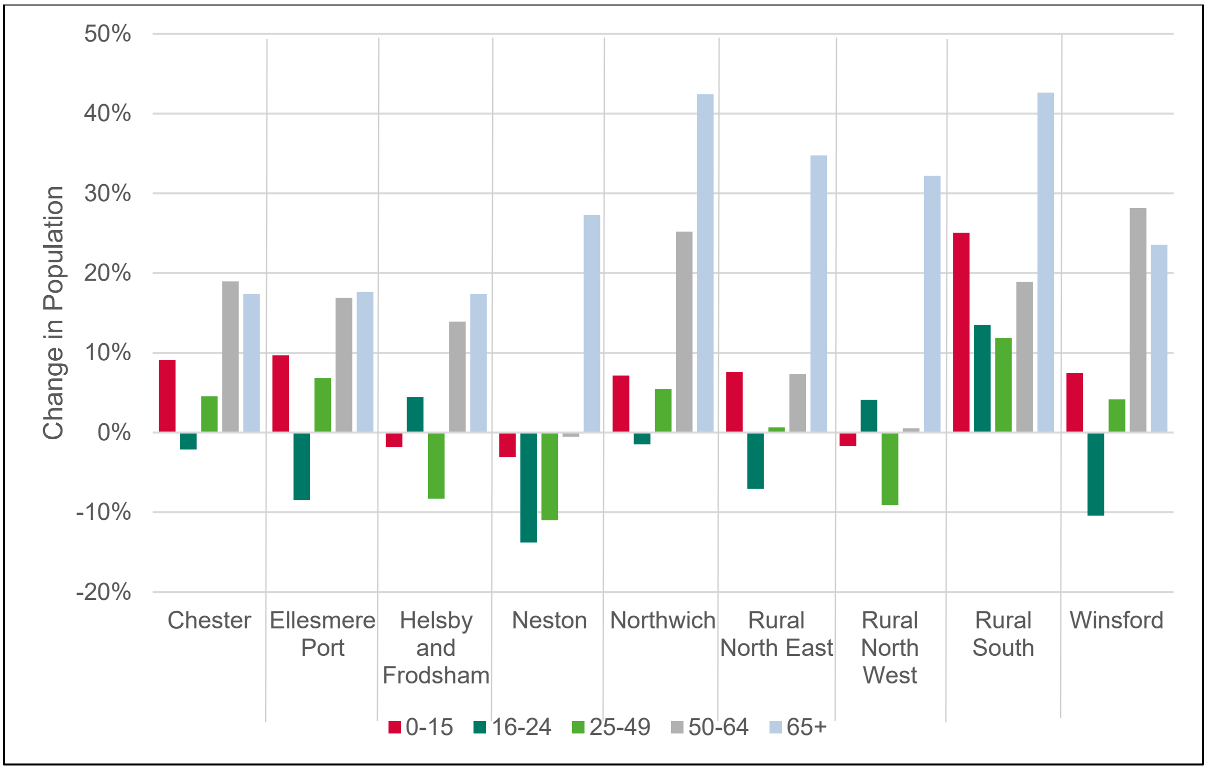
	2014	2024	Change	% change
Under 16	58,268	63,122	4,854	8.3%
16-64	206,378	228,247	21,869	10.6%
65+	67,564	80,283	12,719	18.8%
TOTAL	332,210	371,652	39,442	11.9%

Source: ONS

6.25 However, the highest proportionate increase is amongst those aged 65 and over – this age group increased by 12,719 people, accounting for an 18.8% increase overall.

6.26 There has been growth in the 65+ population in all sub-areas. The most significant growth was in Rural South (43%), Northwich (42%), and other rural sub-areas. The 50-64 population has also increased in all subareas.

Figure 6.6 Change in Population Age Structure by Subarea (2011-2023)



Source: ONS

6.27 There's been a decrease in the population aged 25-49 in Helsby & Frodsham, Neston and Rural North West. There has also been a decrease in the 16-24 population in Ellesmere Port, Neston, Rural North East and Winsford, and a minimal decrease in Chester.

6.28 The Rural South sub-area has seen a 25% increase in the proportion of children, compared to less than 10% growth or a decline in other sub-areas.

Components of Population Change

6.29 The table below considers the drivers of population change from 2011 to 2024. The main components of change are natural change (births minus deaths) and net migration (internal/domestic and international).

6.30 There is also an Unattributable Population Change (UPC), which is a correction made by ONS upon publication of Census data if the population has been under- or over-estimated (this is only calculated for the 2011-21 period).

6.31 There are also ‘other changes’, which are variable (sometimes positive and sometimes negative but generally small in size) – these changes are often related to armed forces personnel, prisons or boarding school pupils.

6.32 The data shows a natural change to be dropping over time generally, and since 2018, there have been more deaths than births across the Council area.

6.33 Migration is variable (but generally increasing), and always positive for internal (domestic) migration. International net migration figures are typically lower (and occasionally negative); however, the last three years for which data are available show a notably higher level of international migration than had been seen in the past – a trend consistent with that seen nationally.

6.34 More recent data at a national level (since 2024) has shown a decline in estimated net international migration; the Council should monitor this as and when new local data is made available (likely in Summer 2026).

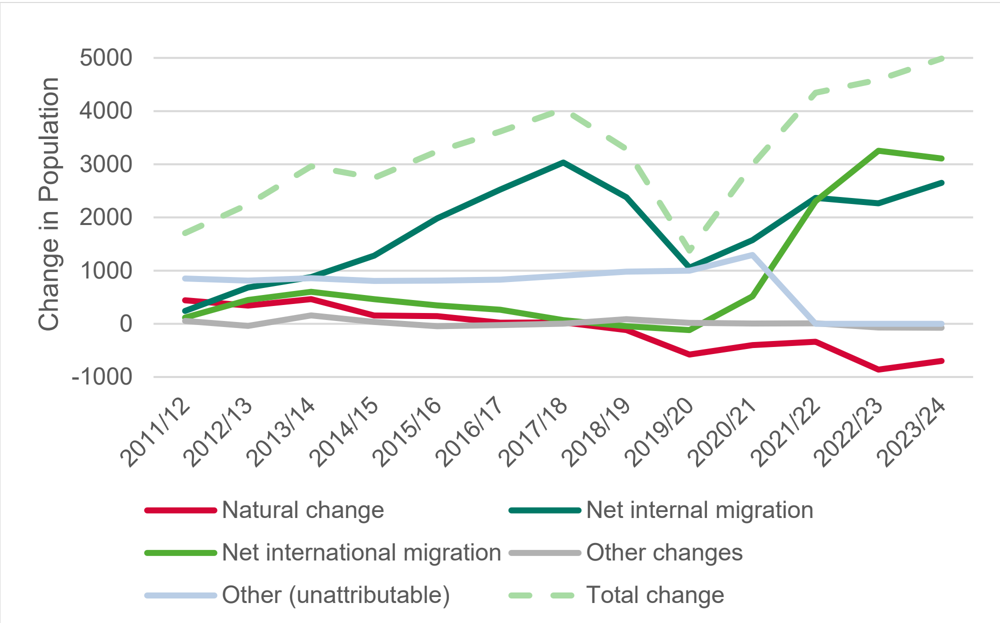
Table 6.5 Components of population change, mid-2011 to mid-2024 – Cheshire West & Chester

	Natural change	Net internal migration	Net intern-ational migration	Other changes	Other (unattri-butable)	Total change
2011/12	443	242	116	54	850	1,705
2012/13	343	684	447	-40	811	2,245
2013/14	464	878	603	158	858	2,961
2014/15	155	1,283	464	35	807	2,744
2015/16	143	1,984	347	-44	813	3,243
2016/17	21	2,523	265	-24	831	3,616
2017/18	26	3,033	68	2	907	4,036
2018/19	-116	2,381	-45	86	980	3,286
2019/20	-578	1,055	-118	18	999	1,376
2020/21	-401	1,575	518	6	1,294	2,992
2021/22	-336	2,368	2,306	8	0	4,346
2022/23	-861	2,265	3,254	-69	0	4,589
2023/24	-698	2,652	3,107	-74	0	4,987

Source: ONS

6.35 Figure 6.9 shows the above analysis as a graph.

Figure 6.7 Change in Population Age Structure by Subarea (2011-2023)



Source: ONS

6.36 The analysis also shows (for the 2011-21 period a notable positive level of UPC (totalling around 9,200 people over the 10 years), which suggests that when the 2021 Census was published, ONS had previously under-estimated population change. Overall, the data show a continuing trend of population growth throughout the period studied.

Demographics – Summary

6.37 As of the most recent published data from mid-2024, the population of Cheshire West & Chester is approximately 371,652.

6.38 This represents an increase of approximately 35,215 residents or 10.5% since 2014, which is a faster growth rate than regionally (8.4%) and Nationally (7.8%).

6.39 Cheshire West & Chester has an older population profile than nationally, with a lower proportion of working-age adults and children.

6.40 The highest total increase was in the working age population, although the highest proportionate increase is amongst those aged 65 and over.

6.41 Internal migration has been a consistent source of population growth, although international migration has been notably higher over the last three years.

6.42 The analysis also suggests that when the 2021 Census was published, ONS had previously under-estimated population change.

7. Overall Housing Need

Introduction

7.1 National government policies and guidance require that housing needs be assessed as part of the plan-making process. As set out in Planning Practice Guidance (PPG):

"Housing need is an unconstrained assessment of the minimum number of homes needed in an area. Assessing housing need is the first step in determining how many homes need to be planned for. It should be undertaken separately from assessing land availability, establishing a housing requirement figure and preparing policies to address this."[10]

7.2 Housing need is thus expected to be assessed upfront as part of the plan-making process, leaving aside constraints. The plan-making process (and testing of development options within it) then assesses whether the housing (and other development) needs identified can be met sustainably and whether any unmet needs need to be accommodated, to define the housing requirement.

7.3 The emphasis within the NPPF is on plans meeting objectively assessed housing needs, unless national policies provide that protect areas or assets of particular importance, provide a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development; or the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits (NPPF Para 11b).

December 2024 NPPF

7.4 The Government, through revisions to the NPPF in December 2024, has revised the standard method. Its ambitions in doing so are to

[10] PPG Para ID: 2a-001-20241212

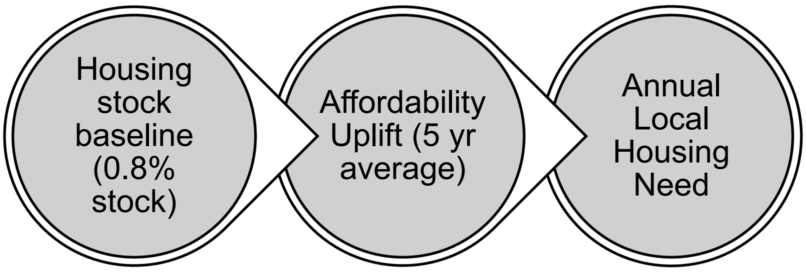
increase housing delivery, delivering 1.5 million homes across England over the next 5 years, with growth in all areas of the country.

7.5 The PPG sets out the revised standard method in the section on *Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessments.*[11] Para 2a-006 therein sets out the methodology.

7.6 The figure below provides an overview of the revised standard method. Step 1 establishes a baseline of 0.8% of the area's existing housing stock, to which an affordability adjustment is applied in Step 2.

7.7 The affordability adjustment is calculated by taking the average affordability ratio figure over the five most recent years for which data is available, and applying a 0.95% increase for each 1% by which the average affordability ratio is above 5.

Figure 7.1 Overview of Revised Standard Method



7.8 The 0.8% pa stock baseline removes the use of demographic projections (which can be volatile). It provides a baseline level of provision across all areas, which is not dissimilar to the 0.89% annual increase in housing stock nationally over the last 10 years.

[11] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments

7.9 The benchmark affordability ratio position of 5 is consistent with the ONS's use of this level as a broad indicator of affordability. With affordability uplifts applied to the stock baseline, the revised standard method supports the provision of around 370,000 homes nationally, which the Government consider should be targeted to improve housing affordability over time.

7.10 Previously, the NPPF provided scope to deviate from the standard method in assessing housing need in exceptional circumstances, enabling a 'justified alternative approach' to be advanced which reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals.

7.11 The revisions to the NPPF in December 2024 have removed the scope to use an alternative – they require housing need to be assessed using the (revised) standard method.

Cheshire West and Chester Calculation

7.12 It is a relatively straightforward exercise to calculate the local housing need using the standard method for Cheshire West and Chester.

Step 1: Housing Stock Baseline

7.13 The stock baseline is expected to be drawn from the MHCLG Live Table 125. The PPG in Para 2a-005 directs that 'the most recent data published at the time should be used.' The latest data on the housing stock position is for 2024. The stock baseline is calculated as 0.8% of existing stock.

Step 2: Affordability Adjustment

7.14 The affordability adjustment is then to be applied, based on the average median (workplace-based) house price to income ratio over the last 5 years, which at the current time is 7.35 for 2019-24. The following formula is then used to calculate the affordability uplift:

$$Adjustment\ factor = \left(\frac{five\ year\ average\ affordability\ ratio - 5}{5}\right) x\ 0.95 + 1$$

7.15 The final stage is to then multiply the housing stock baseline by the affordability adjustment factor.

7.16 The results of the revised standard method calculation using the latest published affordability and housing stock data for Cheshire West and Chester are shown in the table below. This shows a need for 1,928 dpa, which should be applied across the whole plan period.

Table 7.1 CWAC Local Housing Need

	Cheshire West and Chester
Housing Stock, 2024	166,601
0.8% Stock Baseline	1,333
Average Median Affordability Ratio, 2020-24	7.35
Affordability Uplift	145%
Local Housing Need (dpa)	1,928

Source: Iceni analysis

7.17 The standard method figures change when new affordability and stock data are released (typically annually in the Spring), and the Council may need to keep any changes until the point of submission of the Local Plan, at which point the figures are 'fixed' for a period of two years.

Population and Household Projections

7.18 A demographic model has been developed to examine the potential implications of delivering 1,928 dwellings per annum over the 2025-45 period. The modelling considers the levels of migration likely to be needed to fill homes and the possibility of seeing higher levels of household formation in younger age groups (where there is evidence of a historical constraint in formation).

7.19 This analysis is similar to that carried out as part of the Council's Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA) in March 2025. Still, it is updated for key additional data – most notably a new set of subnational population projections (SNPP) from ONS.

7.20 Due to the new data, some of the outputs are somewhat different to those in the EDNA, and a comparison of the two studies can be found at the end of this section.

7.21 The modelling essentially has two components, firstly a population projection and then converting this into household change estimates by applying data about the communal (institutional) population and household representative rates (HRRs) – essentially the changes of someone in a particular age group also being considered as the head of household. For a base population projection, key assumptions in the modelling are:

- Taking the 2022-based subnational population projections (SNPP) as a starting point – this includes data on birth and death rates as well as migration;

- Updating this projection to take account of mid-year population data to 2024 (looking at more recent data about births, deaths and migration);

- Rolling this amended projection on for a further year (to get to an estimate for 2025).

7.22 For household projections data, the communal population is taken from the 2021 Census. This is consistent with ONS projections. It is assumed that actual numbers are held constant up to ages under 75, with the proportion of the population being used for 75+ age groups.

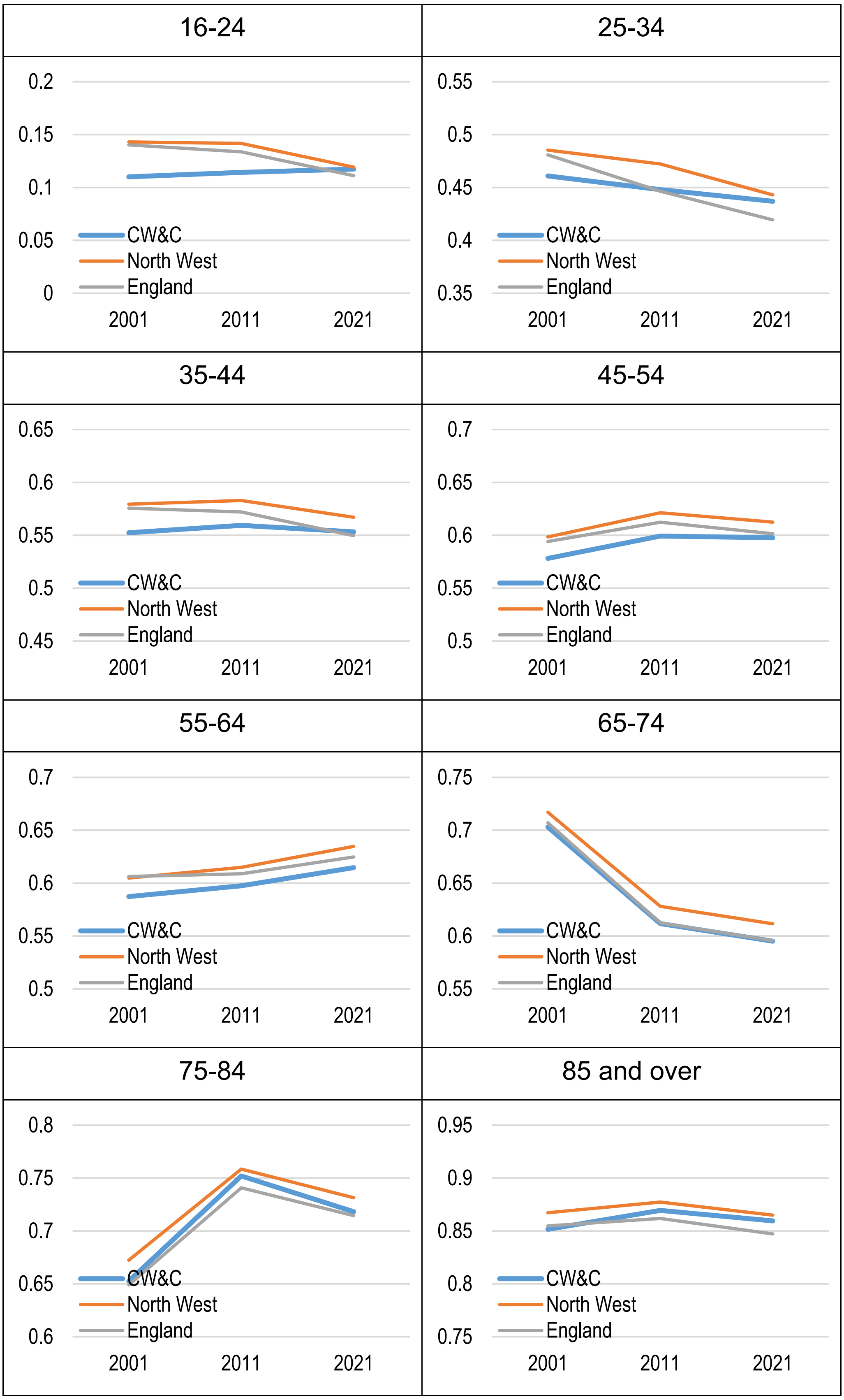
7.23 For household representative rates (HRRs), the figures are calculated at the time of the Census, although consideration has also been given to data in the last three Census points (2001, 2011 and 2021). The figure below shows a summary analysis of the changes in HRRs by age.

7.24 Arguably, the key groups to look at are younger age groups where there may have been a degree of suppression in household formation (due to housing supply and affordability), and this does appear to be the case in Cheshire West & Chester in the 25-34 age group; albeit the reduction has been at a lesser rate than seen regionally or nationally.

7.25 For some older age groups, there also appears to be a trend of increasing or decreasing HRRs – particularly the 65-74 and 75-84 age groups. For these age groups, it is considered that the ‘trends’ are more likely to be due to cohort effects.

7.26 For the base projection (which is trend-based), it has been assumed that HRRs remain at the levels shown in the 2021 Census, but when considering higher delivery in line with the Standard Method, consideration is given to the possibility of some increases in the rates for younger age groups. This is discussed below.

Figure 7.2 Change in household representative rates by age 2001-21 – Cheshire West & Chester



Source: ONS

Standard Method

7.27 The analysis below looks at how the population and household structures might change if housing delivery were to be in line with the Standard Method (1,928 dwellings per annum).

7.28 The modelling flexes migration to and from the Council area such that there is sufficient population for this level of additional homes to be filled each year.

7.29 Within the modelling, migration assumptions have been changed so that across the area the increase in households matches the housing need.

7.30 It is assumed that around 3% of new stock will be vacant at any time (to allow for movement within the stock). This means that for 1,928 dpa, it is assumed there would be household growth of approximately 1,872 per annum.

7.31 Adjustments are made to both in- and out-migration (e.g. if in-migration is increased by 1%, then out-migration is reduced by 1%).

7.32 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was revised in December 2024, alongside the new Standard Method, and provides some indication of why the Government sees a need to increase housing delivery[12]. Paragraph 006 (Reference ID: 2a-006-20241212) states:

'Why is an affordability adjustment applied?

An affordability adjustment is applied as housing stock on its own is insufficient as an indicator of future housing need because:

- *housing stock represents existing patterns of housing and means that all areas contribute to meeting housing needs. The*

[12] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments

affordability adjustment directs more homes to where they are most needed

- *people may want to live in an area in which they do not reside currently, for example to be near to work, but be unable to find appropriate accommodation that they can afford.*

The affordability adjustment is applied in order to ensure that the standard method for assessing local housing need responds to price signals and is consistent with the policy objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes. The specific adjustment in this guidance is set at a level to ensure that minimum annual housing need starts to address the affordability of homes.'

7.33 The previous PPG also stated that an affordability uplift is required because *'household formation is constrained to the supply of available properties – new households cannot form if there is nowhere for them to live',* and it is arguably interesting that this has now been removed.

7.34 Essentially, the Government considers that by providing more homes, there is the opportunity for increased migration to an area to fill the homes, whilst equally, one of the Government's core objectives in planning for the delivery of 370,000 homes a year nationally is to improve affordability. Increased housing provision should provide the opportunity for additional household formation.

7.35 For the Standard Method projection, it has been modelled that additional housing supply supports improved affordability, with HRRs for the 25-34 age group returning to the levels seen in 2001 (and shown on the figure above).

7.36 In reality, as this age group has seen lower levels of 'suppression' than seen regionally or nationally, this additional step only has a minor impact on the outputs (this is discussed when comparing to work in the EDNA, where HRRs were held constant across all age groups.

7.37 In developing this projection, the population is projected to increase by 54,300 people over the 2025-45 period, with this increase being particularly strong in the 16-64 age group.

7.38 However, the highest proportionate change is projected in the 65 and over age group (47% of the growth is projected to be in age groups 65 and over, with this group increasing by 31%).

7.39 There is also projected to be a decline in the number of children. The two tables below show projected changes by age -the first table shows broad age bands and the second is in 5-year bands.

Table 7.2 Projected population change 2025 to 2045 by broad age bands – Cheshire West & Chester.

	2025	2045	Change in population	% change
Under 16	62,937	61,192	-1,745	-2.8%
16-64	230,126	260,919	30,793	13.4%
65 and over	81,844	107,132	25,288	30.9%
Total	374,908	429,243	54,335	14.5%

Source: Iceni analysis

Table 7.3 Projected population change 2025 to 2045 by 5-year age bands – Cheshire West & Chester

	2025	2045	Change in population	% change
0-4	17,249	18,193	943	5.5%
5-9	19,961	19,136	-825	-4.1%
10-14	21,425	19,816	-1,608	-7.5%
15-19	20,708	19,873	-836	-4.0%
20-24	19,543	20,285	741	3.8%
25-29	22,062	23,762	1,701	7.7%
30-34	24,705	26,796	2,091	8.5%
35-39	24,967	28,954	3,987	16.0%
40-44	23,969	29,234	5,265	22.0%
45-49	21,641	30,215	8,574	39.6%
50-54	24,390	30,784	6,393	26.2%
55-59	26,386	28,976	2,590	9.8%
60-64	26,056	26,087	31	0.1%
65-69	21,654	22,449	796	3.7%
70-74	18,650	22,976	4,326	23.2%
75-79	18,348	22,554	4,206	22.9%
80-84	12,143	19,128	6,985	57.5%
85 & over	11,050	20,026	8,976	81.2%
Total	374,908	429,243	54,335	14.5%

Source: Iceni analysis

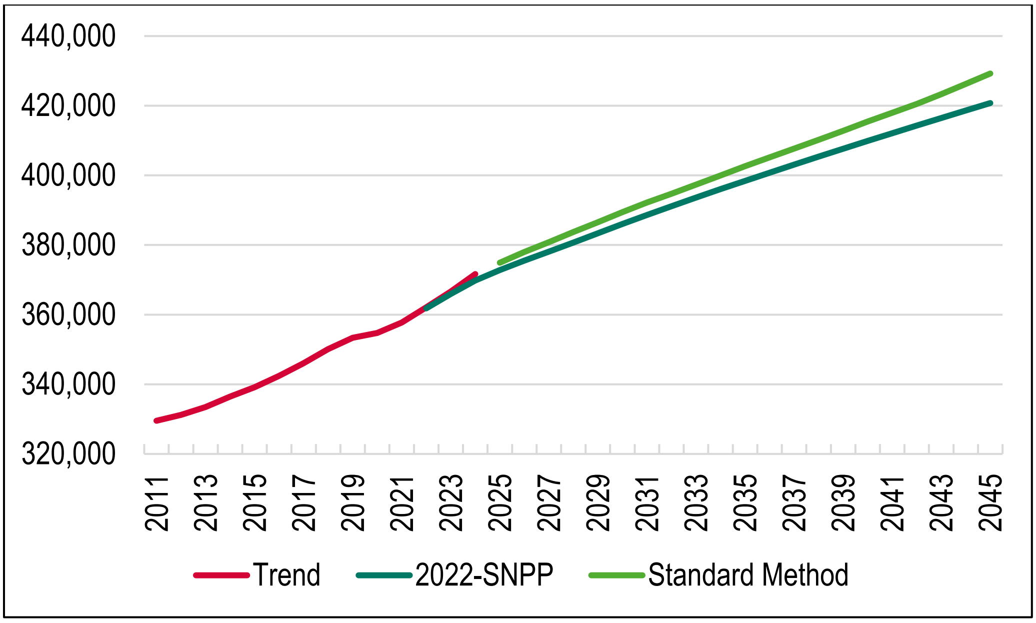
7.40 Below are a series of charts showing past trends and projected population growth and key components of change for each of the projections linking to the Standard Method.

7.41 For comparison, data have also been provided from the 2022-based SNPP. The first figure examines overall population growth before considering natural change and net migration.

7.42 The analysis suggests the population of Cheshire West & Chester could rise to 429,200 by 2045 (up from 374,900 in 2025 (estimated)), a 14.5% increase, or 0.7% per annum.

7.43 For comparison, between 2014 and 2024, the population increased by an average of around 1.0% per annum, and so the Standard Method would be projected to provide a slightly lower level of population growth than recent past trends. The data, however, suggests broad alignment with the Standard Method and the latest ONS projections.

Figure 7.3 Past trends and projected population – Cheshire West & Chester

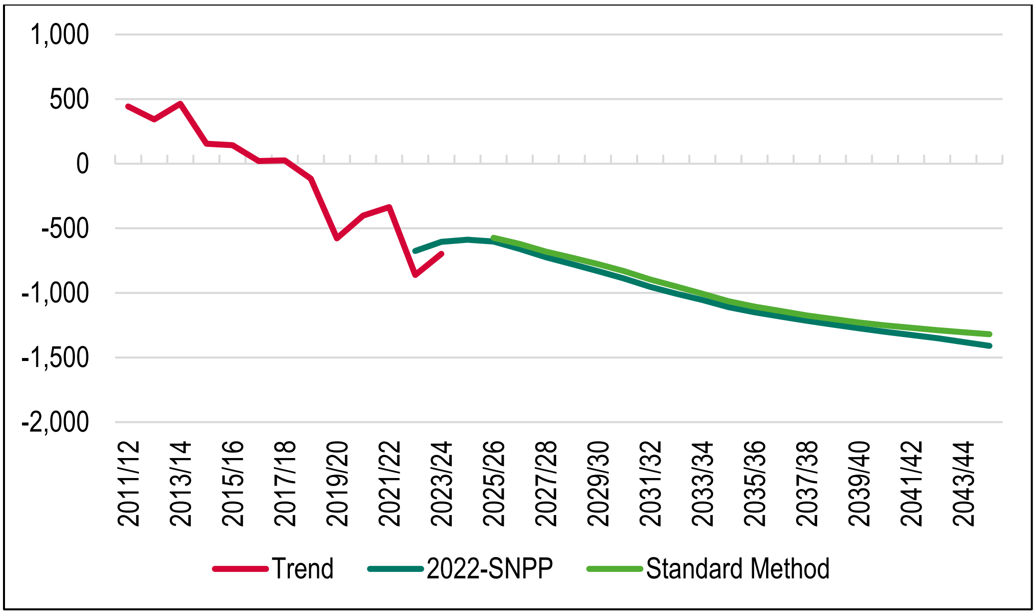


Source: ONS and Iceni analysis

7.44 The main reason for population growth would be due to net in-migration, as the decline in natural change (births minus deaths) is projected to continue moving forward to 2045.

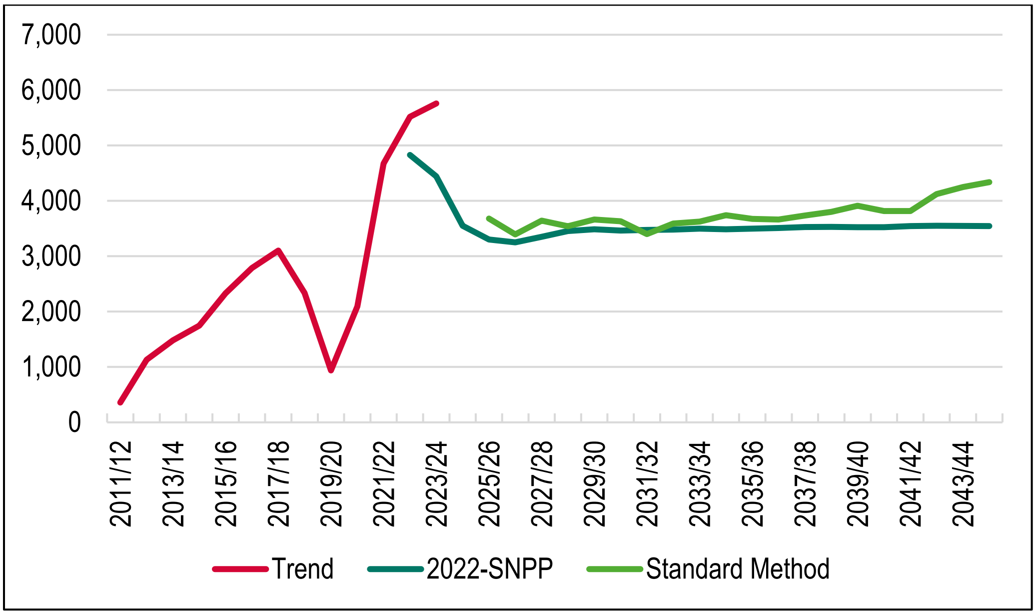
7.45 The figures below show projected natural change and net migration under the scenarios. Focussing on net migration, the analysis suggests that, with delivery linked to the Standard Method, net migration would generally be higher than typical past trends – although below the levels seen in each of the past three years for which data exist (2021-24).

Figure 7.4 Past trends and projected natural change (births minus deaths) – Cheshire West & Chester



Source: ONS and Iceni analysis

Figure 7.5 Past trends and projected net migration – Cheshire West & Chester



Source: ONS and Iceni analysis

Relationship Between Housing and Economic Growth

7.46 The analysis to follow considers the relationship between housing and economic growth, seeking to understand what level of jobs might be supported by changes to the local labour supply (which will be influenced by population change). To assess estimates of the job growth to be supported, a series of stages is undertaken. These can be summarised as:

- Estimate changes to the economically active population (this provides an estimate of the change in labour supply);
- Overlay information about commuting patterns, double jobbing (i.e. the fact that some people have more than one job) and potential changes to unemployment; and
- Bringing together this information will provide an estimate of the potential job growth supported by the population projections.

Growth in Resident Labour Supply

7.47 The approach taken in this report is to derive a series of age and sex specific economic activity rates and use these to estimate how many people in the population will be economically active as projections develop.

7.48 This is a fairly typical approach, with data being drawn in this instance from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) – July 2018 (Fiscal Sustainability Report) – this data has then been rebased to information in the 2021 Census (on age, sex and economic activity).

7.49 The table below shows the assumptions made for the Council area. The analysis shows that the main changes to economic activity rates are projected to be in the 60-69 age groups – this will, to a considerable degree, link to changes to pensionable age, as well as general trends in the number of older people working for longer (which in itself is linked to general reductions in pension provision).

Table 7.4 Projected changes to economic activity rates (2025 and 2045) – Cheshire West & Chester.

	Males			Females		
	2025	2045	Change	2025	2045	Change
16-19	38.2%	38.6%	0.3%	38.5%	38.8%	0.3%
20-24	76.7%	76.9%	0.1%	71.6%	71.7%	0.1%
25-29	89.5%	89.4%	0.0%	83.9%	83.9%	0.0%
30-34	90.3%	90.3%	0.0%	83.1%	83.1%	0.0%
35-39	91.2%	91.0%	-0.2%	83.4%	83.8%	0.4%
40-44	89.9%	89.3%	-0.6%	84.8%	86.7%	1.9%
45-49	90.5%	89.2%	-1.3%	84.2%	87.3%	3.1%
50-54	87.4%	86.8%	-0.6%	78.6%	83.2%	4.5%
55-59	79.3%	78.7%	-0.6%	68.7%	72.1%	3.4%
60-64	65.1%	68.6%	3.5%	53.3%	58.2%	4.9%
65-69	30.5%	42.8%	12.3%	24.1%	36.6%	12.4%
70-74	12.3%	15.9%	3.5%	7.9%	14.0%	6.1%
75-89	5.2%	5.6%	0.4%	3.0%	5.6%	2.6%

Source: Based on OBR and Census (2021) data

7.50 In addition, a sensitivity has been developed where the EARs are held constant at 2021 levels. It is considered that the sensitivity is reasonable, given that data (including Census data) have shown that activity rates have not grown as previously forecast.

7.51 Working through an analysis of age and sex specific economic activity rates, it is possible to estimate the overall change in the number of economically active people in the area – this is set out in the table below and shows the increase in the economically active population is projected to be up to 27,700 (a 15% increase).

Table 7.5 Estimated change to the economically active population (2025-45) – Cheshire West & Chester

	Econom-ically active (2025)	Econom-ically active (2045)	Total change in econom-ically active	% change
OBR EAR	187,263	222,539	35,276	18.8%
EAR no change	185,067	212,717	27,650	14.9%

Source: Iceni Analysis

<u>Linking Changes in Resident Labour Supply to Job Growth</u>

7.52 The analysis above has set out potential scenarios for the change in the number of economically active people. However, it is arguably more useful to convert this information into an estimate of the number of jobs this would support. The number of jobs and resident workers required to support these jobs will differ depending on three main factors:

- Commuting patterns – where an area sees more people out-commute for work than in-commute, it may be the case that a higher level of increase in the economically active population would be required to provide a sufficient workforce for a given number of jobs (and vice versa, where there is net in-commuting);

- Double jobbing – some people hold down more than one job, and therefore the number of workers required will be slightly lower than the number of jobs; and

- Unemployment – if unemployment were to fall, then the growth in the economically active population would not need to be as large as the growth in jobs (and vice versa).

Commuting Patterns

7.53 The table below shows summary data about commuting to and from Cheshire West and Cheshire from the 2011 and 2021 Censuses. Data from both sources is used as the 2011 data is quite old, but the COVID-19 pandemic could influence the 2021 data.

7.54 Overall, from both sources, the data shows a broad balance in commuting with the number of people resident in the area who are working being similar to the number who work in the area.

7.55 These numbers are shown as the commuting ratio in the final row of the table. They are calculated as the number of people living in an area (and working) divided by the number of people working in the area (regardless of where they live). In 2011, out-commuting was at a modest level, and it had reversed by 2021.

7.56 When comparing the two sources, it is worth reflecting on a significant increase in the number of home workers (or those of no fixed workplace) in 2021 compared with 2011.

7.57 In 2011, a total of 27,900 people were recorded as home workers or with no fixed workplace; in 2021, this figure had nearly tripled (to 73,000). As the country has moved past the pandemic, this figure may have begun to decline slightly, with implications for commuting dynamics.

Table 7.6 Commuting Patterns – Cheshire West & Chester

	2011	2021
Live and Work in the Borough	80,360	59,420
Home Workers or No Fixed Workplace	27,878	72,953
In Commute	51,004	37,364
Out Commute	52,799	36,704
Total Working in LA	159,242	169,737
Total Living in LA and Working Anywhere	161,037	169,077
Commuting Ratio	1.011	0.996

Source: Census 2011, 2021

7.58 Given the commuting ratios shown above, the assumption used in modelling is for commuting and new jobs to be on a 1:1 ratio (i.e. the increase in the number of people working in the area is equal to the number of people living in the area who are working).

Double Jobbing

7.59 The analysis also considers that a number of people may have more than one job (double jobbing). This can be calculated as the number of people working in the local authority divided by the number of jobs.

7.60 Data from the Annual Population Survey (available on the NOMIS website) for the past 5 years (for which data exists) suggests that, across Cheshire West & Chester, typically about 3.2% of workers have a second job.

7.61 It has therefore been assumed that around 3.2% of people will have more than one job moving forward – this means the number of jobs supported by the workforce will be around 3.2% higher than workforce growth. In the analysis, it has been assumed that the level of double jobbing will remain constant over time.

Unemployment

7.62 The last analysis, when looking at the link between jobs and resident labour supply, is a consideration of unemployment. Essentially, this is about whether there is any latent labour force that could return to employment to take up new jobs.

7.63 The latest model-based unemployment data from the Annual Population Survey (for April 2024-March 2025) puts unemployment at around 2.3%, which is a level below the national average of 4.0%.

7.64 On the basis of this data, it is considered that there is unlikely to be any significant latent labour supply. So no further adjustment is made to the data to take account of unemployment.

Jobs Supported by Growth in the Resident Labour Force

7.65 The table below shows how many additional jobs might be supported by population growth under the different economic activity scenarios. It is estimated that between 28,600 and 36,400 additional jobs could be supported, depending on the assumptions made about economic activity, all figures for the 2025-45 period.

Table 7.7 Jobs supported by demographic projections (2025-45) – Cheshire West and Chester

	Total change in the economically active	Allowance for double jobbing	Allowance for net commuting (= jobs supported)
OBR EAR	35,276	36,442	36,442
EAR no change	27,650	28,564	28,564

Source: Iceni analysis

7.66 This evidence is updated from the Economic Development Needs Assessment. Although the difference in Housing Need (1,914 dpa then versus 1,928 dpa now) is relatively small, the labour supply calculations differ notably (from 43,558 and 34,427 respectively).

7.67 This change is due to the changing age structure brought about by the publication of the 2022-based SNPP. However, despite the reduction, the labour supply is still significantly above the Experian and Cambridge Econometrics labour demand scenarios, which projected a growth of 7,500 and 13,600 jobs respectively.

7.68 Furthermore, neither the final industrial nor the office need is influenced by the labour supply scenarios.

Comparison with Economic Development Needs Assessment

7.69 The Council's EDNA published in March 2025 contained a very similar analysis to that above in looking at how population and labour supply might change when planning for the levels of housing growth suggested by the Standard Method.

7.70 Interestingly, some of the outputs from the analysis are quite different in terms of the population growth and age structure changes projected in each of these studies, and this is discussed below.

7.71 In the EDNA projections, which were developed for the 2024-44 period (not 2025-45 in this report), the assumed Standard Method was 1,914 dwellings per annum compared with 1,928 in this report. It is not considered that either of these changes are significant.

7.72 The table below shows projected population growth over a 20-year period in the two studies based on broadly the same housing delivery assumption.

7.73 As shown, this study projects a much lower level of population growth, with the main difference being in the number of children (although all three broad age groups show lower growth than previously projected).

Table 7.8 Projected population change in 2025 EDNA and this study (figures based on a 20-year projection period)

	2025 EDNA	This study	Difference
Under 16	15,837	-1,745	-17,582
16-64	39,514	30,793	-8,721
65 and over	27,732	25,288	-2,444
Total	83,082	54,335	-28,747

Source: Iceni analysis (EDNA data from Table A5.5)

7.74 In investigating the differences, it is considered the main reason is due to a very different baseline projection in the 2022-SNPP when compared to the 2018-SNPP (as used in the EDNA).

7.75 Although the EDNA sought to update the 2018-SNPP (including around birth and death rates), it is clear that changes made did not go nearly as far as ONS has now made in their latest projections.

7.76 In addition, the EDNA sought to adjust migration profiles based on new data, but the 2022-SNPP (which uses a complex matrix of moves) has again projected something quite different to that which had been estimated.

7.77 Additionally, the EDNA drew on data to 2023, whereas this study has data to 2024. It is not thought that this one year would have a substantial impact on the figures, but it is noteworthy that the 2023-24 period did show a very high level of net migration (and relatively low natural change).

7.78 Just by way of comparison, the two tables below show data from the SNPP as used at the time of the EDNA and this study. This looks at projected population change over the relevant 20-year period used.

7.79 This demonstrates the very different outlook in 2018 compared with 2022 – the 2018-based figures projecting much lower population change but a positive growth in those aged under 16 (negative in 2022-based, despite overall projected growth more than doubling).

7.80 Overall, whilst the 2025 EDNA sought to use the most up-to-date information available at the time, it is clear that the demographic shifts seen between the two ONS projections did make it very difficult to predict what a new set of projections might look like (when estimating at the time of the EDNA).

7.81 Overall, the analysis in this study, which uses more up-to-date projections and trends, should be preferred.

Table 7.9 Projected population change 2024 to 2044 by broad age bands – Cheshire West & Chester – 2018-SNPP

	2024	2044	Change in population	% change
Under 16	61,851	61,892	41	0.1%
16-64	208,654	207,137	-1,516	-0.7%
65 and over	80,024	102,108	22,084	27.6%
Total	350,529	371,137	20,608	5.9%

Source: ONS

Table 7.10 Projected population change 2025 to 2045 by broad age bands – Cheshire West & Chester – 2022-SNPP

	2025	2045	Change in population	% change
Under 16	61,937	59,523	-2,414	-3.9%
16-64	228,619	252,271	23,652	10.3%
65 and over	82,227	108,964	26,737	32.5%
Total	372,783	420,758	47,975	12.9%

Source: ONS

7.82 A further change made in this report when compared to the EDNA is the inclusion of an assumption that there might be some improvement of the household formation rates of those aged 25-34 – the EDNA held values constant at 2021 levels. This assumption will always see a lower level of projected population growth for a given number of households.

7.83 For Cheshire West and Chester, however, this assumption only has a minor impact on the outputs. Based on the Standard Method, the number of households would be projected to increase by 1,872 per annum. If the assumption about improving household formation in the 25-34 age group were removed, then this figure drops very slightly to 1,811 households per annum.

7.84 Therefore, whilst this additional assumption will have driven a lower level of population growth, the scale of the impact of this assumption is fairly minor.

7.85 As noted, the main reason for differences between the EDNA and this study looks to be related to the use of different ONS projections as a baseline starting position.

7.86 Finally, it is worth discussing the differences in the labour supply outputs from the two studies. In the EDNA, it was projected that the economically active population might increase by 42,200 people, and this would support 43,600 additional jobs. This was based on OBR economic activity rate changes. In this study, the figures are lower (35,300 growth in economically active and 36,400 jobs supported).

7.87 Regardless of this difference, it should be noted that the EDNA (Table 7.4) includes a supply-led calculation, which suggests a job creation of 19,900, although it could be higher if different displacement assumptions are made.

7.88 Under the scenarios set out above, the labour supply using the standard method would be higher regardless of which study or scenario is used.

Housing Need – Summary

7.89 The housing needs assessment studied the overall housing need set against the NPPF and the framework of PPG, specifically the Standard Method for assessing housing need.

7.90 This shows a need for 1,928 dwellings per annum. This is based on 0.8% of the current stock of 166,601 (1,333) and an affordability uplift of 45%.

7.91 A bespoke population and household projection has been developed to look at the implications of delivering 1,928 dpa from 2025 to 2045. This projects that the population might increase by 54,300 people over the 20 years (a 14.5% increase). This includes continued population ageing.

7.92 It was further estimated that population growth might be able to support somewhere in the region of 28,600 and 36,400 additional jobs.

8. Affordable Housing Need

Introduction

8.1 This section provides an assessment of the need for affordable housing in Cheshire West & Chester. The analysis follows the methodology set out in Planning Practice Guidance (Sections 2a-018 to 2a-024). It examines the need from households unable to buy or rent housing, as well as from households able to afford to rent privately but not buy.

Affordable Housing Sector Dynamics

8.2 The 2021 Census indicated that 15% of households in Cheshire West & Chester lived in social or affordable rented homes, with the sector accommodating around 22,700 households.

8.3 Data from the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) for 2024 indicates that the Council and Registered Providers (RPs) owned 27,200 properties in the Council area, of which 78% were for general needs rent; 13% supported housing or housing for older people; and 9% low-cost home-ownership homes (such as shared ownership, discount market sales and rent to buy properties).

8.4 The majority of general needs homes are let out at social rents (83% of all homes) and the rest at affordable rents.

Table 8.1 Stock Owned or Managed by Local Authority and Registered Providers – Cheshire West & Chester

	LA	RP	Total	% of stock
General needs rented	5,319	15,811	21,130	77.5%
Supported/older persons housing	18	3,653	3,671	13.5%
Low-cost home ownership	20	2,426	2,446	9.0%
Total	5,357	21,890	27,247	100.0%

Source: Regulator of Social Housing Geographical Look-Up Tool 2024

8.5 According to Local Authority Housing Statistics as at March 2025, there were 5,931 households on the Council's Housing Register. Of these, the majority required a one-bedroom home. Further analysis on the need for affordable housing of different sizes is set out in the following chapter of this report.

Table 8.2 Housing Register by Size Requirements – Cheshire West & Chester (March 2025)

1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	More than 3 bedrooms	Total
3,220	1,591	833	287	5,931
54.3%	26.8%	14.0%	4.8%	100.0%

Source: Local Authority Housing Statistics, 2025

8.6 In addition, MHCLG data for March 2025 shows that 74 households were accommodated in temporary accommodation (some 24% (18 households) of these had children).

Overview of Method

8.7 In summary, the methodology looks at a series of stages as set out below:

- Current affordable housing need (annualised so as to meet the current need over a period of time);
- Projected newly forming households in need;
- Existing households falling into need; and

- Supply of affordable housing from existing stock

8.8 The first three bullet points above are added together to identify a gross need, from which the supply is subtracted to identify a net annual need for additional affordable housing. Examples of different affordable housing products are outlined in the box below.

Affordable Housing Definitions

Social Rented Homes – are homes owned by local authorities or private registered providers for which rents are determined by the national rent regime (through which a formula rent is determined by the relative value and size of a property and relative local income levels). They are low-cost rented homes.

Affordable Rented Homes are let by local authorities or private registered providers to households who are eligible for social housing. Affordable rents are set at no more than 80% of the local market rent (including service charges).

Rent-to-Buy – where homes are offered, typically by housing associations, to working households at an intermediate rent which does not exceed 80% of the local market rent (including service charges) for a fixed period, after which the household has the chance to buy the home.

Shared Ownership – a form of low-cost market housing where residents own a share of their home, on which they typically pay a mortgage; with a registered provider owning the remainder, on which they pay a subsidised rent.

Discounted Market Sale – a home which is sold at a discount of at least 20% below local market value to eligible households, with provisions in place to ensure that housing remains at a discount for future households (or the subsidy is recycled).

First Homes – a form of discounted market sale whereby an eligible First-time Buyer can buy a home at a discount of at least 30% of market value. Councils can set discounts and local eligibility criteria in policies.

Affordability

8.9 An important first part of the affordable needs modelling is to establish the entry-level costs of housing to buy and rent. The affordable housing needs assessment compares prices and rents with the incomes of households to establish what proportion of households can meet their needs in the market, and what proportion require support and are thus defined as having an ‘affordable housing need’.

8.10 For the purposes of establishing affordable housing need, the analysis focuses on overall housing costs (for all dwelling types and sizes).

8.11 The table below shows estimated current prices to both buy and privately rent a lower quartile home in the Council area (excluding newbuild sales when looking at house prices). Across all dwelling sizes, the analysis points to a lower quartile price of £200,000 and a private rent of £900 per month.

Table 8.3 Estimated lower quartile cost of housing to buy (existing dwellings) and privately rent (by size) – Cheshire West & Chester – September 2025

	To buy	Privately rent
1-bedroom	£85,000	£650
2-bedrooms	£150,000	£850
3-bedrooms	£220,000	£1,050
4-bedrooms	£340,000	£1,500
All dwellings	£200,000	£900

Source: Land Registry and Internet Price Search

8.12 The table below shows how prices and rents vary by location. The analysis shows some variation in prices and rents, with the highest prices and rents estimated in the three Rural areas (particularly Rural South), and lower prices and rents in Northwich and Winsford.

Table 8.4 Lower Quartile Prices and Market Rents, by sub-area

	Lower quartile price (existing dwellings)	Lower Quartile rent, pcm
Chester	£220,000	£950
Ellesmere Port	£220,000	£900
Helsby & Frodsham	£225,000	£925
Neston	£230,000	£900
Northwich	£175,000	£775
Rural North East	£240,000	£990
Rural North West	£270,000	£1,020
Rural South	£285,000	£1,080
Winsford	£165,000	£800
All dwellings	£200,000	£900

Source: Land Registry and Internet Price Search

8.13 Next, it is essential to understand local income levels as these (along with the price/rent data) will determine levels of affordability (i.e. the ability of a household to afford to buy or rent housing in the market without the need for some subsidy).

8.14 Data about total household income has been based on ONS modelled income estimates, with additional data from the English Housing Survey (EHS) being used to provide information about the distribution of incomes. Data has also been drawn from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) to account for changes since the ONS data were published.

8.15 Overall, the average (mean) household income across Cheshire West & Chester is estimated to be around £47,600, with a median income of £38,700; the lower quartile income of all households is estimated to be £21,600.

8.16 There are again some differences between areas, with the range of median incomes going from £34,600 in Winsford, up to £43,400 in Rural North West.

Table 8.5 Estimated average (median) household income

	Median income	As a % of the Council area average
Chester	£39,400	102%
Ellesmere Port	£35,300	91%
Helsby & Frodsham	£41,900	108%
Neston	£38,100	99%
Northwich	£40,100	104%
Rural North East	£41,100	106%
Rural North West	£43,400	112%
Rural South	£39,700	103%
Winsford	£34,600	89%
TOTAL	£38,700	-

Source: Iceni analysis

8.17 To assess affordability, two different measures are used; firstly, to consider what income levels are likely to be needed to access private rented housing, and secondly, to consider what income level is needed to access owner occupation.

8.18 This analysis, therefore, brings together the data on household incomes with the estimated incomes required to access private sector housing. For the purposes of analysis, the following assumptions are used:

- Rental affordability – a household should spend no more than 30% of their income on rent, and

- Mortgage affordability – assume a household has a 10% deposit and can secure a mortgage for four and a half times (4.5×) their income.

Need for Affordable Housing

8.19 The sections below work through the various stages of analysis to estimate the need for affordable housing in the Council area and sub-areas. Final figures are provided as an annual need (including an allowance to deal with current need). As per 2a-024 of the PPG, this figure can then be compared with the likely delivery of affordable housing.

Current Need

8.20 In line with PPG paragraph 2a-020, the current need for affordable housing has been based on considering the likely number of households with one or more housing problems (housing suitability).

8.21 The table below sets out the categories in the PPG and the sources of data being used to establish numbers.

Table 8.6 Main sources for assessing the current need for affordable housing

	Source	Notes
Homeless households (and those in temporary accommodation)	MHCLG Statutory Homelessness data	Household in temporary accommodation at the end of the quarter
Households in overcrowded housing	2021 Census table RM099	Analysis undertaken by tenure (updated by reference to the English Housing Survey)
Concealed Households	2021 Census table RM009	Number of concealed families with children
Existing affordable housing tenants in need	Modelled data linking to past survey analysis	Excludes overcrowded households
Households from other tenures in need	Modelled data linking to past survey analysis	Excludes overcrowded households

Source: PPG [Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 2a-020-20190220]

8.22 The table below sets out estimates of the number of households within each category. This shows an estimated 6,900 households living in ‘unsuitable housing’, with 30% of these being in the Chester area.

Around 700 of those in ‘unsuitable housing’ (across the Council area) currently have no accommodation (homeless or concealed households).

Table 8.7 Estimated number of households living in unsuitable housing (or without housing)

	Concealed and homeless households	Households in overcrowded housing	Existing affordable housing tenants in need	Households from other tenures in need	TOTAL
Chester	141	774	152	1,002	2,069
Ellesmere Port	148	496	123	542	1,309
Helsby & Frodsham	21	56	13	125	215
Neston	35	74	20	128	257
Northwich	72	317	53	413	855
Rural North East	98	220	43	363	724
Rural North West	55	90	16	184	344
Rural South	29	49	14	143	235
Winsford	102	385	71	286	844
TOTAL	700	2,461	506	3,186	6,853

Source: Iceni analysis

8.23 In taking this estimate forward, the data modelling follows the estimates of the need by tenure and considers affordability. The affordability in different groups is based on estimates of how incomes are likely to vary,

8.24 For owner-occupiers, there is a further assumption about potential equity levels. For homeless and concealed households, it is assumed incomes will be low and households unlikely to be able to afford to rent privately. It is estimated that around 54% of the households identified above are unlikely to be able to afford market housing; therefore, the current need is around 3,700 households.

Table 8.8 Estimated housing need and affordability by tenure

	Number in unsuitable housing	% unable to afford	Current need after affordability
Owner-occupied	2,018	6.1%	123
Affordable housing	1,615	84.7%	1,368
Private rented	2,519	58.8%	1,482
No housing (homeless/concealed)	700	100.0%	700
TOTAL	6,853	53.6%	3,673

Source: Iceni analysis

8.25 From this estimate, households living in affordable housing are excluded (as these households would release a dwelling on moving, and so no net need for affordable housing will arise), and the total current need is estimated to be 2,305 households.

8.26 For the purposes of analysis, it is assumed that the Council would seek to meet this need over a period of time. Given that this report typically looks at needs in the period from 2025 to 2045, the need is annualised by dividing by 20 (to give an annual need for around 115 dwellings).

8.27 This does not mean that some households would be expected to wait 20 years for housing, as the need will be dynamic, with households leaving the current need as they are housed, but with other households developing a need over time.

8.28 The table below shows this data for sub-areas – this is split between those unable to rent OR buy and those able to rent but NOT buy. Given the pricing of housing in Cheshire West & Chester, this analysis shows a more modest need for those able to rent but not buy, and in all cases, the number unable to rent OR buy is notably higher.

Table 8.9 Estimated current affordable housing need by affordability

	Number in need (excluding those in AH)	Annualised		
		TOTAL	Unable to rent OR buy	Able to rent but NOT buy
Chester	704	35	32	4
Ellesmere Port	452	23	20	2
Helsby & Frodsham	73	4	3	0
Neston	87	4	4	1
Northwich	255	13	12	1
Rural North East	253	13	11	1
Rural North West	130	6	6	1
Rural South	104	5	5	1
Winsford	247	12	12	0
TOTAL	2,305	115	104	11

Source: Iceni analysis

Projected Housing Need

8.29 Projected need is split between newly forming households who are unable to afford market housing and existing households falling into need.

Newly-forming households

8.30 The number of newly forming households has been estimated through demographic modelling, with an affordability test also being applied. This has been undertaken by considering the changes in households in specific 5-year age bands relative to numbers in the age band below 5 years previously, to provide an estimate of gross household formation. This approach is consistent with the CLG guidance of 2007, which is the last guidance published on this topic[13].

[13] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-housing-market-assessments-practice-guidance (see pages 19-20 of Annexes)

8.31 The number of newly-forming households is limited to households forming who are aged under 45 – this is consistent with CLG guidance (from 2007) which notes that after age 45, headship (household formation) rates 'plateau'.

8.32 There may be a small number of household formations beyond age 45 (e.g., due to relationship breakdown), although the number is expected to be fairly small when compared with the formation of younger households.

8.33 In assessing the ability of newly forming households to afford market housing, data have been drawn from an analysis of English Housing Survey data at a national level. This establishes that the average income of newly forming households is around 87% of the figure for all households.[14]

8.34 The analysis has therefore adjusted the overall household income data to reflect the lower average income for newly forming households. The adjustments have been made by changing the distribution of income by bands such that the average income level is 87% of the all-household average. In doing this, it is possible to calculate the proportion of households unable to afford market housing.

8.35 Overall, it is estimated that around 3,300 new households would form each year, and just over three-fifths will be unable to afford market housing; this equates to a total of 2,057 newly forming households per annum on average – the majority are households unable to rent OR buy.

[14] Raw data from the 2018-19 and 2020-21 EHS has been analysed

Table 8.10 Estimated Need for Affordable Housing from Newly Forming Households (per annum)

	Number of new households	% unable to afford	Annual newly forming households unable to afford	Unable to rent OR buy (per annum)	Able to rent but NOT buy (per annum)
Chester	1,054	62.9%	663	582	82
Ellesmere Port	636	68.4%	435	370	65
Helsby & Frodsham	112	60.9%	68	57	11
Neston	116	66.7%	77	62	15
Northwich	406	50.2%	204	181	23
Rural North East	341	65.1%	222	188	35
Rural North West	174	68.2%	118	93	25
Rural South	107	75.1%	80	66	15
Winsford	345	54.6%	189	183	5
TOTAL	3,291	62.5%	2,057	1,782	275

Source: Projection Modelling/Affordability Analysis

<u>Existing households falling into affordable need</u>

8.36 The second element of newly arising need is existing households falling into need. To assess this, information about past lettings in social/affordable rented has been used.

8.37 The assessment looked at households that have been housed in general needs housing over the past three years – this group will represent the flow of households onto the Housing Register over this period.

8.38 From this, newly forming households (e.g. those currently living with family) have been discounted, as well as households that have transferred from another social/affordable rented property.

8.39 Data has been drawn from a number of sources, including Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS) and Continuous Recording of Sales and Lettings (CoRe).

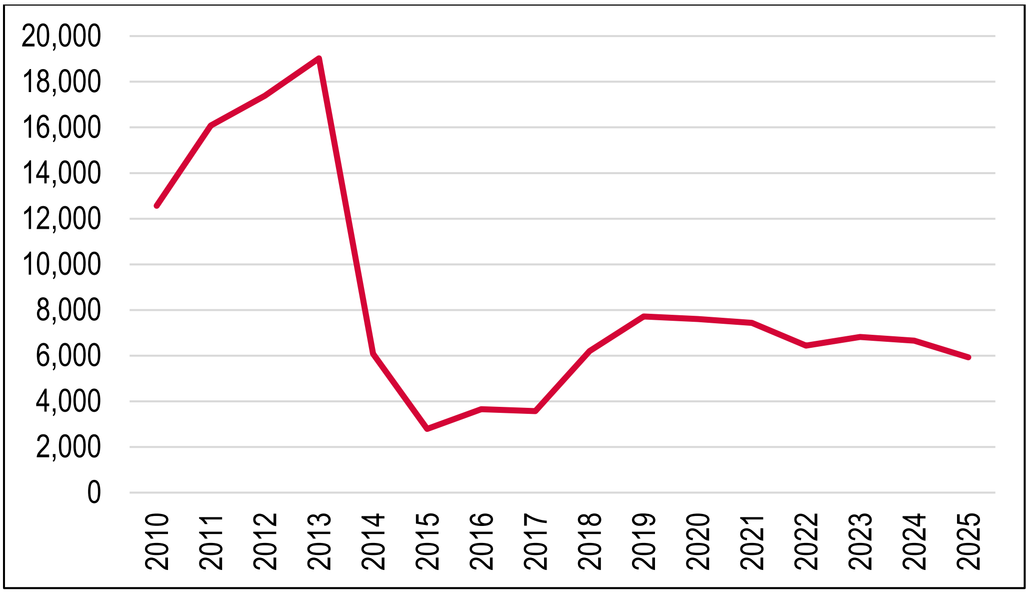
8.40 This method for assessing existing households falling into need is consistent with the 2007 SHMA guide, which says on page 46 that:

‘Partnerships should estimate the number of existing households falling into need each year by looking at recent trends. This should include households who have entered the housing register and been housed within the year as well as households housed outside of the register (such as priority homeless household applicants)’.

8.41 In addition, the analysis has considered trends in the Housing Register, recognising that an increase in numbers would point to a higher level of need than is indicated from past lettings (and vice versa).

8.42 Over the past five years or so (and in the longer-term), the number of households on the Register has been highly variable, but with no clear trend. Therefore, no further adjustments have been made to the estimates based on past lettings.

Figure 8.1 Housing Register Trends (2010-2025) – Cheshire West & Chester



Source: MHCLG Live Table 600

8.43 Following the analysis through suggests a need arising from 374 existing households each year – again most are households unable to buy OR rent.

Table 8.11 Estimated Need for Affordable Housing from Existing Households Falling into Need (per annum)

	Total Additional Need	Unable to rent OR buy	Able to rent but NOT buy
Chester	137	129	8
Ellesmere Port	66	61	5
Helsby & Frodsham	12	11	1
Neston	13	12	1
Northwich	43	40	3
Rural North East	34	32	3
Rural North West	17	15	2
Rural South	19	17	2
Winsford	32	31	1
TOTAL	374	348	26

Source: Iceni analysis

Supply of Affordable Housing Through Relets/Resales

8.44 The future supply of affordable housing through relets is the flow of affordable housing arising from the existing stock that is available to meet future need.

8.45 This focuses on the annual supply of social/affordable rent relets. Information from CoRe and LAHS has been used to establish past patterns of social housing turnover. Data for three years has been used (2021-22 to 2023-24).

8.46 The figures are for general needs lettings (rather than specialist or supported accommodation) but exclude lettings of new properties and also exclude an estimate of the number of transfers from other social rented homes.

8.47 These exclusions are made to ensure that the figures presented reflect relets from the existing stock. On the basis of past trend data, it has been estimated that 705 units of existing social/affordable rented housing are likely to become available each year moving forward.

Table 8.12 Analysis of Past Social/Affordable Rented Housing Supply, 2021/22 – 2023/24 (average per annum) – Cheshire West & Chester

	Total Lettings	% as Non-New Build	Lettings in Existing Stock	% Non-Transfers	Lettings to New Tenants
2021/22	1,183	88.4%	1,046	65.0%	680
2022/23	1,341	79.3%	1,063	64.4%	684
2023/24	1,421	84.9%	1,207	62.3%	752
Average	1,315	84.1%	1,105	63.8%	705

Source: CoRe/LAHS

8.48 It is also possible to consider whether there is any supply of affordable home ownership products from the existing stock of housing. One source is likely to be resales of low-cost home ownership products, with data from the Regulator of Social Housing showing a total stock in 2024 of 2,446.

8.49 If these homes were to turnover at a rate of around 6% (which is roughly the turnover of owner-occupied housing (those with a mortgage) as evidenced through the English Housing Survey) then they would be expected to generate around 147 resales each year.

8.50 A turnover figure of 6% is also consistent with the estimated turnover (data from the Council) of discount market sale properties in Cheshire West and Chester.

8.51 These properties would be available for these households and can be included as the potential supply. The total estimated supply is therefore

852 units per annum (705+147). The table below shows the estimated supply of affordable housing from relets/resales in each sub-area.

Table 8.13 Estimated supply of affordable housing from relets/resales of existing stock by sub-area (per annum)

	Social/affordable rented	LCHO	TOTAL
Chester	212	36	248
Ellesmere Port	172	20	192
Helsby & Frodsham	18	11	29
Neston	28	2	30
Northwich	74	28	102
Rural North East	59	20	79
Rural North West	22	6	28
Rural South	20	9	29
Winsford	100	16	115
TOTAL	705	147	852

Source: CoRe/LAHS/Census 2021

8.52 In the affordable home ownership sector, there is arguably an additional (and significant) source of supply from resale market homes below a lower quartile price.

8.53 Data from the Land Registry shows around 3,800 resales of homes in 2024; therefore, 950 homes were sold at or below the lower quartile price and could make a contribution to meeting the needs of those in the 'gap' between renting and buying.

8.54 However, a supply from this source has not been included in the analysis below, but is considered when drawing conclusions.

8.55 The PPG model also includes bringing vacant homes back into use and the pipeline of affordable housing as part of the supply calculation. These have, however, not been included within the modelling in this report.

8.56 Firstly, there is no evidence of any substantial stock of vacant homes (over and above a level that might be expected to allow movement in the stock) within Cheshire West and Chester. Indeed, at 4%, this is below the national and regional equivalents (6%).

Table 8.14 Number of vacant dwellings by accommodation type, national to local authority districts, England and Wales, 2021

Area Name	Detached	Semi-detached	Terraced	Flat	Caravan or other	Total
Cheshire West and Chester	3%	2%	5%	12%	21%	4%
England	4%	3%	6%	15%	38%	6%
North West	4%	3%	5%	12%	41%	6%

Source: 2021 Census

8.57 Secondly, with the pipeline supply, it is not considered appropriate to include this, as including it would mean that netting off new housing would fail to show the full extent of the need. However, in monitoring, it will be important to net off these dwellings as they are completed.

Net Need for Affordable Housing

8.58 The table below shows the overall calculation of affordable housing need. The analysis shows that there is a need for 1,694 dwellings per annum across the Council area – an affordable need is seen in all sub-areas. The net need is calculated as follows:

Net Need = Current Need (allowance for) + Need from Newly-Forming Households + Existing Households falling into Need – Supply of Affordable Housing

Table 8.15 Estimated Need for Affordable Housing (per annum)

	Current need	Newly forming households	Existing households falling into need	Total Gross Need	Relet/ resale supply	Net Need
Chester	35	663	137	836	248	588
Ellesmere Port	23	435	66	523	192	331
Helsby & Frodsham	4	68	12	84	29	55
Neston	4	77	13	95	30	65
Northwich	13	204	43	260	102	158
Rural North East	13	222	34	269	79	190
Rural North West	6	118	17	142	28	113
Rural South	5	80	19	105	29	75
Winsford	12	189	32	233	115	117
TOTAL	**115**	**2,057**	**374**	**2,546**	**852**	**1,694**

Source: Iceni analysis

8.59 This can additionally be split between households unable to afford to BUY or rent and those able to rent but not buy. For this analysis, it is assumed the LCHO supply would be meeting the needs of the latter group, although in reality, there will be a crossover between categories.

8.60 For example, it is likely in some cases that the cost of shared ownership will have an outgoing below that for privately renting and could meet some of the needs of households unable to buy or rent – the issue of access to deposits would still be a consideration.

8.61 The table below shows the affordable need figure split between the two categories. Across the whole Council area, the analysis shows around 90% of households are unable to buy OR rent, although this is partly influenced by two areas with negative figures in the able to rent but not buy category. It is, however, the case that the proportion able to rent but not buy is low in all areas.

8.62 Where there is a negative number in the 'able to rent but not buy' column, this indicates that there is a sufficient supply of affordable home ownership to meet the need (indeed, a greater level of supply than the need identified).

8.63 This situation largely arises where housing to buy is relatively cheap compared to privately renting (i.e. requires a lower income to buy than rent on the assumptions used).

Table 8.16 Estimated Need for Affordable Housing (per annum) – split between different affordability groups

	Unable to buy OR rent	Able to rent but not buy	TOTAL	% unable to buy OR rent
Chester	530	58	588	90%
Ellesmere Port	279	52	331	84%
Helsby & Frodsham	53	2	55	96%
Neston	50	15	65	77%
Northwich	159	-1	158	100%
Rural North East	171	19	190	90%
Rural North West	92	22	113	81%
Rural South	68	8	75	90%
Winsford	127	-10	117	108%
TOTAL	1,529	165	1,694	90%

Source: Iceni analysis

8.64 These figures can also be standardised based on the size of each location (in this case, linked to the number of households shown in the 2021 Census). This shows the highest need in Chester, with the lowest standardised need being seen in Winsford.

Table 8.17 Standardised level of affordable housing need

	Net Need	Estimated households (2021)	Net need per 1,000 households
Chester	588	41,770	14.1
Ellesmere Port	331	28,230	11.7
Helsby & Frodsham	55	6,558	8.4
Neston	65	7,004	9.3
Northwich	158	19,549	8.1
Rural North East	190	20,457	9.3
Rural North West	113	10,517	10.8
Rural South	75	6,361	11.9
Winsford	117	14,729	8.0
TOTAL	1,694	155,175	10.9

Source: Iceni analysis

8.65 Whilst the need above is provided down to sub-area level, it should be remembered that affordable need can be met across the area as and when opportunities arise, and so specific sub-area data should not be treated as a local target.

Affordable Need and Overall Housing Numbers

8.66 The PPG encourages local authorities to consider increasing planned housing numbers where this can help to meet the identified affordable need. Specifically, the wording of the PPG (housing and economic needs) Ref ID 2a-024 states:

"The total affordable housing need can then be considered in the context of its likely delivery as a proportion of mixed market and affordable housing developments, given the probable percentage of affordable housing to be delivered by market housing-led developments. An increase in the total housing figures included in the strategic plan may need to be considered, where it could help deliver the required number of affordable homes"

8.67 However, the relationship between affordable housing need and overall housing need is complex. This was recognised in the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Technical Advice Note of July 2015[15].

8.68 PAS conclude that there is no arithmetical way of combining the OAN (calculated through demographic projections) and the affordable need. There are a number of reasons why the two cannot be 'arithmetically' linked.

8.69 Firstly, the modelling contains a category in the projection of 'existing households falling into need'; these households already have accommodation, and hence if they were to move to alternative accommodation, they would release a dwelling for use by another household – there is, therefore, no net additional need arising.

8.70 The modelling also contains 'newly forming households'; these households are a direct output from demographic modelling and are therefore already included in overall housing need figures (a point also made in the PAS advice note – see paragraph 9.5).

8.71 The analysis estimates an annual need for 1,529 affordable homes from households unable to buy OR rent housing. However, as noted, caution should be exercised in trying to make a direct link between affordable need and planned delivery, with the key point being that many of those households picked up as having a need will already be living in housing and so providing an affordable option does not lead to an overall net increase in the need for housing (as they would vacate a home to be used by someone else).

8.72 It is possible to investigate this in some more detail by re-running the model and excluding those already living in their own accommodation (existing households). This is shown in the table below, which identifies

[15] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/objectively-assessed-need-9fb.pdf. While the technical note produced by PAS is arguably becoming dated, there is no more up-to-date guidance on this matter from a Government source and the remarks remain valid.

that meeting these needs would lead to an affordable need for 1,112 homes per annum across the Council area – less than three-quarters of the figure when including those with housing.

8.73 This figure is, however, theoretical and should not be seen to be minimising the need (which is clearly acute). That said, it does serve to show that there is a difference in the figures when looking at overall housing shortages.

8.74 The analysis is arguably even more complex than this – it can be observed that the main group of households in need are newly forming households. These households are already included within demographic projections, and so demonstrating a need for this group again should not be seen as additional to the overall figures from demographic projections.

Table 8.18 Estimated Need for Affordable Housing (households unable to buy OR rent), excluding households already in accommodation

	Including existing households	Excluding existing households
Current need	104	35
Newly forming households	1,782	1,782
Existing households falling into need	348	0
Total Gross Need	2,234	1,817
Re-let Supply	705	705
Net Need	1,529	1,112

Source: Iceni analysis

8.75 Additionally, it should be noted that the need estimate is on a per annum basis and should not be multiplied by the plan period to get a total need.

8.76 Essentially, the estimates are for the number of households who would be expected to have a need in any given year (i.e., needing to spend more than 30% of income on housing).

8.77 In reality, some (possibly many) households would see their circumstances change over time such that they would ‘fall out of need’ and this is not accounted for in the analysis.

8.78 One example would be a newly forming household with an income level that means they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. As the household’s income rises, it would potentially pass the affordability test and therefore not have an affordable need.

8.79 Additionally, there is the likelihood that when looking over the longer term, a newly forming household will become an existing household in need and would be counted twice if trying to multiply the figures out for a whole plan period.

8.80 It also needs to be remembered that the affordability test used for analysis is based on assuming a household spends no more than 30% of their income on housing (when privately renting).

8.81 In reality, many households will spend more than this and so would be picked up by modelling as in need, but in fact are paying for a private sector tenancy.

8.82 ONS research[16] for 2023 estimates private tenants are paying an average of 34% of income on housing and this would imply that over half are spending more than the affordable level assumed in this report (if this figure were to be applicable to Cheshire West & Chester).

8.83 A further consideration is that some 165 of the 1,694 per annum affordable need is a need from households able to rent in the market (but not buy).

8.84 Technically, these households can afford market housing (to rent) and historically would not have been considered as needing assessments

16 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/privaterentalaffordabilityengland/2023

such as this – until recently, only households unable to buy OR rent would be considered as having a need for affordable housing.

8.85 For these reasons, these households have not been included in the analysis, looking at households with and without accommodation.

8.86 Finally, it should be recognised that Planning Practice Guidance does not envisage that all needs will be met (whether this is affordable housing or other forms of accommodation, such as for older people). Paragraph 67-001 of the housing needs of different groups PPG states:

"This guidance sets out advice on how plan-making authorities should identify and plan for the housing needs of particular groups of people. This need may well exceed, or be proportionally high in relation to, the overall housing need figure calculated using the standard method. This is because the needs of particular groups will often be calculated having consideration to the whole population of an area as a baseline as opposed to the projected new households which form the baseline for the standard method".

The Role of the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

8.87 The discussion above has already noted that the need for affordable housing does not generally lead to a need to increase overall housing provision.

8.88 However, it is worth briefly thinking about how affordable need works in practice and the housing available to those unable to access market housing without Housing Benefit.

8.89 In particular, the role played by the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in providing housing for households who require financial support in meeting their housing needs should be recognised.

8.90 Whilst the Private Rented Sector (PRS) does not fall within the types of affordable housing set out in the NPPF (other than affordable private rent, which is a specific tenure separate from the main 'full market' PRS), it has evidently been playing a role in meeting the needs of households who require financial support in meeting their housing need.

8.91 Government recognises this, and indeed legislated through the 2011 Localism Act to allow Councils to discharge their "homelessness duty" through providing an offer of a suitable property in the PRS.

8.92 Data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has been used to look at the number of Housing Benefit supported private rented homes.

8.93 As of May 2025, it is estimated that there were around 7,300 benefit claimants in the Private Rented Sector in Cheshire West & Chester. From this, it is clear that the PRS contributes to the wider delivery of 'affordable homes' with the support of benefit claims.

8.94 Whilst the PRS is providing housing for some households, there are, however, significant risks associated with future reliance on the sector to meet an affordable housing need. The last couple of years have seen rents increase whilst Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels have remained static.

8.95 In the Autumn Statement 2023, the then Government increased the LHA rent to the 30^{th} percentile of market rents (although this is based on existing rents and not rents likely to be payable by those moving home).

8.96 Moving forward, the Renters Reform Bill (2025) may also have some impact in restricting future supply of PRS properties to those in need; emphasising the need to support delivery of genuinely affordable homes.

8.97 The figure below shows the trend in the number of claimants in the Council area. This shows there has been an increase since March 2020, which is likely to be related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

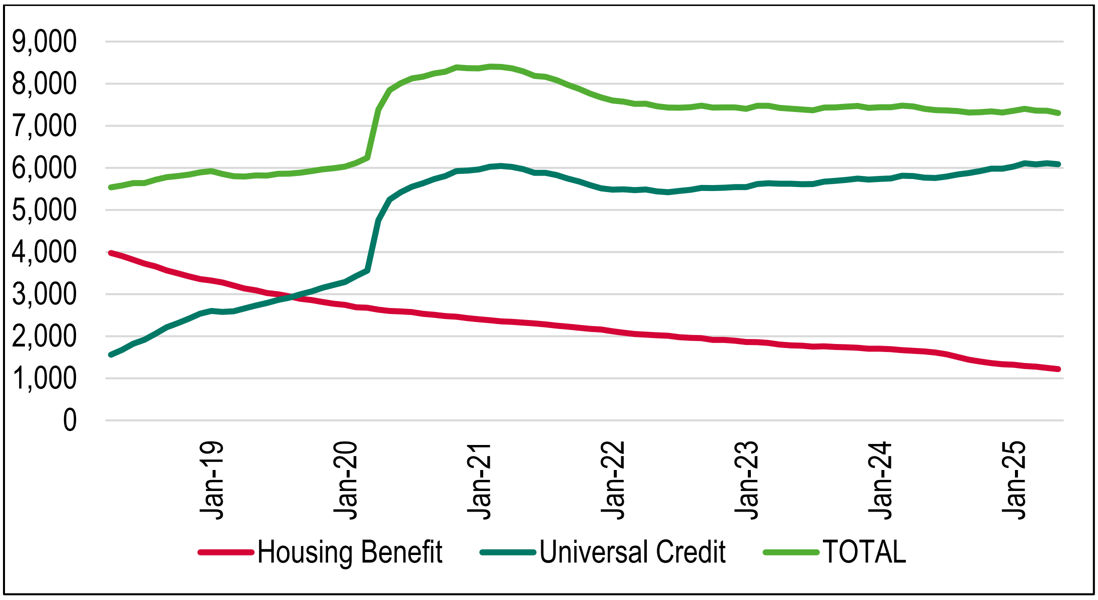
8.98 However, even the more historical data show a substantial number of households claiming benefit support for their housing in the private sector (typically around 6,000 households).

8.99 The data about the number of claimants does not indicate how many new lettings are made each year in the PRS. However, data from the English Housing Survey (EHS) over the past three years indicates that, nationally, around 7% of private-sector tenants are new to the sector each year.

8.100 If this figure is applied to the number of households claiming HB/UC, then this would imply over 500 new benefit-supported lettings in the sector each year.

8.101 Whilst we would not recommend including PRS supply as part of the modelling, not least as it is uncertain whether the availability of homes will remain at this level, as well as concerns about the security of tenure, it is the case that the sector does provide housing, and again, the overall analysis does not point to the need to increase overall provision.

Figure 8.2 Number of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit claimants in the PRS



Source: Department of Work and Pensions

8.102 Whilst housing delivery through the Local Plan can be expected to secure additional affordable housing it needs to be noted that delivery of affordable housing through planning obligations is an important, but not the only means, of delivering affordable housing; and the Council should also work with housing providers to secure funding to support enhanced affordable housing delivery on some sites and through use of its own land assets.

8.103 Overall, it is difficult to link the need for affordable housing to the overall housing need; indeed, there is no justification for trying to make the link. Put simply, the two do not measure the same thing, and in interpreting the affordable need figure, consideration needs to be given to the fact that many households already live in housing and therefore do not generate an overall net need for an additional home.

8.104 Further issues arise as the need for affordable housing is complex, and additionally, the extent of concealed and homeless households needs to be understood, as well as the role played by the private rented sector.

8.105 Regardless of the discussion above, the analysis identifies a notable need for affordable housing, and it is clear that the provision of new affordable housing is an important and pressing issue across the Council area.

8.106 It does, however, need to be stressed that this report does not provide an affordable housing target; the amount of affordable housing delivered will need to reflect the amount that can viably be provided.

8.107 As noted previously, the evidence does, however, suggest that affordable housing delivery should be maximised where opportunities arise.

Types of Affordable Housing

8.108 The analysis above has clearly pointed to a need for affordable housing, and particularly for households who are unable to buy OR rent in the market.

8.109 There is a range of affordable housing options that could meet the need, which will include rented forms of affordable housing (such as social or affordable rents) and products which might be described as intermediate housing (such as shared ownership or discounted market housing/First Homes). These are discussed in turn below.

Social and Affordable Rented Housing

8.110 The table below shows current rent levels in the Council area for a range of products along with relevant local housing allowance (LHA) rates. Most of Cheshire West & Chester falls into the West Cheshire Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA), and so this has been used for comparative purposes.

8.111 Data about average social and affordable rents has been taken from the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), and this is compared with lower quartile market rents. This analysis shows that social rents are lower than affordable rents and that affordable rents are well below the lower quartile market rents.

8.112 The LHA rates for all sizes of home are below the lower quartile market rents for all sizes of accommodation. This does potentially mean that households seeking accommodation in many locations may struggle to secure sufficient benefits to cover their rent.

Table 8.19 Comparison of rent levels for different products – Cheshire West & Chester

	Social rent	Affordable rent (AR)	Lower quartile (LQ) market rent	LHA (West Cheshire)
1-bedroom	£376	£458	£650	£549
2-bedrooms	£427	£558	£850	£673
3-bedrooms	£468	£621	£1,050	£793
4-bedrooms	£515	£733	£1,500	£1,221
ALL	£436	£558	£900	-

Source: RSH, VOA and market survey

8.113 To some extent, it is easier to consider the data above in terms of the percentage one housing cost is of another, and this is shown in the tables below.

8.114 Focusing on 2-bedroom homes, the analysis shows that social rents are significantly cheaper than market rents (and indeed affordable rents) and that affordable rents (as currently charged) represent 66% of a current lower quartile rent.

Table 8.20 Difference between rent levels for different products – Cheshire West & Chester

	Social rent as % of affordable rent	Social rent as % of LQ market rent	Affordable rent as % of LQ market rent
1-bedroom	82%	58%	70%
2-bedrooms	77%	50%	66%
3-bedrooms	75%	45%	59%
4-bedrooms	70%	34%	49%
ALL	78%	48%	62%

Source: RSH and market survey

8.115 The table below suggests that around 13% of households that cannot afford to rent privately could afford an affordable rent at 80% of market rents, with a further 17% being able to afford current affordable rents. There are also an estimated 15% who can afford a social rent (but not an affordable one).

8.116 A total of 55% of households would need some degree of benefit support (or spend more than 30% of income on housing) to be able to afford their housing (regardless of the tenure). This analysis points to a clear need for social rented housing.

Table 8.21 Estimated need for affordable rented housing (% of households able to afford to buy OR rent)

	% of households able to afford
Afford 80% of the market rent	13%
Afford current affordable rent	17%
Afford social rent	15%
Need benefit support	55%
All unable to afford market	100%

Source: Iceni analysis

8.117 The analysis indicates that provision of around 70% of rented affordable housing at social rents could be justified; albeit in setting planning policies, this will need to be considered alongside viability evidence. Higher provision at social rents will reduce the support through housing benefits required to ensure households can afford their housing costs.

Intermediate Housing

8.118 As well as rented forms of affordable housing, the Council could seek to provide forms of intermediate housing, with the analysis below considering the potential affordability of shared ownership, rent to buy and discounted market sale housing (which could include First Homes).

8.119 Generally, intermediate housing will be a newbuild product, sold at a discount (or on a part buy, part rent arrangement with shared ownership) and will therefore be based on the Open Market Value (OMV) of a new home.

Discounted Market Sale

8.120 The table below sets out a suggested maximum purchase price for affordable home ownership/First Homes in Cheshire West & Chester by size. It works through first (on the left-hand side) what households with an affordable home ownership need could afford (based on a 10% deposit and a mortgage at 4.5 times' income).

8.121 The right-hand side of the table then sets out what Open Market Value (OMV) this might support, based on a 30% discount. The affordable figure is based on a midpoint between the house price a household (just) able to rent privately might be able to afford and the lower quartile house price (or just the lower quartile price where this is higher).

8.122 Focussing on 3-bedroom homes, it is suggested that an affordable price is no more than £215,000, and therefore the open market value of homes would need to be in no more than £307,000 (if discounted by 30%).

Table 8.22 Affordable home ownership prices – Cheshire West & Chester

	What households able to rent but not buy could afford	Open Market Value (OMV) of Home with 30% Discount
1-bedroom	£85,000	£121,000
2-bedrooms	£150,000	£214,000
3-bedrooms	£215,000	£307,000
4+-bedrooms	£320,000	£457,000

Source: Iceni analysis

8.123 It is difficult to definitively analyse the cost of newbuild homes as these will vary from site to site and will be dependent on a range of factors such as location, built form and plot size.

8.124 We have, however, looked at newbuild schemes currently advertised on Rightmove (September 2025), with the table below providing a general summary of existing schemes.

8.125 This analysis is interesting as it shows the median newbuild price for all sizes of homes is above the top end of the OMV required to make homes affordable to those in the gap between buying and renting (for sizes where sufficient data was available).

8.126 That said, homes at the bottom end of the price range could potentially be discounted by 30% and considered as affordable.

8.127 This analysis shows how important it will be to know the OMV of housing before discounting to be able to determine if a product is going to be genuinely affordable in a local context – providing a discount of 30% will not automatically mean it becomes affordable housing.

Table 8.23 Estimated newbuild housing cost by size – Cheshire West & Chester

	No. of homes advertised	Range of prices	Median price
1-bedroom	2	£150,000-£200,000	-
2-bedrooms	18	£160,000-£465,000	£335,000
3-bedrooms	38	£245,000-£740,000	£380,000
4+-bedrooms	62	£310,000-£900,000	£465,000

Source: Iceni analysis from Rightmove

8.128 Overall, it is considered that the evidence does not support a need for First Homes (or other discounted market products) in a local context due to the cost of newbuild housing.

8.129 However, it is acknowledged that demand does exist for these products and the Council seeks to apply higher discounts as set out in the table below to ensure properties are affordable.

Table 8.24 First Homes Discount – Cheshire West & Chester

	Median Market Price	What households able to rent but not buy could afford	Percentage discount required
1-bedroom	£175,000	£85,000	50%
2-bedrooms	£335,000	£150,000	55%
3-bedrooms	£380,000	£215,000	45%
4+-bedrooms	£465,000	£320,000	30% DMS / 45% FH due to £250,000 cap

Source: CWAC, 2026

8.130 The analysis is also interesting in highlighting a newbuild market heavily dominated by larger homes; some 83% of homes found by the analysis are 3+ bedrooms, with 52% having 4 bedrooms.

8.131 Although the recommendations do not include any provision for discounted market sales (DMS) housing, there may be situations where the Council would consider this product.

8.132 This might include where a Registered Provider cannot be found to manage the affordable housing, and therefore, a discounted product could be sold directly by the developer.

8.133 There may also be situations where it is not viable to provide any affordable housing other than DMS, and therefore, provision of something at a discount would be better than nothing.

8.134 Additionally, there may be specific local issues around the supply of ‘cheaper’ housing, which point to including DMS as part of the mix.

8.135 Finally, on 100% affordable housing sites, some DMS housing might be considered to provide a better mix and balance and support viability.

8.136 Arguably, a larger discount than the 30% generally considered in the analysis could be provided to make homes more affordable; a higher discount would essentially mean a greater developer subsidy. Such a subsidy might be better spent on other forms of affordable housing that can meet more acute needs but this will be for the Council to determine

Shared Ownership

8.137 The analysis below moves on to consider shared ownership. For this analysis, an assessment of monthly outgoings has been undertaken, with the core assumption that outgoings should be the same as for renting privately, to make this tenure genuinely affordable.

8.138 The analysis has looked at what the OMV would need to be for a shared ownership to be affordable with a 10%, 25% and 50% share. To work out outgoings, the mortgage part is based on a 10% deposit (for the equity share) and a repayment mortgage over 25 years at 5% with a rent at 2.75% per annum on unsold equity.

8.139 The findings for this analysis are interesting and do point to the possibility of shared ownership being a more affordable tenure than discounted market housing (including First Homes).

8.140 By way of an explanation of this table (focusing on 3-bedroom homes), if a 50% equity share scheme came forward, then it is estimated that the OMV could not be above £278,000 if it is to be genuinely affordable (due to the outgoings being in excess of the cost of privately renting).

8.141 However, given the subsidised rents, the same level of outgoings could be expected with a 10% equity share but a much higher OMV of £406,000.

8.142 Although affordability can only be considered on a scheme-by-scheme basis, it is notable that we estimate a median 3-bedroom newbuild to cost around £380,000. This points to shared ownership and an equity share level of between 10% and 25% as being genuinely affordable (in this example). However, lower shares could increase the number of households able to afford.

Table 8.25 Estimated OMV of Shared Ownership with a 50%, 25% and 10% Equity Share by Size – Cheshire West & Chester.

	50% share	25% share	10% share
1-bedroom	£172,000	£214,000	£251,000
2-bedroom	£225,000	£280,000	£328,000
3-bedroom	£278,000	£346,000	£406,000
4-bedrooms	£397,000	£495,000	£580,000

Source: Iceni analysis

8.143 Another way of looking at this data is to see what level of equity share might be needed to make shared ownership affordable, and this is shown in the table below.

8.144 Overall, these points to shares generally in the range of 8%-35% depending on size and location, and this analysis should be treated as indicative as it is based on a specific set of data at a particular point in time.

Table 8.26 Estimated equity share required to make shared ownership affordable

	'Affordable' equity share
1-bedroom	-
2-bedroom	8%
3-bedroom	16%
4-bedrooms	35%

Source: Iceni analysis

8.145 One additional advantage of shared ownership is a lower deposit requirement. For example, the data above suggests a median newbuild costs around £380,000 and for a 10% deposit, this would equate to a need for £38,000 in capital. If such a home were sold at 50% shared ownership, the deposit would halve (to £19,000) and would be under £10,000 at a 25% equity share.

8.146 Although there is no locally specific data about savings, we can look at national data from the English Housing Survey to show the likely difficulty in raising deposits for households that are not already owners.

8.147 For 2023-34, the EHS records 48% of private tenants as having no savings and 72% of those living in social rented housing. Of those with any savings, only 36% of private renters and 17% in social rented housing have more than £16,000.

8.148 This points to less than a fifth of households living in the PRS as having £16,000 or more in savings, which will clearly be a barrier to home ownership – particularly where the deposit will need to be higher, such as for a full market purchase rather than a smaller equity share.

<u>Rent-to-Buy</u>

8.149 A further affordable option is Rent to Buy; this is a Government scheme designed to ease the transition from renting to buying the same home. Initially (typically for five years, although in CWAC this can be as low as two years), the newly built home will be provided at the equivalent of an affordable rent (approximately 20% below the market rate).

8.150 The expectation is that the discount provided in the first five years is saved in order to put towards a deposit on the purchase of the same property. Rent to Buy can be advantageous for some households as it allows for a smaller 'step' to be taken onto the home ownership ladder.

8.151 At the end of the five years, depending on the scheme, the property is either sold as a shared ownership product or purchased outright as a full market property. If the occupant is not able to do either of these, then the property is vacated, or tenants can remain on affordable rent. Where this product has been delivered in CWAC, it has proven popular

8.152 In order to access this tenure, it effectively requires the same income threshold for the initial phase as a market rental property, although the cost of accommodation will be that of affordable rent.

8.153 The lower-than-market rent will allow the household to save for a deposit for the eventual shared ownership or market property, indeed it allows tenants to move in without a deposit at all.

8.154 In considering the affordability of rent-to-buy schemes, there is a direct read across to the income required to access affordable home ownership (including shared ownership). It should therefore be treated as part of the affordable home ownership products suggested by the NPPF.

Key Worker Accommodation

8.155 The University of Chester, in our brief consultation, highlighted a need for key worker accommodation in order to retain graduates within the City.

8.156 They noted that they specialise in training doctors, teachers, and police officers. They were particularly keen to keep graduates in accommodation in the area within walking distance of the hospitals, police stations, etc.

8.157 They also highlighted that this would support redevelopment in the City Centre and increase footfall. But it was not just housing, as they also require nursery spaces.

8.158 We have also engaged with the NHS, which again highlighted the need for NHS Staff to be near their place of work because of shifts and the lack of public transport options in the middle of the night. This relates to the Countess of Chester Hospital, Ellesmere Port Hospital and Elmhurst Intermediate Care Unit in Winsford.

8.159 This was not just confined to CWAC but is a severe issue nationally with the retention and recruitment of staff. They noted that past solutions have involved providing temporary accommodation on NHS land.

8.160 The NHS also highlighted a number of housebuilders that are offering incentives to key workers, such as a percentage discount (up to £25,000) of the cost of new homes or offering other incentives such as carpets or flooring. But this has not yet reached Chester or anywhere else in CWAC.

8.161 A discussion was held with the NHS that attracting key workers into a development could also boost sales rates, as potential buyers are drawn to areas with populations in stable, responsible positions.

Essential Local Worker Accommodation

8.162 The NPPF defines essential local workers as “Public sector employees who provide frontline services in areas including health, education and community safety – such as NHS staff, teachers, police, firefighters and military personnel, social care and childcare workers”.

8.163 Annex 2 of the NPPF also includes the needs of essential local workers ‘Affordable housing: housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (**including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers’** [emphasis added].

8.164 Essential local workers are defined as ‘Public sector employees who provide frontline services in areas including health, education and community safety – such as NHS staff, teachers, police, firefighters and military personnel, social care and childcare workers’.

8.165 To indicate the number of essential workers in Cheshire West and Chester, an analysis has been undertaken looking at Standard Industrial Classification 2007 (SIC) categories – this shows employment sectors based on industry. For this analysis, the public administration, education, and health industries have been used to represent ‘essential workers’.

8.166 The analysis shows that around 28% of resident workers are considered ‘essential workers’ in CWAC – this figure is below that seen regionally and nationally.

Table 8.27 Number and proportion of essential workers in a range of areas (2021)

	CWAC		North West	England
	Resident workers	% of workers	% of workers	% of workers
Agriculture, energy and water	5,006	3.0	2.3	2.4
Manufacturing	16,052	9.5	7.3	8.1
Construction	11,795	7.0	8.7	8.0
Distribution, hotels and restaurants	36,311	21.5	19.9	21.2
Transport & comms	13,663	8.1	9.7	8.6
Financial, Real Estate, Professional & Administration	31,117	18.4	17.4	15.4
Public administration,	47,530	28.1	30.3	32.0
Other	7,614	4.5	4.6	4.2
All industries	169,088	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 2021 Census

8.167 The 2021 Census also enables analysis to be conducted as to the tenure of workers by industry. As shown, essential workers have a higher-than-average level of owner-occupation. Indeed, they show the second-highest percentage of any industry.

Table 8.28 Housing tenure by industry of employment (2021) – CWAC

	Owner-occupied	Social rented	Private rented
Agriculture, energy and water	75.6%	18.0%	6.4%
Manufacturing	76.1%	16.4%	7.5%
Construction	76.3%	15.1%	8.6%
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	63.9%	22.9%	13.1%
Transport and communication	74.5%	18.1%	7.5%
Financial, Real Estate, Professional and Admin	76.9%	16.2%	6.9%
Public administration, education and health	76.5%	15.2%	8.4%
Other	70.4%	21.3%	8.3%
All industries	73.4%	17.7%	8.9%

Source: 2021 Census

8.168 The proportion living in social rented housing is slightly below the CWAC average. This indicates that for most current essential local workers, there is no barrier to market housing.

8.169 It is also possible to consider the affordability of housing for essential workers by considering local salaries. An online assessment of local jobs for key groups was undertaken in October 2025, with the following bullet points highlighting the key findings:

- According to the “School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document 2025 and Guidance on School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions (July 2025)”, teachers in the main pay range are paid between £32,916 and £45,352 in England, excluding London;
- The Cheshire Constabulary website suggests that the starting salary for Police Officers in the County is £31,164;
- According to the Cheshire Fire and Rescue website, “Competent” Firefighters have an annual salary of £37,675, although trainees only receive £28,265.
- According to the MOD website for army recruitment, the starting rate of pay for recruits and privates is £26,334, increasing to

£34,093 for a Lance Corporal. However, it may be expected that subsidised accommodation is provided to junior recruits.

- According to Indeed, the average base salary for a care worker in Chester is £25,145, and for a childcare worker it is £24,994.

8.170 The NHS also provided a detailed breakdown of salaries within the County. This included entry-level salaries (2025-26). Band 1, which included support workers and healthcare assistants, earned £24,465, and Band 6, including paramedics, earned between £38,682 and £46,580

8.171 Recently qualified resident doctors in the NHS must go through two years of mandatory foundation training. During this period, their pay increases from £38,831 in their first year of training to £44,439 in the second year

8.172 Newly qualified NHS dentists also have to go through a one-year mandatory foundation training course. During this period their pay is £40,776. After one year, dental core trainees earn a basic salary between £52,656 and £65,048.

8.173 Therefore, the minimum income for essential local workers in CWAC who do not receive subsidised accommodation is £24,465 for a band 1 NHS worker. However, most of the other essential roles earn over £30,000.

8.174 With a salary of £30,000, an individual might be able to buy a home for around £150,000 (based on a 10% deposit and 4.5 times mortgage multiple) and with two salaries at this level, the household would be able to afford around £300,000.

8.175 This latter figure would allow households access to much of the market in CWAC, given an estimated lower quartile cost of buying housing at £200,000, but a single income would make home ownership difficult.

8.176 Based on income levels alone (i.e., no account of savings), essential local workers could be a target for affordable home-ownership products.

8.177 In addition, evidence suggests that essential local worker incomes will often sit in the gap between being able to buy and rent (given the study estimates an income of around £36,000 is needed to rent privately without the need for subsidy, or spending more than 30% of income on housing). This falls to £30,900 if 35% is spent.

8.178 Overall, however, the analysis does point towards there being a particular need for affordable housing for essential workers, and this is confirmed by the engagement.

8.179 Such workers make up a large minority of the workforce, as is the case in other areas, and they are currently slightly more likely to be owner-occupiers.

8.180 However, based on local incomes, access to market housing and particularly owner occupation may be restricted by income, particularly for support and care workers and younger or junior staff in other essential roles, and it may be appropriate to consider whether or not some affordable properties should be set aside for essential local workers.

8.181 The previous First Homes PPG did state that “authorities can therefore prioritise key workers for First Homes, and are encouraged to do so”. Whether this could be extended to other forms of affordable home ownership remains to be seen.

8.182 Some local authorities (including Manchester) and regional bodies (GLA) do promote key worker accommodation for those in eligible occupations; therefore, if there was a demonstrable need, then such housing could be explicitly allocated to key workers.

8.183 Whilst this analysis highlights a specific need for affordable housing for essential local workers, it may be that other (non-affordable) products might be suitable for particular groups.

8.184 This might include Build to Rent housing, which, for example, might have a specific target of NHS staff on rotation (staff who seek higher quality accommodation close to work but would not be looking to buy due to the possibility of moving to another location in the future).

8.185 Build to Rent housing (and other rented products) are discussed later in this report when considering the private rented sector. But engagement with local agents does reveal a demand for this type of accommodation.

8.186 Through engagement with the NHS, it was also suggested that a certain percentage of low-cost home ownership is marketed to key workers initially before reverting to the market if there is no demand. It was argued that this will ensure that local infrastructure is sustained.

8.187 Additionally, it was suggested that on strategic development sites, there may well be some units that are ringfenced for key worker development. This recently occurred on the Hartree development in Cambridge.

Policy response

8.188 It is not possible through the housing needs assessment to set out the amount of affordable housing to be required through policy, as this will largely depend on the viability of provision.

8.189 We do, however, note the current policy position in the Part One Local Plan, which is an overall target of 30% with no specific tenure mix (this to be determined locally based on up-to-date evidence).

8.190 It is considered that a policy target of 30% or more would provide a suitable starting point for viability testing and that this report can provide advice on the tenure split, particularly in light of the December 2024 NPPF which says (in paragraph 64) that *'planning policies should specify the type of affordable housing required (including the minimum proportion of Social Rent homes required)'.*

8.191 Overall, it is recommended that the Council consider seeking a split between rented and intermediate housing in an 80:20 ratio. This is considered justified, as households with a need for rented products are more likely to have acute needs and fewer housing-market options. The Council will need to consider whether this ratio is appropriate especially in relation to smaller sites.

8.192 Still, the inclusion of 20% as intermediate housing does help to provide a broader mix of housing (although the evidence of difficulties in making intermediate housing affordable due to current newbuild prices should be noted).

8.193 Whilst the main analysis in this report identified a split of 90:10 between those unable to buy OR rent and those able to rent but not buy, it was noted that it may be possible for some intermediate products to be at a low enough cost to be affordable to those unable to rent or buy in the market – this might include shared ownership at lower equity share levels or rent-to-buy housing.

8.194 In terms of more specific types of affordable housing, the analysis suggests around 70% of rented homes should be at social rents (the rest at affordable rents).

8.195 The analysis also suggests it is unlikely for there to be a role for discounted market housing (including First Homes), with the primary focus likely to be on shared ownership (and possibly rent-to-buy housing).

8.196 The following table sets out a suggested tenure split based on the evidence in this report. This would still be subject to viability and to the potential for the Council to make alternative choices.

8.197 For example, it is possible that increasing levels of intermediate housing would increase overall delivery, and this may be considered preferable to providing homes at social rents (of course, the opposite could also be the decision made – more social rents, fewer homes overall).

8.198 Overall, the recommendation is for an 80:20 split, with the majority (70%) of rented housing at social rents and the 20% of intermediate housing focusing on shared ownership and rent-to-buy; no targets are suggested for discounted market sale or First Homes although the Council could choose to include these tenures in policy to reflect viability and place-making priorities.

8.199 The categories used in the table below are consistent with the affordable housing definitions set out in Annex 2 of the NPPF.

Table 8.29 Suggested mix of affordable housing by tenure

Type of affordable housing	Recommended Target (subject to viability)
a) Social Rent	55%
b) Other affordable housing to rent (capped at LHA rates)	25%
c) Discounted market sales housing	N/A
d) Other affordable routes to home ownership (Shared Ownership, Rent to Buy)	20%

Source: Iceni analysis

8.200 Although the recommendations do not include any provision for discounted market sales (DMS) housing, there may be specific situations where the Council would consider this product (as previously discussed).

8.201 While these targets are given as a general guide, a more localised mix may be appropriate. For example, to support community cohesion or for example rural areas that do not see that high a demand for affordable housing (Registered Providers struggle to fill them) because they lack access to jobs and services. It may mean seeking a higher percentage of Intermediate products.

Affordable Housing Need - Summary

8.202 The evidence indicates that there is an acute need for affordable housing in the Borough and a need in all sub-areas.

8.203 The majority of need is from households who are unable to buy OR rent and therefore points particularly towards a need for rented affordable housing rather than affordable home ownership.

8.204 Despite the level of need being high, it is not considered that this points to any requirement for the Council to increase the Local Plan housing requirement due to affordable needs.

8.205 The link between affordable need and overall need (of all tenures) is complex, and in trying to make a link, it must be remembered that many of those picked up as having an affordable need are already in housing (and therefore do not generate a net additional need for a home).

8.206 In addition, the private rented sector is providing benefit-supported accommodation for many households, and the sector is growing. That said, the level of affordable housing need suggests the Council should maximise the delivery of such housing at every opportunity.

8.207 Although a clear need for rented forms of affordable housing was identified, the study also considers different types of intermediate housing (or Affordable Home Ownership (AHO)) as these may have a role to play.

8.208 Shared ownership is likely to be suitable for households with more marginal affordability (those only just able to afford to rent privately) as it has the advantage of a lower deposit and subsidised rent. There was no strong evidence of a need for First Homes or discounted market housing more generally due to new build costs.

8.209 When determining the appropriate mix of affordable housing, including the balance between rented and ownership products, the Council should consider both the level of need and scheme viability.

8.210 While affordable home ownership options may be more viable and enable higher delivery, it is important to recognise that households requiring rented accommodation typically have more acute needs and fewer alternative housing options.

8.211 Overall, the analysis identifies a notable need for affordable housing, and it is clear that the provision of new affordable housing is an important and pressing issue in the area.

8.212 We have also identified a need for affordable housing options, including LCHO for Essential Local Workers. The council should therefore work with developers to support this group's attraction and retention through an improved housing offer, which may require policy intervention.

8.213 It may be that income levels of some key workers mean social rent or affordable rent would not be appropriate but intermediate housing could be prioritised.

8.214 It does, however, need to be stressed that this report does not provide an affordable housing target; the amount of affordable housing delivered will need to reflect the amount that can viably be provided.

8.215 The evidence does, however, suggest that affordable housing delivery should be maximised where opportunities arise.

9. Need for Different Sizes of Homes

Introduction

9.1 This section considers the appropriate mix of housing across Cheshire West & Chester, with a particular focus on the sizes of homes required in different tenure groups.

9.2 This section looks at a range of statistics in relation to families (generally described as households with dependent children) before moving on to look at how the number of households in different age groups is projected to change moving forward.

Background Data

9.3 The number of families in Cheshire West & Chester (defined for the purpose of this assessment as any household which contains at least one dependent child) totalled 41,000 as of the 2021 Census, accounting for 26% of households; this proportion is slightly lower than seen across other areas.

Table 9.1 Households with Dependent Children (2021)

	Cheshire West & Chester		North West	England
	No.	%	%	%
Married couple	21,615	13.9%	13.1%	14.4%
Cohabiting couple	7,489	4.8%	4.9%	4.5%
Lone parent	9,590	6.2%	7.7%	6.9%
Other households	2,324	1.5%	2.3%	2.7%
All other households	114,138	73.6%	72.0%	71.5%
Total	155,156	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total with dependent children	41,018	26.4%	28.0%	28.5%

Source: Census (2021)

9.4 The table below shows the same information for each of the sub-areas. There are some variations in the proportion of households with dependent children, with the highest in Winsford (30%) and the lowest in Neston (22%).

9.5 Winsford and Ellesmere Port show particularly high proportions of lone parent households, with the opposite being the case in the three rural sub-areas.

Table 9.2 Households with dependent children (2021) – sub-areas

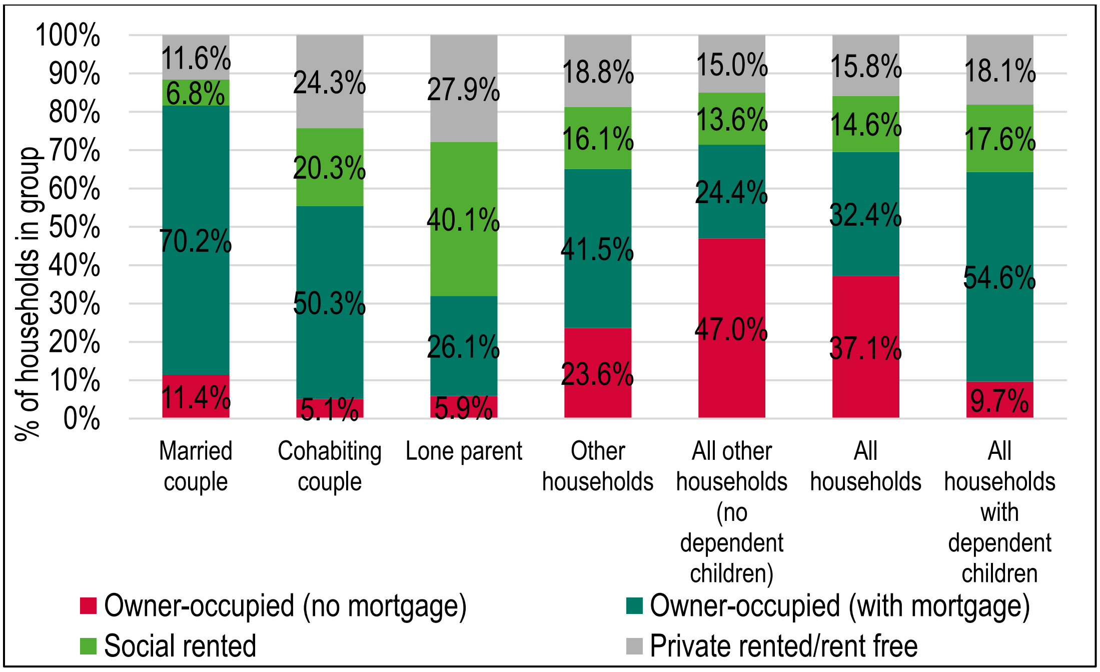
	Married couple	Co-habiting couple	Lone parent	Other house-holds	All other house-holds	Total	Total with depend-ent children
Chester	13.5%	4.2%	5.9%	1.3%	75.1%	100.0%	24.9%
Ellesmere Port	12.6%	6.0%	8.2%	1.7%	71.5%	100.0%	28.5%
Helsby & Frodsham	14.6%	3.7%	5.3%	1.0%	75.4%	100.0%	24.6%
Neston	12.2%	3.3%	4.9%	1.3%	78.3%	100.0%	21.7%
Northwich	15.2%	5.3%	6.3%	1.4%	71.7%	100.0%	28.3%
Rural North East	15.6%	4.2%	4.7%	1.5%	74.0%	100.0%	26.0%
Rural North West	15.7%	3.3%	3.7%	1.8%	75.5%	100.0%	24.5%
Rural South	16.0%	4.1%	4.5%	1.5%	73.8%	100.0%	26.2%
Winsford	12.0%	7.1%	8.5%	2.0%	70.4%	100.0%	29.6%
Total	13.9%	4.8%	6.2%	1.5%	73.6%	100.0%	26.4%

Source: Census (2021)

9.6 The figure below shows the current tenure of households with dependent children. There are some considerable differences by household type, with lone parents having a very high proportion living in the social rented and private rented sectors.

9.7 Across the Council area, only 32% of lone-parent households are owner-occupiers compared with 81% of married couples with children.

Figure 9.1 Tenure of households with dependent children (2021) – Cheshire West & Chester

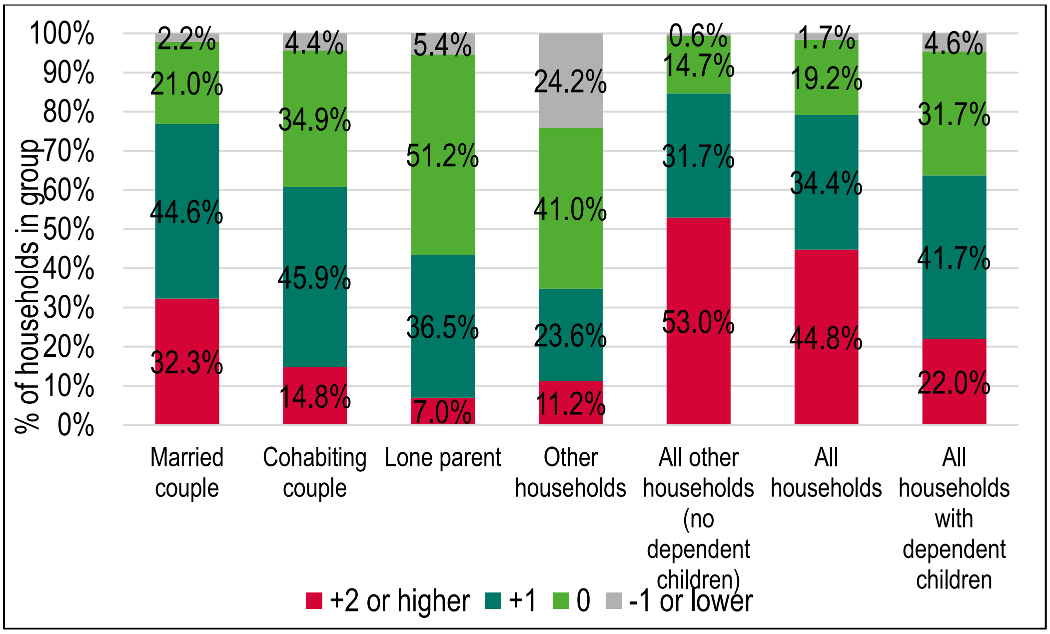


Source: Census (2021)

9.8 The figure below shows levels of overcrowding and under-occupancy of households with dependent children. This shows higher levels of overcrowding (minus figure) for all household types with dependent children, with 5% of all lone parents and 24% of 'other' households being overcrowded.

9.9 Overall, some 5% of households with dependent children are overcrowded, compared with less than 1% of other households. Levels of under-occupancy (positive figures) are also notably lower in households with dependent children.

Figure 9.2 Occupancy rating of households with dependent children (2021) – Cheshire West & Chester



Source: Census (2021)

The Mix of Housing

9.10 A model has been developed that starts with the current profile of housing by size (bedrooms) and tenure. In the data, information is available on household ages and the typical sizes of the homes they occupy. Using demographic projections, it is possible to see which age groups are expected to change in number and by how much.

9.11 On the assumption that occupancy patterns for each age group (within each tenure) remain the same, it is therefore possible to assess the profile of housing needed over the assessment period (taken to be 2025-45 to be consistent with other analyses in this report).

9.12 An important starting point is to understand the current balance of housing in the area – the table below profiles the sizes of homes in different tenure groups across areas.

9.13 The data shows a market stock (owner-occupied) that is dominated by 3+-bedroom homes (making up 82% of the total in this tenure group, a higher proportion to that seen both nationally and across the North West).

9.14 The profile of the social rented sector is broadly similar across areas (slightly more 2- and 3-bedroom homes in Cheshire West & Chester), whilst the private rented sector is generally slightly larger than seen in other locations – this may in part be due to the student population.

9.15 However, the most notable difference is the lower proportion of 1-bedroom homes. Observations about the current mix inform conclusions about the future mix later in this section.

Table 9.3 Number of Bedrooms by Tenure, 2021

		Cheshire West & Chester	North West	England
Owner-occupied	1-bedroom	2%	2%	4%
	2-bedrooms	17%	21%	21%
	3-bedrooms	50%	51%	46%
	4+-bedrooms	32%	26%	29%
	Total	100%	100%	100%
	Ave. no. beds	3.11	3.00	3.01
Social rented	1-bedroom	24%	28%	29%
	2-bedrooms	37%	34%	36%
	3-bedrooms	35%	34%	31%
	4+-bedrooms	3%	4%	4%
	Total	100%	100%	100%
	Ave. no. beds	2.18	2.14	2.10
Private rented	1-bedroom	13%	16%	21%
	2-bedrooms	38%	43%	39%
	3-bedrooms	37%	33%	29%
	4+-bedrooms	11%	9%	11%
	Total	100%	100%	100%
	Ave. no. beds	2.47	2.34	2.30

Source: Census (2021)

Overview of Methodology

9.16 The method to consider future housing mix looks at the ages of the Household Reference Persons and how these are projected to change over time. The following sub-sections describe some of the key analyses.

Understanding How Households Occupy Homes

9.17 Whilst the demographic projections provide a good indication of how the population and household structure will develop, it is not a simple task to convert the net increase in the number of households into a suggested profile for additional housing to be provided.

9.18 The main reason for this is that in the market sector, households are able to buy or rent any size of property (subject to what they can afford) and therefore, knowledge of the profile of households in an area does not directly transfer into the sizes of property to be provided.

9.19 The size of housing which households occupy relates more to their wealth and age than the number of people they contain. For example, there is no reason why a single person cannot buy (or choose to live in) a 4-bedroom home as long as they can afford it, and hence, projecting an increase in single-person households does not automatically imply a need for smaller units.

9.20 That said, issues of supply can also impact occupancy patterns. For example, a supply of additional smaller-level access homes may encourage older people to downsize. Still, in the absence of such accommodation, these households remain living in their larger homes.

9.21 The issue of choice is less relevant in the affordable sector (particularly since the introduction of the social sector size criteria), where households are allocated properties which reflect the size of the household. However, there will still be some level of under-occupation moving forward, particularly among older people and working households who may be able to under-occupy housing (e.g., those who can afford to pay the spare room subsidy ('bedroom tax')).

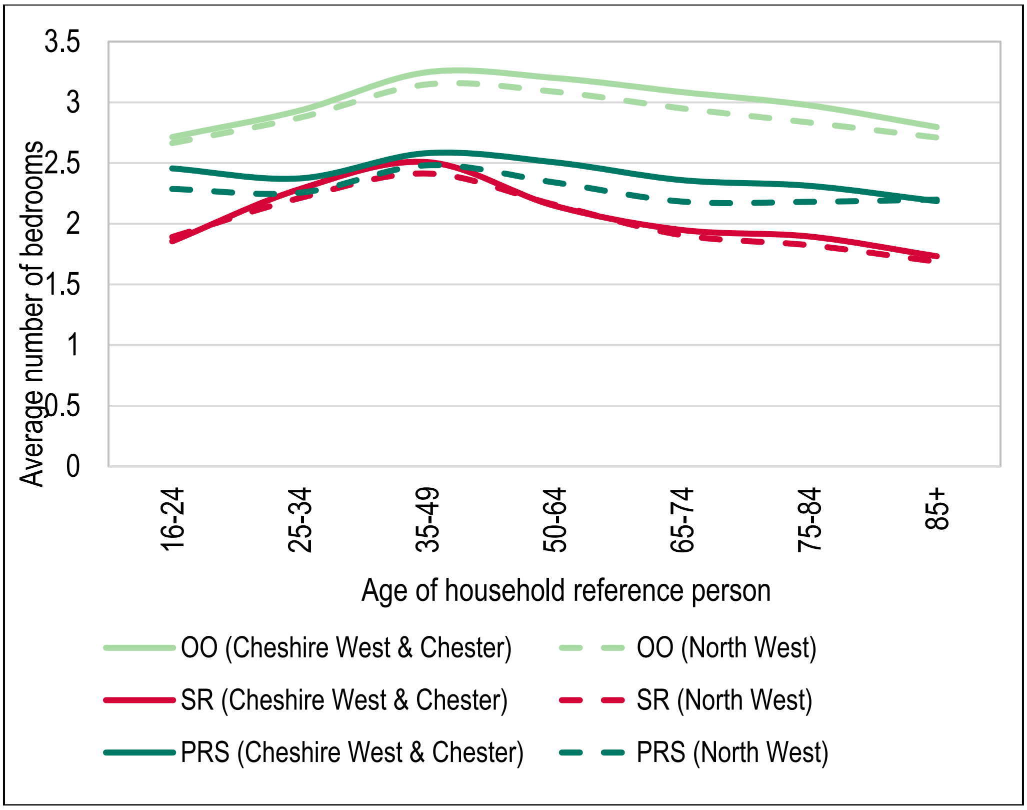
9.22 The approach used is to interrogate information derived in the projections about the number of household reference persons (HRPs) in each age group and apply this to the profile of housing within these groups (data being drawn from the 2021 Census).

9.23 The figure below shows an estimate of how the average number of bedrooms varies by different ages of HRP and broad tenure group for Cheshire West & Chester and the North West region.

9.24 In all sectors, the average size of accommodation rises over time to typically reach a peak around the age of 50. After peaking, the average dwelling size decreases slightly, as typically some households downsize as they get older.

9.25 The analysis also shows Cheshire West & Chester as having slightly larger dwelling sizes across many age and tenure groups when compared with regional data.

Figure 9.3 Average Bedrooms by Age and Tenure in Cheshire West & Chester and the region



Source: Census (2021)

9.26 The analysis uses the existing occupancy patterns at a local and regional level as a starting point for analysis and applies these to the projected changes in Household Reference Person by age discussed below.

9.27 The analysis has been used to derive outputs for three broad categories. These are:

- **Market Housing** – which is taken to follow the occupancy profiles in the market sector (i.e. owner-occupiers and the private rented sector);
- **Affordable Home Ownership** – which is taken to follow the occupancy profile in the private rented sector (this is seen as reasonable, as the Government's desired growth in home ownership looks to be largely driven by a wish to see households move out of private renting); and

- **Rented Affordable Housing** – which is taken to follow the occupancy profile in the social rented sector. The affordable sector in the analysis to follow would include social and affordable rented housing.

9.28 Although the analysis is segmented into three broad categories, there is the additional possibility of build-to-rent housing.

9.29 If such a scheme were to come forward, then it is considered that the outputs and profile of need for affordable home ownership would be appropriate to apply – both tenures are essentially serving much of the same market.

Changes to Households by Age

9.30 The table below presents the projected change in households by age of household reference person under the Standard Method. This shows growth is expected across all age groups, particularly older age groups (notably 85+).

Table 9.4 Projected Change in Household by Age of HRP in Cheshire West & Chester

	2025	2045	Change in Households	% Change
Under 25	3,803	3,931	128	3.4%
25-34	20,312	23,352	3,039	15.0%
35-49	39,619	50,423	10,805	27.3%
50-64	46,902	52,458	5,555	11.8%
65-74	23,790	26,787	2,998	12.6%
75-84	21,385	29,408	8,023	37.5%
85+	8,419	15,307	6,888	81.8%
TOTAL	164,230	201,667	37,436	22.8%

Source: Iceni Analysis

Modelled Outputs

9.31 By following the methodology set out above and drawing on the sources shown, a series of outputs have been derived to consider the likely size requirement of housing within each of the three broad tenures at a local authority level.

9.32 The analysis is based on considering both local and regional occupancy patterns. The data linking to local occupancy will, to some extent, reflect the role and function of the local area, whilst the regional data will help to establish any particular gaps (or relative surpluses) of different sizes/tenures of homes when considered in a wider context.

9.33 The table below shows the modelled outputs of need by dwelling size in the three broad tenures. Market housing focuses on 3+-bedroom homes; affordable home ownership on 2- and 3-bedroom accommodation; and rented affordable housing, which shows a slightly smaller profile again.

Table 9.5 Initial Modelled Mix of Housing by Size and Tenure – Cheshire West & Chester

	1-bedroom	2-bedrooms	3-bedrooms	4+-bedrooms
Market	5%	24%	49%	22%
Affordable home ownership	14%	40%	37%	9%
Affordable housing (rented)	28%	35%	34%	4%

Source: Housing Market Model

Rightsizing

9.34 The analysis above sets out the potential need for housing if occupancy patterns remain the same as they were in 2021 (with differences from the current stock profile being driven by demographic change).

9.35 It is, however, worth also considering that the 2021 profile will have included households who are overcrowded (and therefore need a larger home than they actually live in) and also those who under-occupy (have more bedrooms than they need).

9.36 There is a case to seek for new stock to more closely match actual size requirements. Whilst it would not be reasonable to expect to remove all under-occupancy (particularly in the market sector), it is the case that in seeking to make the most efficient use of land, it would be prudent to look to reduce this over time. Further analysis has been undertaken to take account of overcrowding and under-occupancy (by tenure).

9.37 The table below shows a cross-tabulation of a household's occupancy rating and the number of bedrooms in their home (for owner-occupiers). This shows a high number of households with at least two spare bedrooms that are living in homes with three or more bedrooms.

9.38 There are also a number of overcrowded households. In the owner-occupied sector in 2021, there were 96,900 households with some degree of under-occupation and around 870 overcrowded households – some 90% of all owner-occupiers have some degree of under-occupancy.

Table 9.6 Cross-tabulation of occupancy rating and number of bedrooms (owner-occupied sector) – Cheshire West & Chester

Occupancy rating	Number of bedrooms				
	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4+-bed	TOTAL
+2 spare bedrooms	0	0	33,292	28,567	61,859
+1 spare bedrooms	0	15,009	15,177	4,838	35,024
0 "Right-sized"	2,009	2,720	4,772	644	10,145
-1 too few bedrooms	65	283	436	87	871
TOTAL	2,074	18,012	53,677	34,136	107,899

Source: Census (2021)

9.39 For completeness, the tables below show the same information for the social and private rented sectors. In both cases, there are more under-occupying households than overcrowded households, but the differences are less marked than in owner-occupied housing.

Table 9.7 Cross-tabulation of occupancy rating and number of bedrooms (social rented sector) – Cheshire West & Chester

Occupancy rating	Number of bedrooms				
	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4+-bed	TOTAL
+2 spare bedrooms	0	0	2,106	323	2,429
+1 spare bedrooms	0	4,639	2,689	241	7,569
0 "Right-sized"	5,407	3,309	2,778	148	11,642
-1 too few bedrooms	147	406	477	39	1,069
TOTAL	5,554	8,354	8,050	751	22,709

Source: Census (2021)

Table 9.8 Cross-tabulation of occupancy rating and number of bedrooms (private rented sector) – Cheshire West & Chester

Occupancy rating	Number of bedrooms				
	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4+-bed	TOTAL
+2 spare bedrooms	0	0	3,491	1,694	5,185
+1 spare bedrooms	0	6,344	3,647	734	10,725
0 "Right-sized"	3,064	2,779	1,851	285	7,979
-1 too few bedrooms	116	300	196	41	653
TOTAL	3,180	9,423	9,185	2,754	24,542

Source: Census (2021)

9.40 In using this data in the modelling, an adjustment is made to move some of those who would have been picked up in the modelling as under-occupying into smaller accommodation.

9.41 Where there is under-occupation by two or more bedrooms, the adjustment takes 25% of this group and assigns to a '+1' occupancy. This does need to be recognised as an assumption, but can be seen as reasonable, as they do retain some (considerable) degree of under-occupation (which is likely) and also seek to model a better match between household needs and the size of their home.

9.42 For overcrowded households, a move in the other direction is made; in this case, households are moved up by as many bedrooms as is needed to resolve the problems (this is applied to all overcrowded households).

9.43 The adjustments for under-occupation and overcrowding lead to the suggested mix as set out in the following tables. This suggests a slightly different profile of homes is needed (compared to the initial modelling), including an increase in the need for 4+-bedroom homes in the rented affordable housing sector due to levels of overcrowding.

Table 9.9 Modelled Mix of Housing by Size and Tenure – Cheshire West & Chester

	1-bedroom	2-bedrooms	3-bedrooms	4+-bedrooms
Market	4%	32%	46%	18%
Affordable home ownership	13%	43%	36%	8%
Affordable housing (rented)	27%	36%	32%	5%

Source: Housing Market Model

9.44 Across the Council area, the analysis points to over a quarter of the social/affordable housing need being for 1-bedroom homes, and it is of interest to see how much of this is due to older person households.

9.45 In the future, household sizes are projected to drop, whilst the population of older people will increase. Older person households (as shown earlier) are more likely to occupy smaller dwellings. The impact that older people have on the demand for smaller stock is outlined in the table below.

9.46 This indeed identifies a slightly larger profile of homes needed for households where the household reference person is aged under 65, with a concentration of 1-bedroom homes for older people.

9.47 This information can be used to inform the mix required for housing for older people (e.g. age restricted), although it does need to be noted that not all older people would be expected to live in homes solely for older people.

9.48 The 2, 3, and 4+-bedroom categories have been merged for the purposes of older persons, as we would not generally expect many (if any) households in this category to need (or indeed be able to be allocated) more than two bedrooms in the rented affordable housing sector.

Table 9.10 Modelled Mix of Housing by Size and Age – affordable housing (rented) – Cheshire West & Chester

	1-bedroom	2-bedrooms	3-bedrooms	4+-bedrooms
Under 65	20%	35%	38%	7%
65 and over	40%	60%		
All affordable housing (rented)	27%	36%	32%	5%

Source: Housing Market Model

9.49 A further analysis of the need for rented affordable housing is to compare the need with the supply (turnover) of different sizes of accommodation.

9.50 This links back to estimates of need in the previous section (an annual need for 1,529 dwellings per annum from households unable to buy OR rent) with additional data from CoRe about the sizes of homes let over the past three years.

9.51 This analysis is quite evident in showing the very low supply of larger homes relative to the need for 4+-bedroom accommodation in particular, where it is estimated the supply is only around 9% of the need arising each year. In contrast, for 1- and 2-bedroom homes, over a third of the need can be met.

Table 9.11 Need for rented affordable housing by number of bedrooms – Cheshire West & Chester

	Gross Annual Need	Gross Annual Supply	Net Annual Need	As a % of total net annual need	Supply as a % of gross need
1-bedroom	629	218	411	26.9%	34.7%
2-bedrooms	899	352	547	35.8%	39.1%
3-bedrooms	614	127	487	31.8%	20.7%
4+-bedrooms	92	8	84	5.5%	9.0%
Total	2,234	705	1,529	100.0%	31.6%

Source: Iceni analysis

Indicative Targets for Different Sizes of Property by Tenure

9.52 The analysis below provides some indicative targets for different sizes of home (by tenure). The conclusions take account of a range of factors, including the modelled outputs and an understanding of the stock profile and levels of under-occupancy and overcrowding.

9.53 The analysis (for rented affordable housing) also draws on data from the local authority Housing Register with regard to the profile of need, as well as taking a broader view of issues such as the flexibility of homes to accommodate changes to households (e.g. the lack of flexibility offered by a 1-bedroom home for a couple looking to start a family).

9.54 The Housing Register data below shows a pattern of need focused on 1-bedroom homes, but with around a fifth needing 3+-bedroom accommodation (18.8%).

Table 9.12 Size of Social/Affordable Rented Housing Needed – Housing Register Information (March 2025)

1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	More than 3 bedrooms	Total
3,220	1,591	833	287	5,931
54.3%	26.8%	14.0%	4.8%	100.0%

Source: LAHS

Social/Affordable Rented

9.55 Bringing together the above, a number of factors are recognised. This includes recognising that it is unlikely that all affordable housing needs will be met and that it is likely that households with a need for larger homes will have greater priority (as they are more likely to contain children). The following mix of social/affordable rented housing is therefore suggested:

- 1-bedroom: 30%
- 2-bedrooms: 35%
- 3-bedrooms: 25%
- 4+-bedrooms: 10%

9.56 If a development is to include housing specifically for older people (e.g. forms of age-restricted housing), then broadly a 50:50 split between 1- and 2-bedroom homes is recommended.

9.57 The inclusion of some 2-bedroom homes is considered sensible with the aim to promote the opportunity for older person households to downsize – a 2-bed offering being more likely to encourage this than 1-bed homes.

9.58 Also, whilst technically most older person households will only have a ‘need’ for a 1-bed home, a larger property remains affordable as the bedroom tax/spare room subsidy does not impact most older person households.

9.59 It should be noted that the above recommendations are to a considerable degree based on projecting the need forward to 2045 and will vary over time.

9.60 It may be at a point in time that Housing Register data identifies a shortage of housing of a particular size/type, which could lead to the mix of housing being altered from the overall suggested requirement.

Affordable Home Ownership

9.61 In the affordable home ownership sector, a profile of housing that more closely matches the outputs of the modelling is suggested. It is considered that the provision of affordable home ownership should be more explicitly focused on delivering smaller family housing for younger households and childless couples.

9.62 The conclusions also take account of the earlier observation that it may be challenging to make homes genuinely affordable for AHO due to new-build prices. Based on this analysis, it is suggested that the following mix of affordable home ownership would be appropriate:

- 1-bedroom: 10%
- 2-bedrooms: 45%
- 3-bedrooms: 35%
- 4+-bedrooms: 10%

Market Housing

9.63 Finally, in the market sector, a balance of dwellings is suggested that takes account of both the demand for homes and the changing demographic profile (as well as observations about the current mix when compared with other locations and also the potential to reduce levels of under-occupancy slightly).

9.64 We have also had regard to the potential for rightsizing, but also recognise that in the market sector, there is limited ability to control what households purchase. This shows a slightly larger recommended profile than other tenure groups.

- 1-bedroom: 5%
- 2-bedrooms: 30%
- 3-bedrooms: 45%
- 4+-bedrooms: 20%

9.65 Although the analysis has quantified this on the basis of the market modelling and an understanding of the current housing market (including the stock profile in different tenures as set out earlier in this section), it does not necessarily follow that such prescriptive figures should be included in the plan making process (although it will be helpful to include an indication of the broad mix to be sought across the Council area).

9.66 Demand can change over time, linked to macro-economic factors and local supply. The Council's policy aspirations could also influence the mix sought.

9.67 The suggested figures can be used as a monitoring tool to ensure that future delivery is not unbalanced when compared with the likely requirements as driven by demographic change in the area.

9.68 The recommendations can also be used as a set of guidelines to consider the appropriate mix on larger development sites, and the Council could expect justification for a housing mix on such sites which significantly differs from that modelled herein.

9.69 Site location and area character are also relevant considerations in determining the appropriate mix of market housing on individual development sites.

Smaller-Area Housing Mix

9.70 The analysis above has focused on overall Council area-wide needs with conclusions at the strategic level. It should, however, be recognised that there will be variations in the need within the area due to the different roles and functions of a location and the specific characteristics of local households (which can also vary over time).

9.71 This report does not seek to model a smaller-area housing mix, although data is available that can help inform specific local issues (including data about household composition, current housing mix and overcrowding/under-occupation). Below are some points for consideration when looking at needs in any specific location:

a) Whilst there are differences in the stock profile in different locations, this should not necessarily be seen as indicating particular surpluses or shortfalls of particular types and sizes of homes;
b) As well as looking at the stock, an understanding of the role and function of areas is important. For example, areas traditionally favoured by family households might be expected to provide a greater proportion of larger homes;
c) That said, some of these areas will have very few small/cheaper stocks, and so consideration needs to be given to diversifying the stock; and
d) The location/quality of sites will also have an impact on the mix of housing. For example, brownfield sites in urban locations may be more suited to flatted development (as well as recognising the point above about role and function), whereas a more suburban/rural site may be more appropriate for family housing. Other considerations (such as proximity to public transport) may impact on a reasonable mix at a local level.

9.72 Overall, it is suggested that the Council should broadly seek the same mix of housing in all locations as a starting point in policy; but would be flexible to a different mix where specific local characteristics suggest (such as site characteristics and location)

9.73 Additionally, in the affordable sector, it may be the case that Housing Register data for a smaller area identifies a shortage of housing of a particular size/type, which could lead to the mix of housing being altered from the overall suggested requirement.

Built-form

9.74 A final issue for discussion is the need/demand for different built forms of homes. In particular, this discussion focuses on bungalows and the need for flats vs. houses.

Bungalows

9.75 The sources used for analysis in this report make it difficult to quantify a need/demand for bungalows in the Council area, as Census data (which is used to look at occupancy profiles) does not separately identify this type of accommodation.

9.76 Data from the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) does, however, provide estimates of the number of bungalows (by bedrooms), although no tenure split is available.

9.77 The table below shows a notable proportion of homes in Cheshire West & Chester are bungalows (10% of all flats and houses), with 42% of these having 2 bedrooms, and a further 38% 3-bedrooms. A slightly lower proportion (9%) of homes across England are bungalows.

Table 9.13 Number of dwellings by property type and number of bedrooms (March 2024) – Cheshire West & Chester

	Number of bedrooms					All
	1	2	3	4+	Not Known	
Bungalow	1,640	6,820	6,250	1,570	30	16,310
Flat/Maisonette	9,670	10,970	990	300	40	21,970
Terraced house	520	12,620	22,920	2,640	20	38,720
Semi-detached house	220	6,770	36,920	4,990	30	48,920
Detached house	60	910	12,900	24,220	100	38,200
All flats/houses	12,110	38,090	79,980	33,720	220	164,120
Annexe	-	-	-	-	-	150
Other	-	-	-	-	-	1,140
Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	420
All properties	-	-	-	-	-	165,820

Source: Valuation Office Agency

9.78 Bungalows are often the first choice for older people seeking suitable accommodation in later life, and there is generally a high demand when it becomes available (this is different from specialist accommodation for older people, which would have some degree of care or support). There may also be a demand from households containing someone with a disability (across all age groups).

9.79 The demand for bungalows can be seen in the pricing of this dwelling type, with an internet search of homes for sale suggesting a median asking price for a 2-bedroom bungalow to be around £275,000, compared to £190,000 for 2-bedroom homes of other built-forms.

9.80 Overall, the Council should consider the potential role of bungalows as part of the future mix of housing. Such housing may be particularly attractive to older owner-occupiers (many of whom are equity-rich), which may assist in encouraging households to downsize. However, the downside to providing bungalows is that they are relatively land-intensive.

9.81 Bungalows are likely to meet a particular need and demand in the market sector, and also for rented affordable housing (for older people, as discussed in the next section of the report).

9.82 Bungalows are likely to particularly focus on 2-bedroom homes, including in the affordable sector, where such housing may encourage households to move from larger 'family-sized' accommodation (with 3+ bedrooms).

Flats versus Houses

9.83 Although there are some 1-bedroom houses and 3-bedroom flats, it is considered that the key discussion on built-form will be for 2-bedroom accommodation, where it might be expected that there would be a combination of both flats and houses. At a national level, 82% of all 1-bedroom homes are flats, 38% of 2-bedroom homes and just 5% of homes with 3 bedrooms.

9.84 The table below shows (for 2-bedroom accommodation) the proportion of homes by tenure that are classified as a flat, maisonette or apartment in Cheshire West & Chester, the region and England. This shows a relatively low proportion of flats in CWAC (26% of all 2-bedroom homes), and this would arguably point to the majority of 2-bedroom homes in the future being houses. The analysis also shows a higher proportion of flats in the social and private rented sectors (around a two-fifths of 2-bedroom homes in these sectors are flats).

Table 9.14 Proportion of 2-bedroom homes that are a flat, maisonette or apartment (by tenure)

	CWAC	North West	England
Owner-occupied	14%	14%	25%
Social rented	42%	39%	48%
Private rented	36%	39%	52%
All (2-bedroom)	26%	27%	38%

Source: 2021 Census

9.85 For completeness, the table below shows the proportion of flats in Cheshire West & Chester for all sizes of accommodation and different tenures. Of particular note is the very small proportion of 3+-bedroom homes as flats.

Table 9.15 Proportion of homes that are a flat, maisonette or apartment (by tenure and dwelling size) – Cheshire West & Chester

	1-bedroom	2-bedrooms	3-bedrooms	4+-bedrooms
Owner-occupied	54%	14%	1%	0%
Social rented	75%	42%	4%	4%
Private rented	80%	36%	4%	6%
All	72%	26%	1%	1%

Source: 2021 Census

9.86 As noted, this analysis would suggest that most 2-bedroom homes should be built as houses (or bungalows) rather than flats.

9.87 Any decisions will have to take account of site characteristics, which in some cases might point towards flatted development as being most appropriate.

9.88 The analysis would suggest that the affordable sector might be expected to see a higher proportion of flats than for market housing.

Housing Mix – Summary

9.89 Analysis of the future mix of housing required takes account of demographic change, including potential changes to the number of family households and the ageing of the population.

9.90 The proportion of households with dependent children in Cheshire West & Chester is below average, with around 26% of all households containing dependent children in 2021.

9.91 There are notable differences between different types of households, with married couples (with dependent children) seeing a high level of owner-occupation, whereas lone parents are particularly likely to live in social and private rented accommodation.

9.92 There is a range of factors which will influence demand for different sizes of homes, including demographic changes, future growth in real earnings, households' ability to save, economic performance and housing affordability.

9.93 The analysis linked to future demographic change concludes that the following represents an appropriate mix of affordable and market homes, which takes into account both household changes and the ageing of the population, as well as seeking to make more efficient use of new stock by not projecting forward the high levels of under-occupancy (which is notable in the market sector).

9.94 In all sectors, the analysis points to a particular need for 2- and 3-bedroom accommodation, with varying proportions of 1- and 4+-bedroom homes.

9.95 For rented affordable housing, there is a clear need for a range of different sizes of homes, including 35% to have at least 3-bedrooms, of which 10% should have at least 4-bedrooms. Our recommended mix is set out below.

Table 9.16 Suggested size mix of housing by tenure – Cheshire West & Chester

	Market	Affordable home ownership	Rented affordable housing
1-bedroom	5%	10%	30%
2-bedrooms	30%	45%	35%
3-bedrooms	45%	35%	25%
4+-bedrooms	20%	10%	10%

Source: Iceni analysis

9.96 The strategic conclusions in the affordable sector recognise the role that delivery of larger family homes can play in releasing a supply of smaller properties for other households.

9.97 Also recognised is the limited flexibility which 1-bedroom properties offer to changing household circumstances, which feed through into higher turnover and management issues.

9.98 The conclusions also take account of the current mix of housing by tenure and also the size requirements shown on the Housing Register.

9.99 The mix identified above could inform strategic policies although a flexible approach should be adopted. For example, in some areas, affordable housing registered providers find it challenging to sell 1-bedroom affordable home ownership (AHO) homes.

9.100 Therefore, the 1-bedroom elements of AHO might be better provided as 2-bedroom accommodation. That said, given current house prices, there are potential difficulties in making AHO genuinely affordable.

9.101 Additionally, in applying the mix to individual development sites, regard should be had to the nature of the site and character of the area, and to up-to-date evidence of need as well as the existing mix and turnover of properties at the local level. The Council should also monitor the mix of housing delivered.

10. Private Rented Sector

Introduction

10.1 This section of the report analyses different aspects of the private rental sector in Cheshire West and Chester, including HMOs, Build to Rent and PBSA (which is addressed in the next chapter).

10.2 As set out earlier in this report, in Cheshire West & Chester, the proportion of households renting privately in 2021 was 15.8%. This was lower than the benchmark areas.

10.3 Private renting had also grown by 2.1% points between 2011 and 2021, but this was at a slower rate than that seen nationally and regionally.

Rental Market

10.4 At the national level, Savills report that supply and demand are imbalanced in the private rental sector, leading to strong rental growth in recent years[17].

10.5 The rising cost of debt has meant that fewer people are able to afford to buy, while at the same time, fewer landlords are able to sustain their properties and are therefore leaving the market.

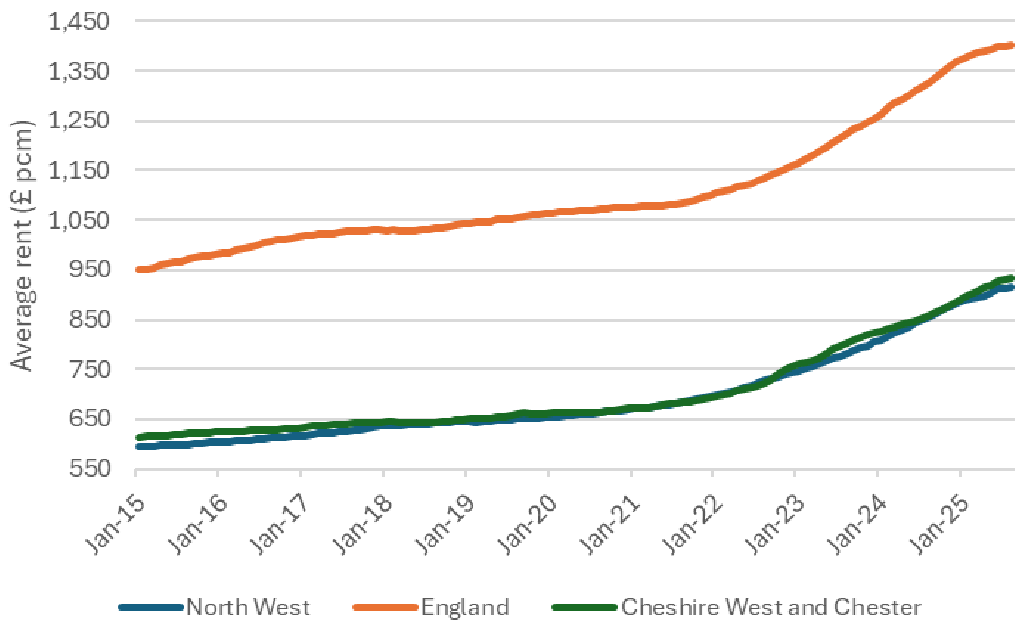
10.6 Cheshire West and Chester has seen steady rental growth since 2015, in line with regional averages as shown in the figure below, but with stronger growth evident since 2021.

10.7 While Cheshire West and Chester's trends follow the same overall trajectory as England as a whole, rents in Cheshire West and Chester are significantly lower.

[17] Savills, 2024 https://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/229130/368940-0

10.8 In the year to August 2025, the overall Median Rent in CWAC was £934 per calendar month (pcm), which was above the regional (£916 pcm) but below the national (£1,403 pcm) medians.

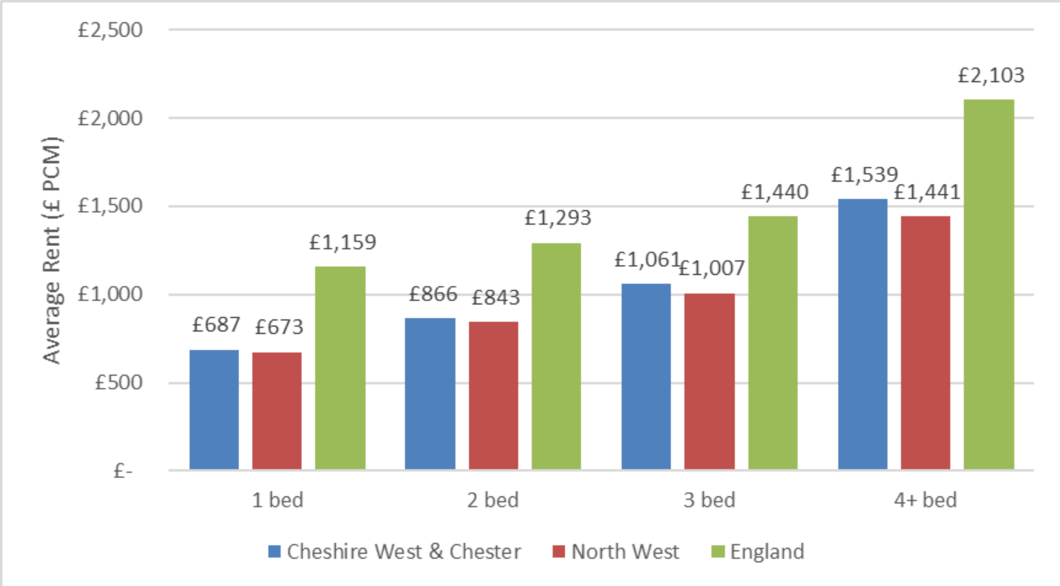
Figure 10.1 Median Rental Values



Source: Iceni analysis of ONS Data, 2025

10.9 The figure below sets out the property rents by size across Cheshire West & Chester and England. Cheshire West & Chester's rental costs are consistently lower than national comparators across different dwelling types and sizes, but slightly higher than regional rental prices.

Figure 10.2 Rental costs, by size (2025)



Source: Iceni analysis of ONS Data, 2025

Profile of tenants

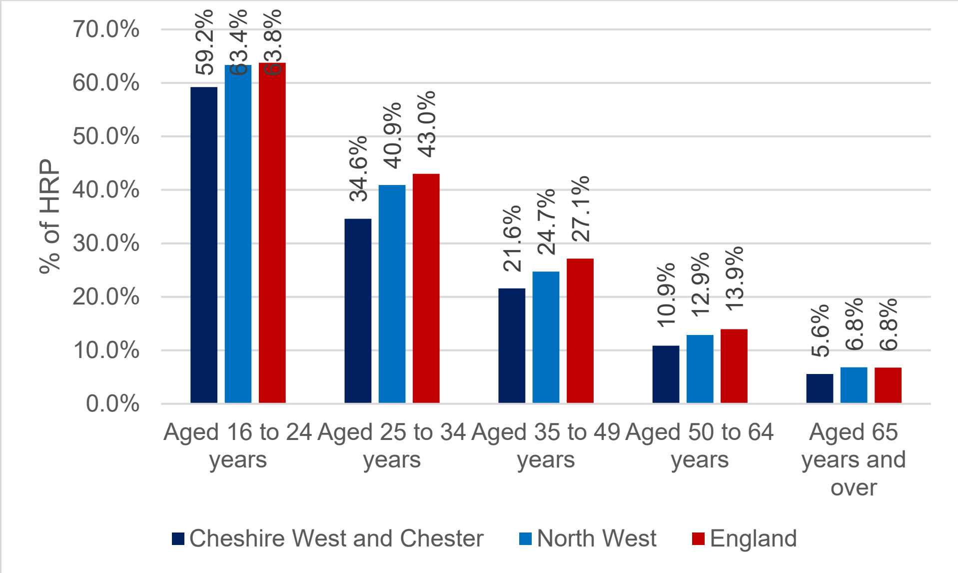
10.10 The census provides the best source and most comprehensive information on the profile of private rental sector tenants.

10.11 The following figure shows the age profile of tenants (using the household reference person[18]) in CWAC. People of all ages are under-represented compared to regional and national benchmarks.

10.12 It is also clear that the propensity for renting decreases with age, which is the case in all areas.

[18] individual within a household who is responsible for owning or renting the accommodation, or, if multiple people share that responsibility, the person with the highest income or, if incomes are equal, the eldest

Figure 10.3 Private rental sector tenant age profile (by household reference person)



Source: ONS Census 2021

10.13 Household composition provides another way to consider the PRS tenure profile. This is shown in the table below, with results for the total number of people recorded in privately rented dwellings and separately for households.

10.14 One-person households are the most common household type, making up 34.1% of households, although only 6.4% of them (1,572 people) are aged over 65. Because these households contain only a single person, they make up only 15.2% of the PRS population (a much lower proportion than the households).

10.15 Couples without children are also relatively common (18.9% of households or 16.9% of people), as are families with children, which is the group making up the highest proportion of people (17.6% of households and 29.9% of people).

10.16 Other households (which are likely to be HMOs and predominantly student households) make up 13% of all households in the PRS and 17.9% of people.

Table 10.1 Tenants and households in private rental sector - CWAC

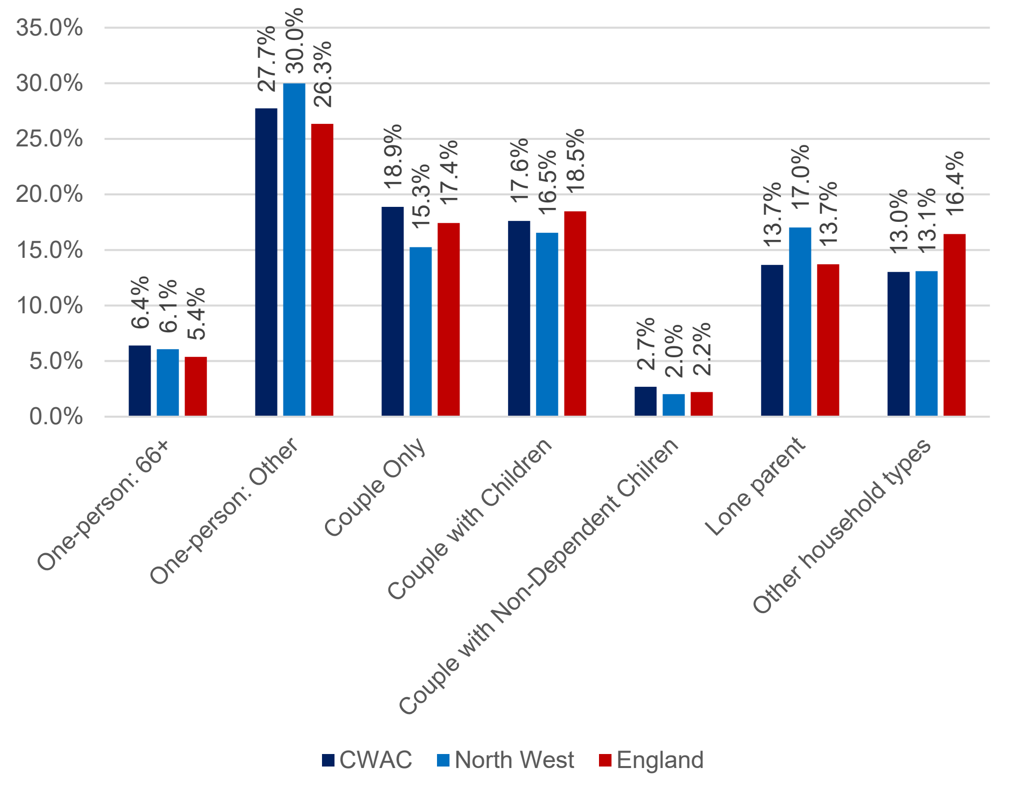
Household type	Number of people	% of people	Number of households	% of households
One-person: 66+	1,572	2.9%	1,572	6.4%
One-person: Other	6,809	12.4%	6,809	27.7%
Single family: Couple: No children	9,269	16.9%	4,634	18.9%
Single family: Couple: Dependent children	16,457	29.9%	4,322	17.6%
Single family: Couple: Non-dependent Children	2,140	3.9%	661	2.7%
Single family: Lone parent	8,954	16.3%	3,351	13.7%
Other household types	9,787	17.8%	3,195	13.0%
Total	54,988	100.0%	24,544	100.0%

Source: ONS Census 2021

10.17 Comparing this household profile to that of the North West and England confirms the proportion of other households in CWAC to be relatively low in the national context (13% and 16.4% respectively).

10.18 The comparison also shows single-person households aged over 65 and couple-only households to be over-represented in CWAC's PRS in comparison to the North West.

Figure 10.4 Private rental sector tenant household profile



Source: ONS Census 2021

Agent Engagement

10.19 Agent engagement was conducted over the course of the week commencing 22nd September 2025, with a range of letting agencies across Chester, Northwich, Ellesmere Port, Neston, Winsford, Helsby and Frodsham to understand local market conditions.

10.20 To note, local agent viewpoints reflect individual experiences and business focus and should therefore be considered alongside market data.

10.21 The following agents were spoken across all areas: Thornley Groves, Currans Homes, Carman Friend Estate Agents, Cavendish Estate Agents Ltd, Jordan & Halstead, Jackson-Stops Estate Agents, Rickitt Partnerships, Ashton & Grosvenor, Fine & Country, Northwood Chester, Marshall Tonks, Reeds Rains Estate Agents, Beresford Adams, Chester Place Lettings, Humphreys of Chester, Cavendish Rentals, Thomas Property Group, Town & Country Estate & Lettings Agents, Royal Fox Estates, Vincent James Estate Agents, Belvoir Lettings Agents, Clive Watkins Estate and Letting Agents, Hunter Estate & Letting Agent, Bridgfords Estate Agents, Swetenhams Estate Agents, Butters John Bee Estate & Lettings Agent, LMS Property Lettings, Hewitt Adams, Vista Abode and Grosvenor Properties.

10.22 Across the Borough, rental demand remains strong, and supply is limited, particularly for affordable and smaller homes such as two-bed apartments.

10.23 These are highly sought after by young couples and working professionals. The need for accessible housing is rising, especially among older renters and key workers.

10.24 Remote working trends have prompted demand for homes with additional space, but rental supply has been reduced by regulatory changes and landlords exiting the market.

10.25 Most areas across Cheshire West and Chester see high tenant demand for all property types, yet supply shortages restrict choice and drive up rental prices.

10.26 The market is also affected by landlords leaving, partly due to changes in the Renters Reform Act. This is reducing supply, which is now being outstripped by demand, and consequently, rents are increasing.

Chester

10.27 Rental demand is strong, and supply is limited, particularly for smaller, affordable homes. Two-bed apartments are popular, and the demand is mainly from young couples.

10.28 Agents noted that there is a growing need for disability-friendly housing for older tenants and working-age adults, looking to downsize. Some of this is driven by older people seeking to downsize due to the cost of running a larger home.

10.29 One agent noted that there is not enough supply of older persons' housing to meet the demand.

10.30 Some of the market demand is from tenants opting for temporary rentals while saving to buy, reflecting affordability pressures in the City. As a result, tenancies are often relatively short (12–24 months).

10.31 The rise of remote working has encouraged a preference for homes with additional space, though commuter links remain variable in influence.

10.32 Agents note there is demand from key workers, due to the Countess of Chester Hospital in the City.

Northwich

10.33 Undersupply drives rapid lettings, especially for cheaper homes. Rentals are often let within hours of being listed.

10.34 There are no specific gaps in the market, but all rental types are in demand. As elsewhere, fewer landlords are entering the market as costs rise, leading to falling supply.

10.35 Cheaper homes see the most activity, while higher-end stock is quieter, suggesting there could be demand for HMOs.

10.36 One agent suggested that tenants are renting for longer because there are fewer rental alternatives, and purchase costs are increasing.

10.37 One agent suggested there is a growing demand for pet-friendly properties (which may be addressed by the Renters Reform Act) and for properties that offer extra space for home offices.

10.38 There is sporadic demand for older person accommodation, while recent graduates and new workers do account for some of the interest.

Ellesmere Port

10.39 The rental sector is very active, with most family homes (3-bed semis and terraces) letting quickly.

10.40 Higher mortgage costs are driving up rents, and affordability checks are becoming stricter, resulting in some applicants being refused due to credit issues.

10.41 Tenant profiles are diverse, but affordability takes precedence over commuting or homeworking considerations.

10.42 The majority of renters are local, with a smaller segment relocating for work. Student demand remains low.

10.43 There is demand from older persons for ground-floor rental accommodation, though the supply of accessible homes is limited.

Neston

10.44 Rental demand is exceptionally high and is significantly outstripping supply, especially for properties priced under £1,200 per month.

10.45 Students at the University of Liverpool, Leahurst Campus, create a seasonal demand in late summer, though availability is limited.

10.46 There is significant unmet demand for older person accommodation, including ground floor general housing.

Winsford

10.47 There is high demand across all property types, with a high proportion of families seeking rental homes.

10.48 Many tenants relocate for work from regions including the Wirral, Merseyside and even overseas. The area offers value for money and attracts a diverse tenant mix. There is minimal impact from working from home arrangements.

Frodsham and Helsby

10.49 There is high demand for all house types to rent, and despite this, landlords are increasingly looking to sell. Again, this is influenced by higher costs and evolving regulations, resulting in longer-term rentals as people cannot find homes to move into.

10.50 There is high demand, with nearly all types of rental property (terraced, detached houses and flats) sought after by a wide demographic, including a mix of working-age residents and professionals.

10.51 The Stanlow oil refinery also attracts workers to the area, with the site a 10-to-15-minute commute from Frodsham and Helsby.

10.52 Frodsham and Helsby also benefit from being within commuting distance of Liverpool and Chester.

10.53 The area sees some demand for HMOs, although HMO licensing requirements are increasingly deterring landlords. This is on top of the increased economic burden, which is leading landlords to leave the market and tighten supply.

10.54 Demand for older persons' housing is low, and homeworking has not significantly affected market preferences.

Rural Cheshire

10.55 The rental market in Rural Cheshire is buoyant and varied, with demand for two-bed terraced homes. The demographic is highly mixed, including key workers and some students.

10.56 While students prefer living in the city area, there is still some movement towards rural areas, particularly around Willaston, from those studying at the University of Liverpool Campus.

10.57 Landlords are generally seeking long-term tenants; therefore, some agents do not deal with student properties.

10.58 The rural market is especially active for accessible or specialist accommodation linked to the ageing population.

HMOs

10.59 A house in multiple occupation (HMO) is a property rented out by at least 3 people who are not from 1 household (for example, a family) but share facilities like the bathroom and kitchen. It is sometimes called a ‘house share’.

10.60 Chester, being a university city, has a significant demand for student accommodation, which often includes HMOs. This is explored later in this document.

10.61 A licence is required for large HMOs rented to 5 or more people who form more than one household with some or all tenants sharing toilet, bathroom or kitchen facilities.

10.62 HMOs of up to six people typically do not require planning permission for a change of use from a C3 dwelling unless there is an Article 4 Direction which mandates it.

10.63 This has been the case in the Chester Garden Quarter Area since July 2013, Newry Park and King Street since May 2016, when Article 4 Directions were introduced.

10.64 The Article 4 Direction does not mean the HMOs are banned; it only requires planning permission for a change of use from a C3 dwelling.

10.65 According to Local Authority Housing Statistics, the estimated number of HMOs in CWAC is 1,731 as of March 2024. Of these, 637 are of a licensable size, while only 585 actually have an HMO license, with the others unlikely to be complying with the requirements if they exist.

10.66 However, the 2021 Census recorded 2,318 other households in the private rental sector (i.e. those containing unrelated people), and also 740 HMOs. There is thus a discrepancy between the Census and the Council’s HMO register.

10.67 There are several potential reasons for this discrepancy, including:

- Some landlords may have left the market since the 2021 Census, which would be consistent with market commentary
- Small HMOs outside of certain wards do not require a licence, meaning the Council’s Register would not capture them

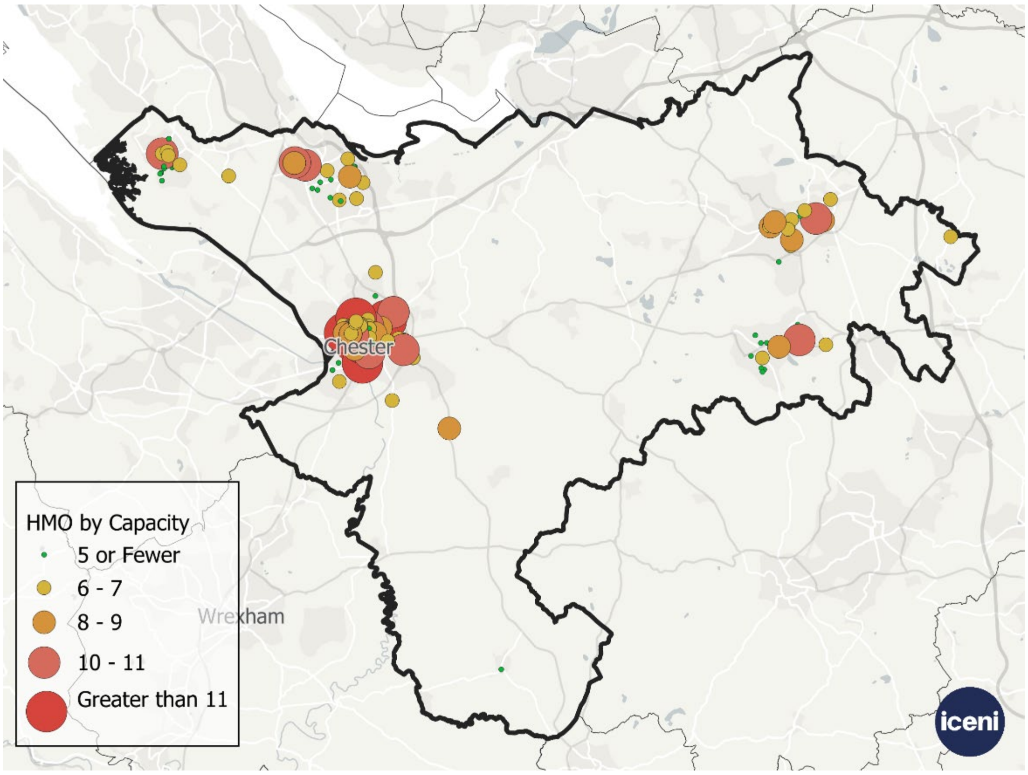
- There may be some shared homes which are effectively operating as HMOs but for which the landlords do not hold a licence.

- Two unrelated people sharing a house would be classed as an ‘Other household’ in the Census, but would not be a HMO as they are too small.

10.68 Notwithstanding these points, the number of HMOs in CWAC is likely to be higher than recorded in the Council’s register, noting that there are no advantages to landlords erroneously applying for a HMO licence, some HMOs do not require registration, and there may be some unlicensed HMOs operating.

10.69 The figure below illustrates the distribution of HMOs in CWAC using the Council's HMO register in 2022. There is a clear concentration in Chester with smaller clusters in the other urban areas of Neston, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford. There are a few HMOs in the rural areas, which may be tied to accommodation.

Figure 10.5 Distribution of HMOs in CWAC



Source: Iceni analysis of Council HMO Data

10.70 Within Chester, the vast majority of licensed HMOs are found in the Garden Quarter, which prompted the Article 4 Direction. There are also high numbers in Newton and Hoole, and Great Broughton. The highest number outside the city can be found in Northwich

10.71 It is difficult to quantify demand for HMO accommodation as it provides accommodation for disparate reasons. For many, it is an accommodation of last resort due to a lack of affordable alternatives.

10.72 For others, it could offer a more affordable form of accommodation, or the possibility to socialise with others when no friends or family are nearby.

10.73 Nonetheless, it is clear that HMOs serve a housing need in the City and, to a lesser degree, the wider borough. In part, this stems from the sizeable student population, many of whom live in HMOs as established in Chapter 11.

10.74 HMOs are also relatively affordable compared to general private rental housing. Iceni has reviewed listings for rooms for rent in the City on spareroom.co.uk.

10.75 They are generally advertised at £500-£1150 PCM (slightly higher rents for some larger ensuite rooms), with an average of around £595 PCM. This is less than the average rent for a one-bedroom flat, as listed earlier in this chapter, of £685 PCM.

10.76 As shown in Chapter 5, there is estimated to be an annual need arising from 2,057 newly forming households in the CWAC area who are unable to afford housing. Many of these will be singles or couples. As a lower-cost housing option, HMOs play a clear role in providing housing for some of these households. Particularly, younger households (under 35) who are only entitled to a room rate under Local Housing Allowance regulations.

Build to Rent

10.77 With respect to Build to Rent, the Housing White Paper (February 2017) set out that the Government wanted to build on earlier initiatives to attract new investment into large-scale housing which is purpose-built for market rent (i.e. Build to Rent).

10.78 The Government set out that this would drive up the overall housing supply, increase choice and standards for people living in privately rented homes and provide more stable rented accommodation for families – particularly as access to ownership has become more challenging.

10.79 Build to Rent is defined in the NPPF (Annex 2, Glossary) as "purpose built housing that is typically 100% rented out. It can form part of a wider multi-tenure development comprising either flats or houses, but should be on the same site and/or contiguous with the main development. Schemes will usually offer longer tenancy agreements of three years or more, and will typically be professionally managed stock in single ownership and management control."

10.80 It therefore represents development which is constructed with the intention that it will be let rather than sold.

10.81 The benefits of Build to Rent are best summarised in the Government's A Build to Rent Guide for Local Authorities, which was published in March 2015[19]. The Guide notes the benefits are wide-ranging, but can include:

- Helping local authorities to meet demand for private rented housing while increasing tenants' choice, "as generally speaking, tenants only have the option to rent from a small-scale landlord".
- Retaining tenants for longer and maximising occupancy levels as Build to Rent investment is an income-focused business model;

[19] Build to Rent: guide for local authorities - GOV.UK

- Helping to increase housing supply, particularly on large, multiple-phased sites, as it can be built alongside build-for-sale and affordable housing; and
- Utilising good design and high-quality construction methods, which are often key components of the Build to Rent model.

10.82 This Build to Rent Guide provides a helpful overview of the role that Build to Rent is intended to play in the housing market, offering opportunities for those who wish to rent privately (i.e. young professionals) and for those on lower incomes who are unable to afford their own home.

10.83 Over recent years, there has been rapid growth in the Build to Rent sector backed by domestic and overseas institutional investment. Savills' UK Build to Rent Market Update[20] As of Q1 2025, the BtR market has 132,000 completed homes, 51,000 under construction, and 110,000 in the development pipeline, for a total of 293,000 units, a 5% increase on the Q2 2024 figure.

Profile of tenants

10.84 The British Property Federation ("BPF"), London First and UK Apartment Association ("UKAA") published (November 2022) a report[21] profiling those who live in Build to Rent accommodation in England. While this is focused on more urban locations, it is helpful for understanding the broad tenant profile.

10.85 According to their research, around 40% of residents were aged between 25 and 34, which is broadly similar to the wider private rented sector.

10.86 The survey-based data identified that incomes are similar to those in private rented sector accommodation, with 18% earning between £26,000 and £32,000, and 23% earning between £32,000 and £44,000.

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[20] Savills, February 2025. UK Build to Rent Market Update – H1 2025. Accessed at: https://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/229130/379550-0
[21] British Property Federation, November 2022. Who lives in Build-to-Rent?

The report noted that Build to Rent offers comparable affordability but is notably more affordable for couples and sharers.

10.87 The report also identified a broadly similar balance of people working in the public and private sectors, with 17% of residents employed in the public sector living in Build to Rent accommodation compared with 19% in the private rented sector.

CWAC BtR Supply

10.88 The Council's Housing Land Monitoring Data does not explicitly identify BtR developments as a specific monitoring category, although there have been 27 serviced apartments at Raymond House in Chester.

10.89 According to Bidwells' Build to Rent map[22] There are four operational BtR schemes in CWAC, totalling 311 homes:

- Woodford Lodge, Winsford (54 units)
- Glisk, Ellesmere Port (49 units)
- Cromwell Road, Ellesmere Port (175 units)
- Chase Park, Ellesmere Port (40 units)

10.90 The Woodford Lodge and Chase Park sites on this list were developed as market homes but subsequently sold to a single landlord to rent as the owner-occupied market showed little interest.

10.91 All of these sites are single-family housing rather than the more typical multi-family BtR developments in flats. However, recent investment in BtR has shifted towards single-family BtR.

Co-living

10.92 Co-living is a small but growing sub-sector of the Build to Rent market. Neither the NPPF nor the PPG define Co-living, but it is widely

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[22] Bidwells *Built-to-Rent Map* Build to rent map | Operational Living | Bidwells

accepted that it comprises a private furnished bedroom or studio flat with shared common areas. These differ from community-built developments, which are typically standard housing.

10.93 The bedrooms are typically en-suite and are used by single people and couples. Tenancies typically range from 9-12 months (3 months minimum) but can be as long as 3 years.

10.94 Research by Savills[23] suggests that there are around 9,000 co-living bedspaces in the UK, with at least 17,600 further units under construction or with planning permission.

10.95 The vast majority of the operational co-living bedspaces are located in London. Other areas that have seen activity are primarily major cities. Schemes were approved for the first time in Southampton, Bath, Cardiff, Salford and Woking.

10.96 Savills notes that target residents of co-living developments are typically students, recent graduates and young professionals and most developments are located in city centres. Although open to all ages, residents of co-living developments are predominantly aged 18–40 years old.

10.97 Co-living provides potential benefits to young professionals facing affordability pressures, as well as those who are new to an area, as it allows them to establish roots and make friendships when otherwise they might face a degree of isolation.

10.98 The Savills research also stated that co-living has a number of pull factors (extensive amenities, interaction with fellow residents, flexible leases and all-inclusive bills). Still, demand is also aided by push factors such as high house prices, a lack of PRS stock, high rents, and people seeking to avoid house shares.

[23] Savills *Spotlight: UK Co-Living 2025* (www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/229130/372282-0)

10.99 We are not aware of any current co-living interest in CWAC, although it is most likely to be in Chester or Ellesmere Port. There was one previous enquiry to the Council near Northwich, but it was not progressed.

Policy Response

10.100 The PPG on Build to Rent recognises that where a need is identified, local planning authorities should include a specific plan policy to support Build to Rent development.

10.101 The NPPF's definition of Build to Rent development sets out that schemes will usually offer tenancy agreements of three or more years and will typically be professionally managed stock in single ownership and management control.

10.102 The Council will also need to consider affordable housing policies specifically for the Build to Rent sector. The viability of Build to Rent development will, however, differ from that of a typical mixed tenure development, in that returns from the Build to Rent development are phased over time. In contrast, in a typical mixed tenure scheme, capital receipts are generated as units are sold.

10.103 In general terms, it is expected that a proportion of Build to Rent units will be delivered as 'Affordable Private Rent' housing. Planning Practice Guidance[24] states that:

> *"The National Planning Policy Framework states that affordable housing on Build to Rent schemes should be provided by default in the form of affordable private rent, a class of affordable housing designed explicitly for Build to Rent. Affordable private rent and private market rent units within a development should be managed collectively by a single Build to Rent landlord.*

24 ID: 60-002-20180913

20% is generally a suitable benchmark for the level of affordable private rent homes to be provided (and maintained in perpetuity) in any Build to Rent scheme. If local authorities wish to set a different proportion, they should justify this using the evidence emerging from their local housing need assessment, and set the policy out in their local plan. Similarly, the guidance on viability permits developers, in exceptional cases, the opportunity to make a case seeking to differ from this benchmark.

National affordable housing policy also requires a minimum rent discount of 20% for affordable private rent homes relative to local market rents. The discount should be calculated when a discounted home is rented out, or when the tenancy is renewed. The rent on the discounted homes should increase on the same basis as rent increases for longer-term (market) tenancies within the development"

10.104 The Council should have regard to the PPG on Build to Rent developments. This states that at least 20% of the units in a Build to Rent development should be let as affordable private rented units at a 20% discount to local market rents. The specific policy provision should be considered either through viability evidence to inform specific planning policies or through site-specific viability analysis.

10.105 Notwithstanding the apparent lack of demand for co-living in CWAC, the Council could also consider a policy in this area. Much of the Build to Rent policy response set out earlier in this chapter can also be applied to Co-Living.

10.106 London Plan Policy H16 is a rare example of an adopted co-living policy, although in that case, it is referred to as Large-Scale Purpose-Built Shared Living. The policy seeks to ensure that co-living development:

- Is of good quality and design
- Contributes towards mixed and inclusive neighbourhoods
- Has good public and active transport connectivity

- Is under single management with a management plan in place and tenancy lengths of no less than three months
- Has appropriate communal facilities and services, noting that the co-living model implies residents will make more use of communal facilities
- Provides adequate functional living space and layout within private units

Private Rental Sector - Summary

10.107 Nationally, supply and demand are imbalanced; fewer people can buy homes, and landlords are exiting the market, driving up rents.

10.108 Cheshire West and Chester has seen steady rental growth since 2015, in line with regional averages.

10.109 In the year to August 2025, the overall Median Rent in CWAC was £934 per calendar month (pcm), which was above the regional (£916 pcm) but below the national (£1,403 pcm) medians.

10.110 CWAC's PRS accommodates a wide range of people, but the most prevalent groups are young individuals, with fewer families and older renters.

10.111 There are a large number of HMOs in CWAC, with a particular concentration in the City of Chester.

10.112 While it is difficult to quantify the future need for HMOs, they serve a clear need for lower-cost rental options as well as accommodating many students. The extent of their use should also be kept under review and responded to appropriately.

10.113 There is evidence of BtR demand in CWAC with an emerging supply in Ellesmere Port. The Council should develop a policy on this type of housing, including an affordable housing contribution to help meet the acute need.

11. Student Accommodation

11.1 A key component of the private rental sector is the demand for student accommodation. This includes HMOs and Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA).

11.2 Key to understanding the growth in demand for PBSA is to understand the aspirations of the education providers. The University of Chester and the University of Liverpool, Leahurst Campus between Neston and Willaston, are the only two higher education facilities in the Borough.

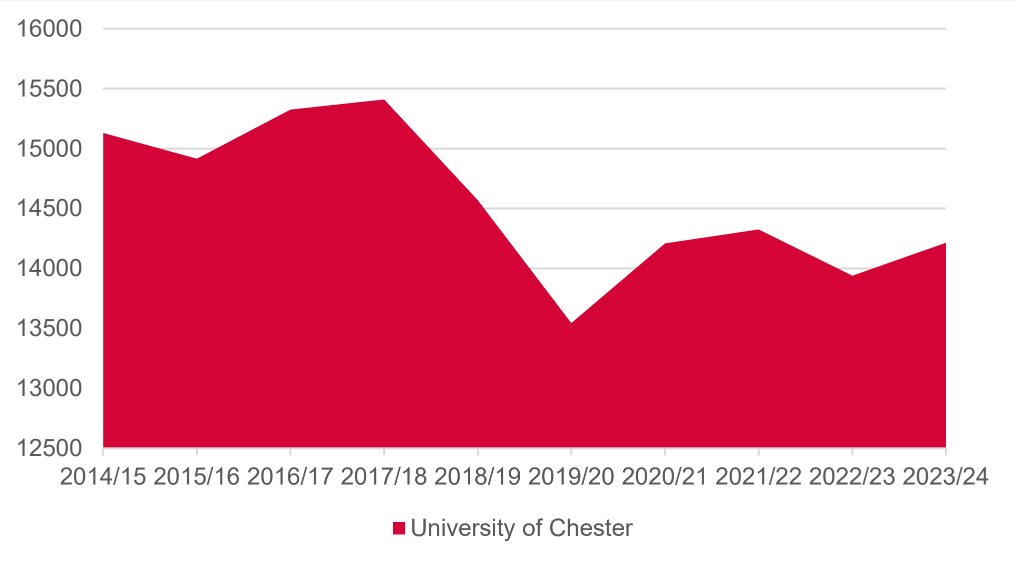
11.3 The focus is on higher education, as these have a significantly greater impact on the demand for housing than further education, in which most people continue to live in the parental home while studying.

11.4 Furthermore, there is also limited data on the latter as they are not covered by the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA). However, the HESA does not break down statistics by campus; therefore, the data for the University of Liverpool has limited benefit in this context.

Student Numbers

11.5 According to HESA, there are 14,215 students enrolled at the University of Chester in the 2023/24 academic year. As shown in the table below, this is a fall of around 1,195 students from the 2017/18 peak (-8%).

Figure 11.1 Students at the University of Chester (2023/24)



Source: HESA

11.6 Of these, 11,500 were full-time students, equating to 81% of the student roll. This group typically require accommodation in greater numbers than part-time students, who are typically older and living in their own accommodation or living with their parents.

11.7 Around 3,505 Full-time students (30%) are from overseas, with the largest groups coming from India (960) and Nigeria (560). This group typically requires PBSA (and accommodation) more generally than domestic students.

11.8 HESA also surveys full-time students about their accommodation choices. However, as this is a survey, the data is not 100% accurate; it also contains errors because students self-declare. For example, students often say they are in their "own residence" when they are actually in rental accommodation.

11.9 As shown in the table below, around 46% of students are in their own residence or living with parents or guardians. These groups would not affect housing demand in the Borough.

11.10 Of the remainder, approximately 10% of students are in private PBSA, 11% are in halls of residence, and 28% are in other rented accommodation (typically HMOs). The remaining 2.5% live in "other accommodation".

Table 11.1 Full-Time Students by Accommodation Choice (2023/24) – University of Chester

Other rented accom-modation	Own residence	Parental/ guardian home	Private-sector halls	Provider-maintained property	Not available	Other	Total
3,185	2,240	3,035	1,165	1,270	320	285	11,500
27.7%	19.5%	26.4%	10.1%	11.0%	2.8%	2.5%	100%

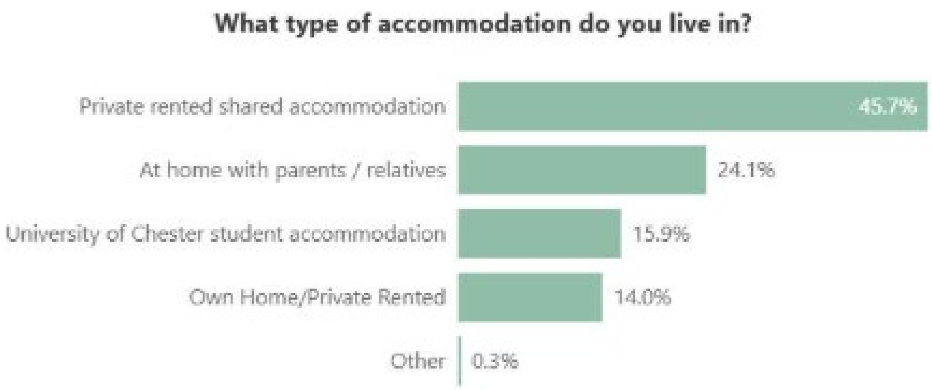
Source: HESA

11.11 Around 46% of students are in their own residence or living with parents or guardians. These groups would not affect housing demand in the Borough.

11.12 While the number of students has fallen since 2017/18, the number of students in other rented accommodation has increased by 65 in absolute terms. There has also been a significant increase in the use of private sector halls (PBSA), particularly in the last year (685 to 1,165).

11.13 The University also provides its own data, and this shows that around 46% of students live in private rental shared accommodation, which is slightly higher than the combined HMO and PBSA numbers from HESA (38%).

Figure 11.2 Full-Time Students by Accommodation Choice (2023/24) – University of Chester



Source: University of Chester

11.14 This data also shows an increase in the number of students living in the University of Chester-provided accommodation (16%) in comparison to HESA (11%). This could mean the University is counting those it places in PBSA through nomination agreements, or it could be just more accurate data.

11.15 The Census is another source of information on student accommodation. Although ONS have flagged issues with the quality of this data, noting that while students should be counted at their term-time address, “there is evidence that the coronavirus pandemic did result in changes to where people lived”.

11.16 This shows that there are only around 576 all full-time student households in the borough, comprising only 0.4% of the total number of households. Although at 3.9 per household, these are above average size (2.3 persons) and therefore contribute 0.6% of the population (2,249).

Table 11.2 All Student Households (2021) - CWAC

Local Authority	Households	% of Households	Population	% of Population	Average Size
Cheshire West and Chester	576	0.4%	2,249	0.6%	3.9

Source: ONS, Census 2021

Engagement with Universities

11.17 We have sought to engage with both the University of Chester and the University of Liverpool; however, we were only able to have a full discussion with the latter, although the University of Chester provided the data above and confirmed that they “are anticipating the total student body to remain at about the same size (14,000) going forward”.

11.18 Engagement with the University of Chester accommodation department noted that PBSA schemes have increased significantly in Chester, creating a surplus where previously demand outstripped supply.

11.19 The student rental market in Chester is dominated by a small number of established agencies, which handle the majority of student properties and supply channels with landlords.

11.20 Most students prefer en-suite accommodation in popular spots near Exton Park campus and Handbridge. The market is now well balanced, with developers having met both quality and supply needs.

University of Liverpool at Leahurst Campus

11.21 Liverpool University's School of Veterinary Science offers a five-year programme. During the initial three years, students are required to live in Liverpool.

11.22 For years four and five, it is mandatory for students to reside within a 20-minute drive of the Leahurst Campus.

Accommodation Provision and Student Numbers

11.23 The university does not currently provide accommodation for students. While accommodation was previously offered, this has not been the case for several years, and any future provision would be made on a long-term basis only.

11.24 Approximately 200 students are admitted to the course each year. However, due to attrition, the number of students per class typically ranges from 175 to 185 by the time they reach years 4 and 5, and two classes are running concurrently.

11.25 To address gaps caused by attrition, international students are admitted, resulting in a total of around 390 students being present at any given time.

11.26 In addition to undergraduate education, the university offers PHD training programmes in clinical science, as well as postdoctoral positions based at Leahurst Campus.

11.27 The PHD and postdoctoral positions comprise approximately 90 individuals, most of whom also reside within a 20-minute commuting distance, although they are not compelled to do so.

11.28 Consequently, the total number of students, PHD and postdoctoral roles during term time typically ranges from 450 to 470.

Accommodation Patterns

11.29 Both students and postdoctoral staff predominantly reside in the private rented sector (PRS), with the majority choosing to live in the nearby areas of Neston and Willaston. While some may live further afield, these two locations are the principal residential bases.

11.30 The university is also one of the largest rural employers in Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC), employing around 500 to 600 staff members who reside locally. This means that more than 1,000 people are present on campus at any given time.

11.31 Most students live in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). The quality of landlords varies, but students are generally regarded as desirable tenants—they tend to take good care of the property, pay rent promptly, and commit to tenancies for the whole year.

11.32 Some HMOs are even owned by university staff, and there remains interest from landlords in acquiring and converting properties for student use.

11.33 One developer is seeking to convert and extend an agricultural building to create 50 student bedsits, although providing sufficient parking spaces poses a challenge. The university has expressed a preference for additional accommodation within walking distance of the campus and is open to providing on-site parking for a fee to facilitate this development.

11.34 Students consistently report a shortage of available accommodation in the local area. They value certainty and typically begin/ searching for accommodation up to 10 months in advance. However, many landlords do not confirm availability until just a few months before the start of the academic year.

11.35 The local rental market is challenging; recent changes to stamp duty have led to a sell-off of properties, disproportionately affecting the supply of rental homes.

11.36 While there are acknowledged issues with the cost of accommodation, insufficient data is available to provide precise figures.

11.37 There are some concerns regarding the quality of available accommodation. Survey data may exist on this topic, and issues such as heating have been identified as particular challenges.

Future Plans and Challenges

11.38 The campus masterplan includes an intention to increase student numbers, which would necessitate further construction and a rise in class sizes from 200 to 250.

11.39 This expansion is expected to occur within the next three to four years, although funding is required, and that is not a foregone conclusion. The expectation is that the PRS will be able to absorb the increased demand.

11.40 Although the university would prefer to construct purpose-built student accommodation, financial constraints mean that priority must first be given to expanding teaching facilities. If additional investment were secured, student numbers could increase to 300 or 350; however, it is uncertain whether this will occur.

11.41 The university does not anticipate exceeding 400 students per year under current circumstances. An increase in this number would be aspirational and contingent on receiving significant facility investment—estimated at £120 million —currently not feasible due to financial limitations.

11.42 In the very long term, the considerable investment could facilitate substantial growth in student numbers and the development of dedicated student accommodation. However, there is no clear timeline or guarantee that this will occur.

Policy Considerations

11.43 Given that the University of Chester is not seeking to grow, it is unlikely that there will be a significant increase in demand for rental accommodation in the City caused by students.

11.44 However, the much smaller University of Liverpool Leahurst Campus has modest short-term growth aspirations if funding can be secured. This is likely to have some impact on demand in Neston and Willaston without the delivery of Halls of Residence.

11.45 Such is the scale of growth and indeed the overall number of students at the Leahurst Campus, that it is unlikely that a PBSA operator would be interested in developing in these towns.

11.46 Although there is no overwhelming evidence of demand for additional PBSA, there will always be a significant proportion of students who will continue to seek accommodation within the private rented sector.

11.47 Typically, this is focused on lower-cost rental products such as HMOs, which, at present, are not a reliable source of accommodation as landlords leave the market and demand from non-students increases.

11.48 There are several benefits to providing additional PBSA, including:

- Providing a more secure form of accommodation for students,
- Relieve pressure on the PRS.
- Release family-sized housing in the Borough.
- Help meet an identified housing need
- Provide additional affordable housing.

11.49 If the Council does seek to expand the portfolio of PBSA in the City of Chester (and this will perhaps be driven by the private sector rather than the Universities) or protect against loss, then they should develop a policy setting out their expectations.

11.50 To minimise the need to travel, the Council should look to focus student accommodation in locations proximate to the universities, most likely

Chester and next to the Leahurst Campus, and those with good public transport links.

11.51 Earlier in this report, Table 10.4 shows the distribution of licensed HMOs within the Borough. However, these HMOs will provide accommodation to more than just students; they are concentrated in Chester, particularly in the Garden Quarter. This might therefore be a suitable location to consider its merits.

11.52 They may also wish to require cluster flats rather than studio flats, as these are more sociable and lead to a lower drop-out rate. However, they should also ensure that any design is future-proofed against a downturn in student demand.

11.53 The policy should also ensure PBSA supports affordable housing delivery. The mechanisms for doing so, however, need careful consideration, as on the one hand, there is a case for providing affordable student accommodation in schemes, but on the other hand, the Council might also consider a financial contribution toward the delivery of genuinely affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough.

11.54 The Council could seek contributions (through commuted sums) from student housing schemes to deliver other forms of affordable housing (such as social rent) on other housing schemes, which might more closely meet the Borough's acute housing needs.

Student Accommodation – Summary

11.55 According to HESA, the University of Chester enrolled 14,215 students in the 2023/24 academic year, while the University of Liverpool's Leahurst Campus had approximately 450 students.

11.56 Student numbers in Cheshire West and Chester have declined since 2017/18, and the University of Chester does not anticipate future growth.

11.57 In contrast, the University of Liverpool is considering a modest increase in student numbers at the Leahurst Campus, though any significant expansion would depend on substantial facility investment, which is not currently planned.

11.58 Around 46% of students at the University of Chester are in their own residence or living with parents or guardians. The remaining 54% require accommodation.

11.59 Although there is no overwhelming evidence of a need for additional PBSA, there are clear benefits of providing it, including releasing existing HMOs.

11.60 If the Council does seek to expand the portfolio of PBSA in the borough, then it should also develop a policy which clearly sets out its expectations, including built-form, location and affordable housing contributions.

12. Older and Disabled Persons

Introduction

12.1 This section studies the characteristics and housing needs of the older person population (+65) and the population with some form of disability. The two groups are taken together as there is a clear link between age and disability.

12.2 It responds to Planning Practice Guidance on Housing for Older and Disabled People, published by the Government in June 2019. It includes an assessment of the need for specialist accommodation for older people and the potential requirements for housing to be built to M4(2) and M4(3) housing technical standards (accessibility and wheelchair standards).

12.3 M4(2) and M4(3) are higher optional accessibility standards which require additional features for adaptability and wheelchair users. M4(2) ensures homes are more easily accessed and adaptable, whereas M4(3) is immediately accessible for wheelchair users.

Older People

12.4 The table below provides baseline population data about older persons in Cheshire West & Chester and compares this with other areas.

12.5 The table shows that the Council area has a slightly older age structure than the regional and national levels, with 22% of the population aged 65 and over.

12.6 The proportion of people aged 75 and over is also above equivalent figures for other areas.

Table 12.1 Older Persons Population, 2024

	Cheshire West & Chester		North West	England
	No.	%	%	%
Under 65	291,369	78.4%	81.2%	81.3%
65-74	39,819	10.7%	9.7%	9.4%
75-84	29,728	8.0%	6.8%	6.8%
85+	10,736	2.9%	2.4%	2.5%
Total	371,652	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total 65+	80,283	21.6%	18.8%	18.7%
Total 75+	40,464	10.9%	9.2%	9.3%

Source: ONS

12.7 The table below shows the same data for sub-areas. The analysis points to some variation in the proportion of older people, this being notably higher in the Rural areas (and also Neston and Helsby & Frodsham) – Winsford has the lowest proportion of people aged 65+.

Table 12.2 Older Persons Population, 2024 – sub-areas

	Under 65	65-74	75-84	85+	Total	Total 65+	Total 75+
Chester	80.9%	9.3%	6.9%	2.8%	100.0%	19.1%	9.7%
Ellesmere Port	81.7%	9.8%	6.2%	2.3%	100.0%	18.3%	8.5%
Helsby & Frodsham	73.7%	11.3%	10.3%	4.7%	100.0%	26.3%	15.0%
Neston	69.3%	14.2%	12.3%	4.1%	100.0%	30.7%	16.4%
Northwich	81.0%	10.1%	6.7%	2.1%	100.0%	19.0%	8.8%
Rural North East	72.4%	13.2%	10.8%	3.6%	100.0%	27.6%	14.4%
Rural North West	71.6%	13.7%	11.0%	3.7%	100.0%	28.4%	14.7%
Rural South	72.2%	12.6%	10.8%	4.4%	100.0%	27.8%	15.2%
Winsford	83.0%	9.1%	6.2%	1.7%	100.0%	17.0%	7.9%
TOTAL	78.4%	10.7%	8.0%	2.9%	100.0%	21.6%	10.9%

Source: ONS

Projected Future Change in the Population of Older People

12.8 Population projections can next be used to indicate how the number of older persons might change in the future, with the table below showing that Cheshire West & Chester is projected to see a notable increase in the older person population – the projection is based on the Standard Method.

12.9 For the 2025-45 period, a projected increase in the population aged 65+ of around 31% is shown – the population aged under 65 is, in contrast, projected to see a more modest increase (of 10%).

12.10 In total population terms, the projections show an increase in the population aged 65 and over of 25,300 people. This is against a backdrop of an overall increase of 54,300; population growth of people aged 65 and over, therefore, accounts for 47% of the total projected population change.

Table 12.3 Projected Change in Population of Older Persons, 2025 to 2045 – Cheshire West & Chester

	2025	2045	Change in population	% change
Under 65	293,063	322,111	29,047	9.9%
65-74	40,304	45,425	5,121	12.7%
75-84	30,491	41,681	11,191	36.7%
85+	11,050	20,026	8,976	81.2%
Total	374,908	429,243	54,335	14.5%
Total 65+	81,844	107,132	25,288	30.9%
Total 75+	41,541	61,707	20,166	48.5%

Source: Iceni Analysis

Characteristics of Older Person Households

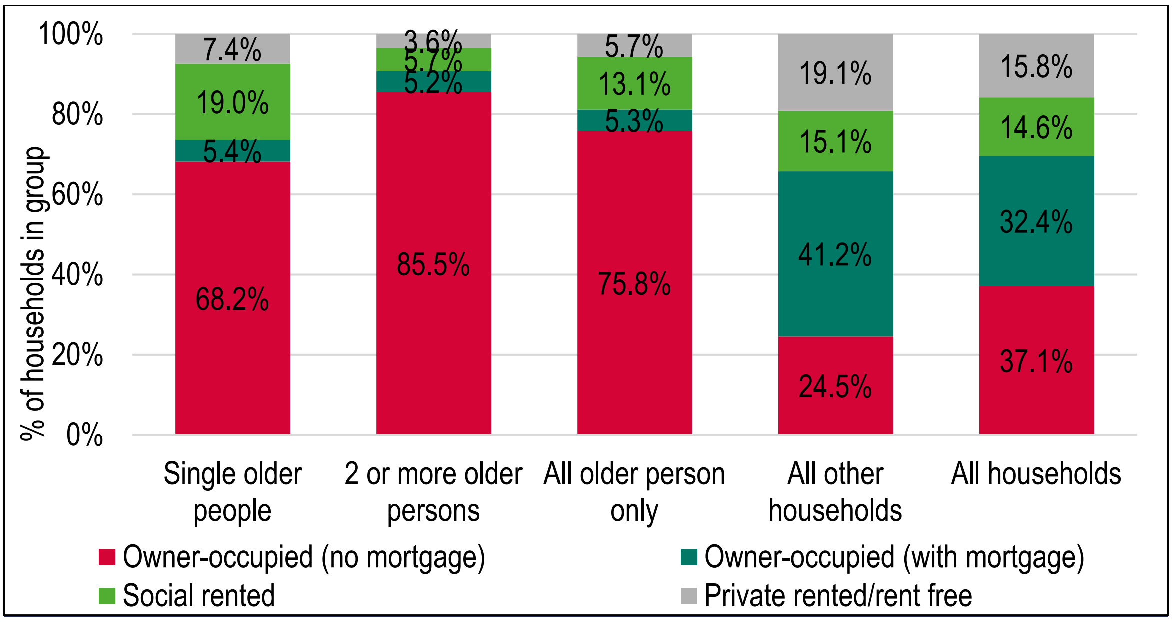
12.11 The figure below shows the tenure of older-person households. As this draws from Census data, the definition of an older person in this instance is aged 66+ (this being based on pensionable ages as at the time of the Census). The data has been split between single older-person households and households with two or more older people (which will largely be couples).

12.12 The data shows that the majority of older persons' households are owner occupiers (81% of older person households), and indeed most are owner-occupiers with no mortgage and thus may have significant equity which can be put towards the purchase of a new home.

12.13 Some 13% of older persons' households live in the social rented sector, and the proportion of older persons' households living in the private rented sector is relatively low (about 6%).

12.14 There are also notable differences for different types of older person households, with single older people having a lower level of owner-occupation than larger older person households – this group also has a higher proportion living in the social rented sector.

Figure 12.1 Tenure of Older Person Households in Cheshire West & Chester, 2021



Source: 2021 Census

12.15 The table below shows the tenure of older person households by sub-area (figures are for all older person households). This shows some differences between areas, with a range from 75% of older people being owner-occupiers in Winsford to 89% in Rural North West.

12.16 Figures for the proportions living in social rented housing show the opposite pattern, varying from 6% in Rural North West, up to 18% in Winsford.

12.17 There is also some variance in the proportions living in the private rented sector, with the figure of 11% in Rural South being the most notable finding.

Table 12.4 Tenure of Older Persons Households, 2021 – sub-areas

	Owner-occupied (no mortgage)	Owner-occupied (with mortgage)	Social rented	Private rented	TOTAL
Chester	72.2%	5.1%	16.6%	6.1%	100.0%
Ellesmere Port	71.3%	5.8%	17.1%	5.9%	100.0%
Helsby & Frodsham	82.0%	5.1%	9.0%	3.9%	100.0%
Neston	80.3%	5.3%	10.1%	4.2%	100.0%
Northwich	75.2%	5.6%	13.6%	5.6%	100.0%
Rural North East	82.1%	5.1%	8.1%	4.7%	100.0%
Rural North West	84.0%	5.0%	6.4%	4.6%	100.0%
Rural South	73.6%	5.6%	9.5%	11.3%	100.0%
Winsford	69.7%	5.4%	18.2%	6.7%	100.0%
TOTAL	75.8%	5.3%	13.1%	5.7%	100.0%

Source: 2021 Census

Disabilities

12.18 The table below shows the proportion of people who are considered disabled under the definition within the 2010 Equality Act[25], drawn from 2021 Census data, and the proportion of households where at least one person has a disability.

12.19 The data suggest that some 33% of households in the Council area contain someone with a disability. This figure is very slightly lower than seen in the North West but slightly above the national average.

[25] The Census uses the same definition of disability as described in the Equality Act. This defines disability as a person with a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities.

12.20 The figures for the population with a disability show the same pattern in comparison with other areas, with some 18% of the population having a disability.

Table 12.5 Households and People with a Disability, 2021

	Households Containing Someone with a Disability		Population with a Disability	
	No.	%	No.	%
Cheshire West & Chester	50,781	32.7%	65,897	18.5%
North West	1,104,261	35.0%	1,440,760	19.4%
England	7,507,887	32.0%	9,774,510	17.3%

Source: 2021 Census

12.21 The table below shows the same information for sub-areas; this shows modest variation in the proportion of the population and households with a disability across areas, with figures being slightly higher in Winsford and lower in Rural South.

Table 12.6 Households and People with a Disability, 2021 – sub-areas

	Households Containing Someone with a Disability		Population with a Disability	
	No.	%	No.	%
Chester	13,099	31.4%	17,221	18.1%
Ellesmere Port	10,330	36.6%	13,276	20.5%
Helsby & Frodsham	2,014	30.7%	2,634	18.1%
Neston	2,384	34.0%	2,975	19.3%
Northwich	5,990	30.6%	7,549	17.0%
Rural North East	6,383	31.2%	8,384	17.5%
Rural North West	3,221	30.6%	4,193	17.0%
Rural South	1,854	29.1%	2,292	15.5%
Winsford	5,515	37.4%	7,372	20.9%
TOTAL	50,790	32.7%	65,896	18.5%

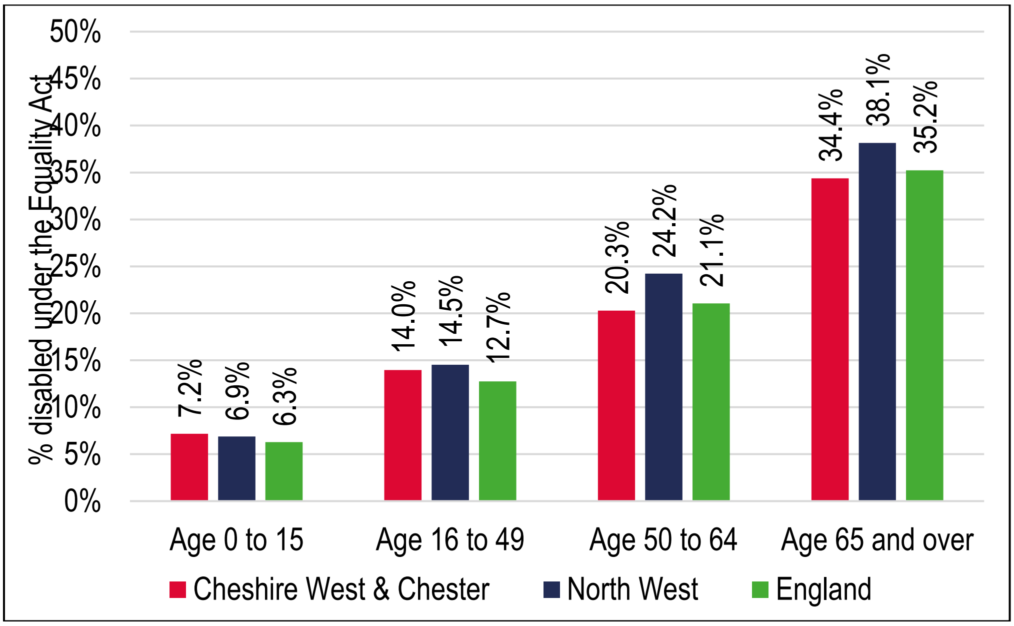
Source: 2021 Census

12.22 As noted, it is likely that the age profile will impact upon the numbers of people with a disability, as older people tend to be more likely to have a disability.

12.23 The figure below shows the age bands of people with a disability. It is clear from this analysis that those people in the oldest age bands are more likely to have a disability.

12.24 The analysis also generally shows marginally lower age-specific levels of disability when compared with the regional position – those aged 0-15 being the only exception.

Figure 12.2 Population with Disability by Age



Source: 2021 Census

Health Related Population Projections

12.25 The incidence of a range of health conditions is an important component in understanding the potential need for care or support for a growing older population.

12.26 The analysis undertaken covers both younger and older age groups. It draws on prevalence rates from the PANSI (Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information) and POPPI (Projecting Older People Population

Information) websites. Adjustments have been made to take account of the age-specific health/disabilities previously shown.

12.27 Of particular note are the large increases in the number of older people with dementia (increasing by 56% from 2025 to 2045 and mobility problems (up 46% over the same period).

12.28 Changes for younger age groups are minor, reflecting the fact that projections expect older age groups to see the most significant proportional increases in population.

12.29 When related to the total projected change to the population, the increase of people aged 65+ with a mobility problem represents around 12% of the total projected population growth.

Table 12.7 Projected Changes to Population with a Range of Disabilities – Cheshire West & Chester

Disability	Age Range	2025	2045	Change	% change
Dementia	65+	5,662	8,822	3,160	55.8%
Mobility problems	65+	14,798	21,547	6,750	45.6%
Autistic Spectrum Disorders	18-64	2,282	2,650	368	16.1%
	65+	752	977	225	29.9%
Learning Disabilities	15-64	5,979	6,741	761	12.7%
	65+	1,655	2,151	497	30.0%
Impaired mobility	16-64	13,493	15,182	1,689	12.5%

Source: POPPI/PANSI and Demographic Projections

12.30 Invariably, there will be a combination of those with disabilities and long-term health problems that continue to live at home with family, those who choose to live independently with the possibility of incorporating adaptations into their homes and those who choose to move into supported housing.

12.31 The projected change shown in the number of people with disabilities alongside the backlog need and increase in those with other disabilities provides clear evidence justifying delivering ‘accessible and adaptable’ homes as defined in Part M4(2) of Building Regulations, subject to viability and site suitability.

12.32 The data also shows a need for those with non-physical disabilities, and shows a 16.1% increase in working-age adults with autism and 12.7% in those with a learning disability. There is an even greater increase in these conditions in older people.

12.33 The PANSI data also provides projections for working-age adults with a range of mental health conditions. As shown across this range, the increase in those with some form of mental health issues is expected to increase by around 13%-15%.

12.34 The largest increase is expected in those with a common mental health disorder (+5,712), while the most significant percentage increase is projected to be in those with an antisocial personality disorder (15.3%).

Table 12.8 Projected Changes to Population with a Range of Mental Health Issues – Cheshire West & Chester

	Age range	2025	2045	Change	% change
Common mental disorder	18-64	42,017	47,728	5,712	13.6%
Borderline personality disorder	18-64	5,334	6,061	727	13.6%
Antisocial personality disorder	18-64	7,361	8,486	1,125	15.3%
Psychotic disorder	18-64	1,550	1,770	219	14.1%
Two or more psychiatric disorders	18-64	15,957	18,197	2,240	14.0%

Source: POPPI/PANSI and Demographic Projections

12.35 The Council's own data shows the number of individuals with learning disabilities, autism, and mental health needs is expected to rise steadily over the next ten years, including an increase in older people aged 65+ with these conditions.

12.36 Consequently, the demand for specialist and supported housing will grow, reflecting changing lifestyles and preferences for different housing options to support independent living.

12.37 It is estimated that Cheshire West and Chester will need at least 350 new units of specialist supported accommodation for these populations within the next ten years.

12.38 Specifically, the Council's report suggests that at least 25 new units and 20 replacement units are required by March 2026, with a further 25 new demand and 10 replacement units by March 2027. This was to help bring back people currently placed out of the borough.

12.39 These projections are based on various assessments, including the Campbell and Tickell Cheshire and Merseyside Transforming Care Partnership Assessment, internal intelligence, NHS guidance, and backlog analyses.

12.40 To address new demand, an ageing population, and lifestyle changes, the document advocates for more ‘core and cluster’ or ‘extra care’ housing models.

12.41 These involve self-contained private units with communal areas for socialising and care interactions. The use of technology to enhance independence and future-proof accommodations for ageing residents is emphasised. These spaces need not be large or heavily adapted but should integrate into larger housing schemes.

Need for Specialist Accommodation for Older People

12.42 Given the ageing population and higher levels of disability and health problems amongst older people, there is likely to be an increased requirement for specialist housing options moving forward. The box below shows the different types of older persons' housing which are considered.

Definitions of Different Types of Older Persons' Accommodation

Age-restricted general market housing: This type of housing is generally for people aged 55 and over and the active elderly. It may include some shared amenities, such as communal gardens, but does not include support or care services.

Retirement living or sheltered housing (housing with support): This usually consists of purpose-built flats or bungalows with limited communal facilities such as a lounge, laundry room and guest room. It does not generally provide care services but provides some support to enable residents to live independently. This can include 24-hour on-site assistance (alarm) and a warden or house manager.

Extra care housing or housing-with-care (housing with care): This usually consists of purpose-built or adapted flats or bungalows with a medium to high level of care available if required, through an on-site care agency registered through the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Residents are able to live independently with 24-hour access to support services and staff, and meals are also available. There are often extensive communal areas, such as space to socialise or a wellbeing centre. In some cases, these developments are known as retirement communities or villages - the intention is for residents to benefit from varying levels of care as time progresses.

Residential care homes and nursing homes (care bedspaces): These have individual rooms within a residential building and provide a high level of care, meeting all activities of daily living. They do not usually include support services for independent living. This type of housing can also include dementia care homes.

Source: Planning Practice Guidance [63-010]

12.43 The need for specialist housing for older persons is typically modelled by applying prevalence rates to current and projected population changes and considering the level of existing supply. There is no standard methodology for assessing the housing and care needs of older people.

12.44 The current and future demand for elderly care is influenced by a host of factors, including the balance between demand and supply in any given area and social, political, regulatory and financial issues.

Additionally, the extent to which new homes are built to accessible and adaptable standards may, over time, have an impact on specialist demand (given that older people often want to remain at home rather than move to care) – this will need to be monitored.

12.45 There are several ‘models’ for considering older persons’ needs, but they all essentially work in the same way. The model results are, however, particularly sensitive to the prevalence rates applied, which are typically calculated as a proportion of people aged over 75 who could be expected to live in different forms of specialist housing. Whilst the population aged 75 and over is used in the modelling, the estimates of need would include people of all ages.

12.46 Whilst there are no definitive rates, the PPG [63-004] notes that ‘the future need for specialist accommodation for older people broken down by tenure and type (e.g. sheltered housing, extra care) may need to be assessed and can be obtained from a number of online tool kits provided by the sector, for example SHOP@ for Older People Analysis Tool)’.

12.47 The PPG does not specifically mention any other tools and therefore seems to be indicating that SHOP@ would be a good starting point for analysis. Since the PPG was published, the Housing Learning and Information Network (Housing LIN) has removed the Shop@ online toolkit, although the base rates used for analysis are known.

12.48 The SHOP@ tool was originally based on data in a 2008 report (More Choice Greater Voice), and in 2011, a further suggested set of rates was published (rates which were repeated in a 2012 publication). In 2016, Housing LIN published a review document which noted that the 2008 rates are 'outdated' but also noting that the rates from 2011/12 were 'not substantiated'. The 2016 review document, therefore, set out a series of proposals for new rates to be taken forward onto the Housing LIN website.

12.49 Whilst the 2016 review rates do not appear to have ever led to an update of the website, it does appear from reviewing work by Housing LIN over the past few years as if it is these rates which typically inform their own analysis (subject to evidence-based localised adjustments).

12.50 For clarity, the table overleaf shows the base prevalence rates set out in the various documents described above. For the analysis in this report, the age-restricted and retirement/sheltered have been merged into a single category (housing with support).

Table 12.9 Range of suggested baseline prevalence rates (units per 1,000 people aged 75 and over) from various publications

Type/Rate	SHOP@ (2008)[26]	Housing in Later Life (2012)[27]	2016 Housing LIN Review[28]
Age-restricted general market housing	-	-	25
Retirement living or sheltered housing (housing with support)	125	180	100
Extra care housing or housing-with-care (housing with care)	45	65	30-40 ('proactive range')
Residential care homes Nursing homes (care bedspaces), including dementia	65 45	(no figure apart from 6 for dementia)	40 45

Source: Housing LIN

12.51 In interpreting the different potential prevalence rates:

- The prevalence rates used should be considered and assessed, taking account of an authority's strategy for delivering specialist housing for older people;

- The Housing LIN model has been influenced by existing levels of provision and their view on what future level of provision might be reasonable, taking account of how the market is developing, funding availability, etc. It is more focused towards publicly commissioned provision. There is a degree to which the model and assumptions within it may not fully capture the growing

[26] Based on the More Choice Greater Voice publication of 2008 (Link). It should be noted that although these rates are from 2008, they are the same rates as were being used in the online toolkit when it was taken offline in 2019.
[27] Housing in Later Life Link
[28] Housing LIN Review

recent private sector interest and involvement in the sector, particularly in extra care, and

- The assumptions in these studies look at the situation nationally. At a more local level, the relative health of an area's population is likely to influence the need for specialist housing, with better levels of health likely to mean residents can stay in their own homes for longer.

12.52 These issues are considered to provide appropriate modelling assumptions for assessing future needs. Nationally, there has been a clear focus on strengthening a community-led approach and reducing reliance on residential and nursing care, in particular focusing where possible on providing households with care in their own home, such as through Technology Enabled Care.

12.53 This could, however, be provision of care within general needs housing, but also care which is provided in a housing with care development, such as in extra care housing.

12.54 We consider that the prevalence rates shown in the 2016 Housing LIN Review are an appropriate starting point, but that the corollary of lower care home provision should be a greater focus on delivery of housing with care.

12.55 Having regard to market growth in this sector in recent years, and since the above studies were prepared, we consider that the starting point for housing with care should be the higher rate shown in the SHOP@ report (this is the figure that would align with the PPG).

12.56 Rather than simply taking the base prevalence rates, an initial adjustment has been made to reflect the relative health of the local older person population.

12.57 This has been based on Census data about the proportion of the population aged 75 and over who have a long-term health problem or disability (LTHPD) compared with the England average. In Cheshire West & Chester, the data shows very slightly better health in the 75+ population, and so a modest decrease has been made to the prevalence rates.

12.58 A second local adjustment has been to estimate a tenure split for the housing with support and housing with care categories. This again draws on suggestions in the 2016 Review, which suggests that less deprived local authorities could expect a higher proportion of their specialist housing to be in the market sector.

12.59 Using 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data shows CW&C to be the 183rd most deprived local authority in England (out of 317). This is a slightly lower than average level of deprivation and suggests a slightly greater proportion of market housing than a local authority in the middle of the range (for housing with support and housing with care).

12.60 The following prevalence rates, expressed as a need per 1,000 people aged 75 and over have been used in the analysis:

- Housing with support (market) – 56 units;
- Housing with support (affordable) – 67 units;
- Housing with care (market) – 28 units;
- Housing with care (affordable) – 17 units;
- Residential care – 39 bedspaces; and
- Nursing care – 44 bedspaces

12.61 It is also important to understand the supply of different types of specialist accommodation, with the table below showing various categories of accommodation. Figures are expressed as a total and as a proportion of the population aged 75 and over (estimated to be 41,541 in 2025).

12.62 The analysis shows a total of around 4,300 units of housing with support, which represents around 104 per 1,000 people aged 75 and over – some 66% of this in the affordable sector.

12.63 For housing with care, a lower current supply is shown (1,075 units – again mainly in the affordable sector).

12.64 For nursing and residential care, a supply of 2,845 bedspaces is shown, with the majority (73%) being nursing care.

Table 12.10 Current supply of housing for older people – Cheshire West & Chester

		Current supply	Supply per 1,000 aged 75+
Housing with support	Market	1,452	35
	Affordable	2,859	69
Total (housing with support)		4,311	104
Housing with care	Market	280	7
	Affordable	795	19
Total (housing with care)		1,075	26
Residential care bedspaces		771	19
Nursing care bedspaces		2,074	50
Total bedspaces		2,845	68

Source: EAC

12.65 Taking the supply forward and using the prevalence rates, the tables below show estimated needs for different types of housing linked to the population projections.

12.66 The analysis is separated into the various types and tenures. However, it should be recognised that there may be overlap between categories (i.e., some households may be suited to more than one type of accommodation).

12.67 The analysis shows there is currently a sufficient supply of housing with support (e.g. sheltered/retirement housing) and housing with care (e.g.

extra-care) in the affordable sector. However, by 2045, an additional need is identified.

12.68 Overall, by 2045, a shortfall of 3,300 units of housing with support is identified (around three-fifths in the market sector) and a further 1,700 units with care (86% as market housing).

12.69 For nursing and residential care, the analysis suggests a current shortfall of around 640 units, entirely for residential care (which may overlap with extra-care). Moving through to 2045, a total need for 2,300 bedspaces is identified, including a need for additional nursing care (approaching a third of the total).

Table 12.11 Specialist Housing Need for Older Persons, 2025-45 – Cheshire West & Chester

		Housing demand per 1,000 75+	Current supply	Current demand	Current shortfall/ surplus (-ve)	Additional demand to 2045	Shortfall /surplus by 2045
Housing with support	Market	56	1,452	2,331	879	1,132	2,011
	Affordable	67	2,859	2,796	-63	1,357	1,295
Total (housing with support)		123	4,311	5,127	816	2,489	3,306
Housing with care	Market	28	280	1,153	873	560	1,433
	Affordable	17	795	693	-102	336	234
Total (housing with care)		44	1,075	1,846	771	896	1,667
Residential care bedspaces		39	771	1,641	870	797	1,666
Nursing care bedspaces		44	2,074	1,846	-228	896	668
Total bedspaces		84	2,845	3,487	642	1,693	2,334

Source: Iceni analysis/EAC

12.70 While the above provides a PPG-compliant assessment of the need for different categories of specialist accommodation, there is a degree of fluidity between them. For example, a greater supply of extra care will stem the flow to residential care. Similarly, an increased supply of M4(2) and M4(3) dwellings will allow people to live in their home for longer and reduce demand for housing with care and housing with support.

Adult Social Care and Housing Needs

12.71 We have engaged with the Council's Adult Social Care (ASC) team to gain a better understanding of the policy context and demand for specialist accommodation in CWAC.

12.72 Housing has emerged as a central priority for ASC over the past two years, with significant emphasis placed on understanding the lived experiences of service users and what their needs are.

12.73 Engagement work has highlighted a strong desire for self-contained properties – with individual front doors, care wrapped around the accommodation.

12.74 While extra care provision has traditionally been targeted at those aged 65 and over, there is growing recognition of the needs of adults aged 45–65 with early-onset dementia, acquired brain injury from substance misuse, and a range of disabilities and long-term conditions.

12.75 Increasingly, this includes adults of all ages with learning disabilities, autism, ADHD, and mental health conditions who are living longer than in previous generations and whose support needs have often been masked while living with ageing parents who are now unable to provide care.

12.76 The council's strategic direction is to ensure that people with low-level care and support needs have access to affordable, accessible housing located within communities, close to services and public transport.

12.77 The objective is to support independent living in mainstream settings wherever possible, with care and support introduced as required. At present, supported living and extra care models often separate individuals from wider communities, and there is a desire to move towards properties designed to accommodate technology-enabled care, including additional power sockets and ceiling track hoists.

12.78 A key ambition is to reduce reliance on traditional residential care, shifting instead towards extra care provision. There are currently seven extra care schemes in operation, though until recently the council had limited influence over placements.

12.79 The establishment of a new extra care panel has enabled some control over allocations to voids. Demand is rising, reflecting both the council's move away from residential placements and the wider aspiration for more independent living.

12.80 Nonetheless, challenges remain: individuals are still being discharged from hospital into residential care due to the lack of available extra care units, while some residents in existing schemes seek to transfer to residential care when, ideally, their needs should be met in situ.

12.81 In general, and not necessarily CWAC-specific issues, the quality of some extra care accommodation, particularly converted buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, is increasingly unsuitable for modern extra care use. Where this arises, there may be a need for replacement stock.

12.82 Where new schemes are developed, there is an ambition to strengthen their role within communities, for example, through health and wellbeing groups and other support initiatives making use of communal spaces.

12.83 Identified gaps include the absence of male-only provision, particularly for individuals with criminal histories, resulting in costly out-of-borough placements.

12.84 The council has identified a need for approximately 300 new units in a variety of different types, including but not exclusively single front door accommodation for adults under 65 with learning disabilities or mental health needs. This is being advanced through a major new-build programme delivered directly by the council.

12.85 Demand is relatively consistent across the borough, though rural areas, such as Malpas, face acute challenges due to limited supply.

12.86 Costs remain an issue, particularly in relation to private landlord-operated supported living schemes where rents exceed housing benefit levels, placing additional financial burdens on the council.

12.87 Overall, the council's clear priority is to expand the availability of appropriate housing within mainstream community settings to meet a wide range of support needs.

Wheelchair User Housing

12.88 The analysis below draws on secondary data sources to estimate the number of current and future wheelchair users and to estimate the number of wheelchair accessible/adaptable dwellings that might be required in the future.

12.89 Estimates of need produced in this report draw on data from the English Housing Survey (EHS) – mainly 2020/21 data. The EHS data used include the age structure of wheelchair users, information about work needed to make homes 'visitable' for wheelchair users, and data about wheelchair users by tenure.

12.90 The table below shows, at a national level, the proportion of wheelchair user households by the age of the household reference person. Nationally, around 3.1% of households contain a wheelchair user, with around 1% using a wheelchair indoors.

12.91 There is a clear correlation between the age of the household reference person and the likelihood of there being a wheelchair user in the household.

Table 12.12 Proportion of wheelchair user households by age of household reference person – England

Age of household reference person	No household members use a wheel-chair	Uses wheel-chair all the time	Uses wheel-chair indoors only	Uses wheel-chair outdoors only	TOTAL
24 and under	99.4%	0.4%	0.0%	0.1%	100.0%
25-34	99.4%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	100.0%
35-49	97.9%	0.4%	0.3%	1.4%	100.0%
50-64	97.1%	0.5%	0.2%	2.2%	100.0%
65 and over	94.3%	1.3%	0.5%	4.0%	100.0%
All households	96.9%	0.6%	0.3%	2.2%	100.0%

Source: English Housing Survey (2020/21)

12.92 The prevalence rate data can be brought together with information about the household age structure and how this is likely to change moving forward – adjustments have also been made to take account of the relative health (by age) of the population. The data estimates that there will be 5,200 wheelchair-user households in 2025, rising to 6,600 by 2045.

Table 12.13 Estimated number of wheelchair user households (2025-45) – Cheshire West & Chester

	Prevalence rate (% of households)	Households 2025	Households 2045	Wheelchair user households (2025)	Wheelchair user households (2045)
24 and under	0.7%	3,803	3,931	25	26
25-34	0.6%	20,312	23,352	117	134
35-49	2.1%	39,619	50,423	814	1,036
50-64	2.7%	46,902	52,458	1,271	1,421
65 and over	5.5%	53,594	71,503	2,967	3,958
All households	-	164,230	201,667	5,193	6,576

Source: Iceni analysis

12.93 The finding of an estimated current number of wheelchair user households does not indicate how many homes might be needed for this group – some households will be living in a home that is suitable for wheelchair use, whilst others may need improvements to accommodation, or a move to an alternative home.

12.94 Data from the EHS shows that of the 814,000 wheelchair user households, some 200,000 live in a home that would either be problematic or not feasible to make fully 'visitable' – this is around 25% of wheelchair user households.

12.95 Applying this to the current number of wheelchair user households across the Council area gives a current need for 1,298 additional wheelchair user homes.

12.96 If the projected need is also discounted to 25% of the total (on the basis that many additional wheelchair user households will already be in accommodation), then a further need for 346 homes in the 2025-45 period can be identified. Added together, this leads to a need estimate of 1,644 wheelchair user homes – equating to 82 dwellings per annum.

Table 12.14 Estimated need for wheelchair user homes, 2025-45

	Current need	Projected need (2025-45)	Total current and future need
Cheshire West & Chester	1,298	346	1,644

Source: Iceni Analysis

12.97 Furthermore, information in the EHS (for 2020/21) also provides national data about wheelchair users by tenure. This showed that, at that time, around 6.7% of social tenants were wheelchair users (including 1.8% using a wheelchair indoors/all the time), compared with 2.6% of owner-occupiers (0.8% indoors/all the time).

12.98 These proportions can be expected to increase with an ageing population, but do highlight the likely need for a greater proportion of social (affordable) homes to be for wheelchair users.

Table 12.15 Proportion of wheelchair user households by tenure of household reference person – England

Tenure	No household members use a wheel-chair	Uses wheel-chair all the time	Uses wheel-chair indoors only	Uses wheel-chair outdoors only	TOTAL
Owners	97.4%	0.6%	0.2%	1.8%	100.0%
Social sector	93.3%	1.3%	0.5%	4.9%	100.0%
Private renters	98.6%	0.2%	0.2%	1.0%	100.0%
All households	96.9%	0.6%	0.3%	2.2%	100.0%

Source: English Housing Survey (2020/21)

12.99 To meet the identified need, the Council should seek a proportion (potentially up to 5%) of all new market homes to be M4(3) compliant and potentially a higher figure in the affordable sector (potentially up to 10%).

12.100 These figures indicate that not all sites can deliver homes of this type. In the market sector, these homes would be M4(3)A (adaptable) and M4(3)B (accessible) for affordable housing.

12.101 As with M4(2) homes, it may not be possible for some schemes to be built to these higher standards due to built form, topography, flooding, etc. Furthermore, provision of this type of property may, in some cases, challenge the viability of delivery given the reasonably high build-out costs.

12.102 It is worth noting that the (previous) Government has reported on a consultation (Raising Accessibility Standards for New Homes).[29]) on changes to the way the needs of people with disabilities and wheelchair users are planned for as a result of concerns that, in the drive to achieve housing numbers, the delivery of housing that suits the needs of the households (in particular those with disabilities) is being compromised on viability grounds.

12.103 The key outcome is: ‘Government is committed to raising accessibility standards for new homes. We have listened carefully to the feedback on the options set out in the consultation, and the government response sets out our plans to mandate the current M4(2) requirement in Building Regulations as a minimum standard for all new homes. This change was intended to be implemented through a change to building regulations, but has not yet occurred.

[29] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/raising-accessibility-standards-for-new-homes

12.104 The consultation outcome still requires a need for M4(3) dwellings to be evidenced, stating ‘M4(3) (Category 3: Wheelchair user dwellings) would continue as now, where there is a local planning policy in place in which a need has been identified and evidenced. Local authorities will need to continue to tailor the supply of wheelchair user dwellings to local demand’.

12.105 As well as evidence of need, the viability challenge is particularly relevant for M4(3)(B) standards. These make properties accessible from the moment they are built and involve high additional costs that could, in some cases, challenge the feasibility of delivering all or any of a policy target.

12.106 It should be noted that local authorities only have the right to request M4(3)(B) accessible compliance from homes for which they have nomination rights. They can, however, request M4(3)(A) adaptable compliance from the wider (market) housing stock.

12.107 Finally, while we have recommended that 100% of all new dwellings be built to M4(2) dwellings, the draft NPPF (December 2025) seeks to “ensure that at least 40% of new housing delivered over the course of the plan is delivered to M4(2) or M4(3) standards.”

Older and Disabled Persons - Summary

12.108 The data show that Cheshire West & Chester has a slightly older age structure than is seen regionally and nationally. Generally, marginally lower age-specific levels of disability are compared with the regional and national position.

12.109 The older person population shows high proportions of owner-occupation, and particularly outright owners who may have significant equity in their homes (76% of all older person households are outright owners).

12.110 The older person population is projected to increase notably moving forward. An ageing population means that the number of people with disabilities is likely to increase. Key findings for the 2025-45 period include:

- a 31% increase in the population aged 65+ (potentially accounting for 47% of total population growth);
- a 56% increase in the number of people aged 65+ with dementia and a 46% increase in those aged 65+ with mobility problems;
- a need for around 3,300 additional housing units with support (sheltered/retirement housing) – 61% in the market sector;
- a need for around 1,700 additional housing units with care (e.g. extra-care) – around 86% in the market sector;
- a need for additional nursing and residential care bedspaces (around 2,300 in the period); and
- a need for around 1,600 dwellings to be for wheelchair users (meeting technical standard M4(3)).

12.111 This would suggest that there is a clear need to increase the supply of accessible and adaptable dwellings and wheelchair-user dwellings, as well as providing specific provision of older persons' housing.

12.112 Given the evidence, the Council could consider (as a starting point as not all site could delivery it) requiring all dwellings (in all tenures) to meet the M4(2) standards and around 5% of homes meeting M4(3) – wheelchair user dwellings in the market sector (a higher proportion of around 10% in the affordable sector).

12.113 Where the authority has nomination rights, the supply of M4(3) dwellings would be wheelchair-accessible dwellings (constructed for immediate occupation), and in the market sector, they should be wheelchair-user adaptable dwellings (constructed to be adjustable for occupation by a wheelchair user). These are also referred to as M4(3)a and M4(3)b, respectively.

12.114 It should, however, be noted that there will be cases where this may not be possible (e.g. due to site-specific circumstances), and so any policy should be applied flexibly.

12.115 In framing policies for the provision of specialist older persons' accommodation, the Council will need to consider a range of issues. This will include the different use classes of accommodation (i.e. C2 vs. C3) and requirements for affordable housing contributions (linked to this, the viability of provision).

12.116 There may also be some practical issues to consider, such as the ability of any individual development being mixed tenure, given the way care and support services are paid for.

13. Other Specific Groups

Self and Custom-Housebuilding

13.1 As of 1st April 2016, and in line with the Act and the Right to Build, relevant authorities in England are required to have established and publicised a self-build and custom housebuilding register which records those seeking to acquire serviced plots of land in the authority's area to build their own self-build and custom houses.

13.2 The NPPF (December 2024, paragraph 63) requires housing needs of different groups to be assessed and reflected in planning policies, including "people who wish to commission or build their own homes".

13.3 The NPPF also recognises the benefits of mixed-tenure sites, including plots sold for custom or self-build (paragraph 71), and directs LPAs to support small sites coming forward for self- and custom-build housing (paragraph 73(b)).

13.4 The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding PPG provides wider guidance on assessing demand and supporting self-build development. In line with the legal duty placed on local authorities by the 2016 Act, the PPG reminds us that relevant authorities must give suitable development permission to enough suitable serviced plots of land to meet the demand for self-build and custom housebuilding in their area.

13.5 The level of demand is established by reference to the number of entries added to an authority's register during a 'base period'. The first base period began on the day the register was established.

13.6 Each subsequent base period is 12 months beginning immediately after the end of the previous base period. Subsequent base periods will therefore run from 31st October to 30th October each year.

13.7 At the end of each base period, relevant authorities have 3 years in which to meet their legal duty and grant permission for an equivalent number of plots of land, which are suitable for self-build and custom housebuilding, as there are entries for that base period.

13.8 The PPG states that local planning authorities should use the demand data from the registers in their area, but this should also be supported as necessary by additional data from secondary sources, to understand and consider the future need for this type of housing in their area when preparing housing needs assessments.

13.9 Under the provisions of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023) (LURA), which amended the Self Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, while each authority has three years to meet the needs arising from the register, this need must be counted cumulatively.

13.10 For example, the need as of the 30th of October 2024 will be the cumulative demand shown in all base periods prior to the 30th of October 2021 minus any delivery. If there is under-delivery, then this will roll forward.

13.11 The LURA also made changes to how supply permissions can be counted. This means that the councils will need to demonstrate that serviced plots have resulted in self- and custom-build development rather than plots that could be self- or custom-build.

13.12 This essentially means that in order for planning permissions to be counted towards the supply of self and custom build homes, there needs to be evidence to show that this is what the development is for.

13.13 Going forward, the Authorities will need to continue to monitor applications for self-build dwellings in CWAC. Ensuring that all supply permissions are evidenced as self-build will also be essential to allow an assessment of whether the duty is properly met.

13.14 It may also be prudent for the Council to retrospectively assess supply permissions to properly ascertain which permissions are specifically for the carrying out of self and custom-build development.

Self and Custom Build Register

13.15 The total number of Base Periods since the register was introduced is nine. The Council introduced a local connection test in October 2019; as a result, the register is now split into 2 parts. As of the end of Base Period 10, there were 665 total entries on the register.

13.16 Monitoring data suggests that 734 plots that are specifically for self and custom build have gained planning permission since the register was created.

Table 13.1 CWAC Self and Custom Build Register

Base Period	Annual Entries	Cumulative Total Entries	Permissions
Base Period 1 (1st April 2016 to 30th October 2016)	120	120	
Base Period 2 (31st October 2016 to 30th October 2017)	113	233	152
Base Period 3 (31st October 2017 to 30th October 2018)	94	327	101
Base Period 4 (31st October 2018 to 30th October 2019)	70	397	98
Base Period 5 (31st October 2019 to 30th October 2020)	60	457	120
Base Period 6 (31st October 2020 to 30th October 2021)	63	520	86
Base Period 7 (31st October 2021 to 30th October 2022)	64	584	56
Base Period 8 (31st October 2022 to 30th October 2023)	34	618	60
Base Period 9 (31st October 2023 to 30th October 2024)	36	654	61
Base Period 10 (31st October 2024 to 30th October 2025)	11	665	
Total	**665**		**734**
Average	**66**		**73**

Source: MHCLG Council

13.17 Although the Council has three years to meet the need on the register, they have already exceeded this. Consequently, the need for self and custom-built housing in Cheshire West and Chester is being met, and there is no backlog.

13.18 This oversupply can also help meet any additional registrations in the next two years. At present, the council has only counted single dwelling developments, but they are reviewing and improving how self and custom-built homes are monitored.

13.19 While there is no backlog to address, the council also has to meet future needs as per the number of registrations. While this number is unknowable, past registrations can act as a guide. These past trends suggest a need to permit 67 plots per annum.

Broader Demand Evidence

13.20 To supplement the data from the Council's register(s), we have looked to secondary sources as recommended by the PPG, which, for this report, is data from NaCSBA – the National Custom and Self-build Association.

13.21 First, it is worth highlighting that the October 2020 survey undertaken by YouGov on behalf of NaCSBA found that 1 in 3 people (32%) are interested in building their own home at some point in the future, including 12% who said they were very interested.

13.22 Almost half (48%) of those aged between 18 and 24 were interested in building their own home, compared to just 18% of those aged 55 and over. This is notable as traditionally self-build has been seen as the reserve of older members of society aged 55 and over, with equity in their property.

13.23 Secondly, we can draw on NaCSBA data to better understand the level of demand for serviced plots in CW&C in relative terms. The association published an analysis with supporting maps and commentary titled "Mapping the Right to Build" in 2020.

13.24 This document includes an output on the demand for serviced plots as a proportion of the total population relative to all other local authorities across England.

13.25 For CWAC, this mapping indicates a demand of 122 per 100,000 population. Based on the CWAC population of 371,652 in 2024, this would equate to a need for around 543 serviced plots to date which is lower than the identified need

13.26 Despite the figure from NaCSBA being slightly lower than the level of demand shown on the register, the Council still must permit enough plots for self and custom build as indicated by the register.

Policy Response

13.27 The Council's current policy, as set out in the Local Plan (Part 1), adopted in 2015, predates the register and only provides a general support policy in the SOC3 Policy relating to Housing Mix and Type.

13.28 The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding PPG sets out how authorities can increase the number of planning permissions which are suitable for self-build and custom housebuilding and support the sector.

13.29 The PPG[30] is clear that authorities should consider how local planning policies may address identified requirements for self- and custom-housebuilding to ensure enough serviced plots with suitable permissions come forward, and should focus on playing a key role in facilitating relationships to bring land forward.

13.30 There are several measures which can be used to do this, including but not limited to:

- supporting Neighbourhood Planning groups where they choose to include self-build and custom-build housing policies in their plans;
- working with Homes England to unlock land and sites in wider public ownership to deliver self-build and custom-build housing;
- when engaging with developers and landowners who own sites that are suitable for housing, encouraging them to consider self-build and custom housebuilding, and facilitating access to those on the register where the landowner is interested; and
- working with local partners, such as Housing Associations and third sector groups, to custom build affordable housing for veterans and other groups in acute housing need.

[30] Paragraph: 025 Reference ID: 57-025-20210508

13.31 An increasing number of local planning authorities have adopted specific self-build and custom housebuilding policies in their respective Local Plans to encourage delivery, promote and boost housing supply.

13.32 There are also several appeal decisions in the context of decision-making which have found that paragraph 11(d) of the Framework is engaged in the absence of a specific policy on self-build housing when this is the focus of a planning application.

13.33 There are several policy levers that the council could consider as part of its response to future need for custom and self-build housing in the borough. These include:

- **General Support Policies** - Although these set out the council's intentions to support housing, they are weak unless supplemented with clear guidance and expectations around how self and custom build can be delivered.
- **Housing Mix Policies** – Such policies are more strategic in nature but could address Self and Custom Build needs as well as built form and the size and tenure of homes. However, such policies are unlikely to be applicable to every site.
- **Percentage Policies –** This approach seeks a specific percentage of plots from typically large sites. It is a good way to generate a continued supply, but the council needs to ensure it is reliable. The scale of the site and the percentage to be applied should reflect the identified and projected need and the likely delivery.
- **Site Allocations –** The Council could also consider allocating sites specifically for Self and Custom Build use. This could be council-owned sites or smaller sites in high-demand locations. Such sites provide greater certainty for delivery but may not be welcomed by the site owner.
- **Exception Sites –** This allows Self and Custom Build homes to be built where the market will not deliver, e.g. small sites in remote areas
- **Criteria-Based Polices –** Establish criteria that must be met for planning to be supported, e.g. limiting the number of developments in each parish, garden sites, infill sites, etc.

13.34 No single policy choice will be fully effective; therefore, the Council should consider which suite of policies will be most effective in Cheshire West and Chester.

13.35 When examining the future supply, either through site allocations or that resultant from percentage policies, the council should ensure that a mix of sites is forthcoming.

13.36 This should include both small sites that are primed for early delivery and large sites that could be sustained later into the plan period. There should also be a wide spread of sites across the Borough, not just in one settlement. The register can inform the location of these sites.

13.37 If the Council do wish to pursue a percentage policy, then, given typical build-out rates, it should only seek to enforce such plots on larger sites. This could be applied to sites of 70 dwellings or more based on a rounded average annual completions on sites with one sales outlet. This means that anything above this threshold would deliver over a period of more than 12 months.

13.38 These plots should be marketed appropriately for 6 months (online and offline at realistic prices). Then the developer can revert to delivering these sites as market accommodation without significantly elongating the build-out period.

13.39 The Council may also wish to consider making the first three months of marketing these plots to those with a local connection or on the custom and self-build register, with the remaining time widening it out to anyone else.

13.40 To provide greater clarity to the development industry, the council may wish to consider publishing supporting text or additional guidance on matters relating to:

- Design codes
- Phasing
- Marketing strategies

- S106 Clauses
- Validation requirements (e.g. delivery statements)
- Affordable Contributions

13.41 A further consideration for the Council is that, when demonstrating supply to meet this demand, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill makes it harder for Councils to count CIL exemption sites.

13.42 They now must demonstrate that these homes are specifically for self or custom-build occupiers. The Council could consider introducing a self-build delivery statement to be submitted alongside planning applications and adapting its monitoring to ensure its implementation.

Looked after Children and Care Leavers

13.43 Key legislation relating to the accommodation and maintenance of a looked-after child is set out in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. The act places a duty on local authorities to plan strategically for the children in their care, ensuring that, where aligned with the child's welfare, accommodation should be provided within the authority's own area.

13.44 This means councils must take steps to ensure sufficient local provision is available. Looked-after children can remain close to their home community, family and support networks whenever possible.

13.45 The legislation provides a framework within which decisions about the most appropriate way to accommodate and maintain children must be considered:

- Section 22A of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty on the responsible authority when a child is in their care to provide the child with accommodation.
- Section 22B of the Children Act 1989 sets out the duty of the responsible authority to maintain a looked-after child in other respects apart from providing accommodation.

- Section 22C of the Children Act 1989 sets out the ways in which a looked-after child is to be accommodated.
- Section 22D of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty on the responsible authority to formally review the child's case prior to making alternative arrangements for accommodation.
- Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to take strategic action with respect to those children they look after and for whom it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation within their own local authority area.

13.46 In a Written Ministerial Statement[31] (WMS) In May 2023, the Housing and Planning Minister reminded local authorities of their requirement to assess the housing needs of different groups in the community, including "accommodation for children in need of social services care".

13.47 The WMS statement said, "Local planning authorities should give due weight to and be supportive of applications, where appropriate, for all types of accommodation for looked after children in their area that reflect local needs and all parties in the development process should work together closely to facilitate the timely delivery of such vital accommodation for children across the country".

13.48 The WMS follows on from the Department of Education Implementation Strategy[32] To fix children's social care from February 2023. The "Stable Homes Built on Love" Strategy has undergone consultation with aspects of the Government's reform proposals, receiving a broad welcome.

13.49 However, some stakeholders raised concerns that the proposals amounted to a "piecemeal approach" rather than the required whole-system reset.

[31] https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-05-23/hcws795

[32] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1147317/Children_s_social_care_stable_homes_consultation_February_2023.pdf

13.50 In response, the then Government said it is taking a “test and learn” approach and the strategy marks “the start of the journey.”

13.51 The strategy outlined an ambition to transform Children’s Care through six pillars. The first of these pillars makes it clear that supporting families is the priority. This ensures that children can remain in their family home for as long as possible (Pillar 1) and, if this is not possible, within their wider family (Pillar 3).

13.52 If both the immediate and wider family cannot look after a child, then Pillar 4 seeks to ensure that “when care is the best choice for a child, the care system must provide stable, loving homes close to children’s communities.”

13.53 To achieve this, the strategy aims to increase and support foster carers and develop a programme to support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children’s homes sector.

13.54 The report sets out a mission to “see an increase of high-quality, stable and loving homes available for every child in care, local to where they are from”.

13.55 To do this, it suggests that an immediate action is to “boost the number of the right homes in the right places available for children as a matter of urgency.”

13.56 The strategy notes, “Local authorities have primary responsibility for the children in their care. This includes ensuring there is sufficient accommodation locally to meet the range of needs of children in care in their area”, and that there is a “statutory duty to ensure there is sufficient provision for their children in care”.

13.57 It also states that the DfE “will continue to build on our work reforming supported accommodation for 16- to 17-year-olds. Semi-independent provision, including supported lodgings, can be the right option for some older children. Still, only where it is high-quality, and the young person is ready for the level of independence it promotes.”

13.58 The Department will also continue “with the Children’s Home Capital Programme, which has seen £259 million of capital funding invested to increase provision in local authority-run open and secure children’s homes. We are working with local authorities to create new children's homes and increase provision in their local area.”

13.59 At a similar time, the government also launched a consultation on the “Children’s Social Care National Framework[33]” and the “Children’s Social Care Dashboard”. The Framework sets out some of the outcomes to be measured, including Outcome 4 relating to those seeking to ensure “children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes”.

13.60 The indicators include the percentage of children in care living in foster care and living in residential care, and the distance of placements from home. This is important to ensure the stability of schooling and contact with their siblings. The framework recognises that this will mean prioritising foster homes rather than residential homes.

13.61 The outcome can also be achieved by leaders undertaking “sufficiency planning and work with other local authorities and partners to jointly invest in care options that meet the future needs of children.”

Council Position

13.62 Cheshire West and Chester Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023-27 Final Draft – Oct 2022 summarises the position in CWAC as of August 2022.

13.63 At that time, the Council was responsible for 560 children in care. This would equate to 0.8% of the population aged under 18.

13.64 Of these 330 children were living within the borough, and 230 children were living out of the borough (some of whom are purposefully placed

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[33] Children in Care Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2023 to 2026

outside of the borough with connected people or to meet specific complex needs).

13.65 In addition, there were 37 Young People aged 16 - 17 years living in semi-independent settings. At that time, 107 of the 560 children were young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years, including 15 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who would have required move-on accommodation as care leavers. Additionally, 212 carer leavers were aged 18 years or older.

13.66 The report noted that the number of children in the Council's care has gradually increased, with a noted rise since January 2021, which is expected to continue in the future.

13.67 Demand on all services had also intensified not only numerically, but in complexity, as children and young people are presenting with multiple and complex needs.

13.68 It noted that the Council continued to have more children in their care than the national average, and it was growing at a faster rate than was seen over the previous 4 years from 2018.

13.69 The report also noted that the costs of placements for children made it increasingly difficult to locate and increasingly expensive. Providers also struggled to recruit carers.

Demographic Growth

13.70 The population projections linked to CWAC's housing need show a decline in the population aged under 18 of 3.2%. This in itself would point to no need for more children's residential housing, although it is not the only driver of demand.

13.71 There may, however, still be a need for additional supply to either repatriate some of the out-of-area need, but also to reduce the reliance (and cost) of using private providers, as well as addressing the increasingly complex nature of demand.

13.72 The Council's Children's and Families service is working closely with colleagues the housing team and with social housing providers to provide in-house residential care to ensure the needs of current and future looked after children are met within the borough.

13.73 The WMS statement said, "Local planning authorities should give due weight to and be supportive of applications, where appropriate, for all types of accommodation for looked after children in their area that reflect local needs".

13.74 One solution would be for the Council to adopt an approach seen elsewhere (Basildon, Gloucester, Lancashire), where applications for Children's Care Homes specify that the Council has first refusal on nominations within a given period, to increase access to accommodation in the area. This benefits everyone by allowing children to maintain community and education links.

13.75 The current best practice is to deliver these as 3-4 bedroom "ordinary homes" on sites with the most appropriate locations according to Ofsted's Location Assessment[34]. In summary, this includes ensuring safeguarding concerns are met and that children have access to services.

13.76 Efforts are being made to make homes resemble regular houses and reduce the reliance on children's care homes, given the significant cost difference between care homes and fostering.

13.77 There will also be a need for supported accommodation for young adults and care leavers. The Council should work with Registered Providers to explore opportunities to provide this through developer contributions and in the existing stock.

34 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/339545/Children_s_homes_regulations_amendments_2014.pdf

Recommendations

13.78 The WMS statement said “Local planning authorities should give due weight to and be supportive of applications, where appropriate, for all types of accommodation for looked after children in their area that reflect local needs”

13.79 Clearly, the national and council policy direction is to provide in-situ support, followed by familial and foster support. Therefore, the demand for care homes will largely be determined by the success of these policies. Where this is not possible, then local authorities will be required to provide safe accommodation in the right places.

13.80 The Council should also consider engaging with partner agencies like Health, Education/Early Years and the voluntary sector to strengthen their role in supporting increased placement provision as and when necessary. Although population projections suggest this is likely to fall.

13.81 However, if this need does arise, the Council should ensure that any new 3-4 or more bed homes or multi-building units are developed in close collaboration with existing service providers. This need could also be met by seeking provision on larger strategic sites if demand increases.

13.82 Such sites should align with the most appropriate locations according to Ofsted’s Location Assessment[35] for such accommodation. In summary, this includes ensuring safeguarding concerns are met and that children have access to services.

13.83 Any additional capacity is likely to be in the urban areas, particularly Chester, Ellesmere Port and Northwich/Winsford, to allow for wider access. To ensure the needs of those from the rural parts of the

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35 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/339545/Children_s_homes_regulations_amendments_2014.pdf

Borough are met locally, there should also be provision in the same centres to serve the peripheral areas.

Service Families

13.84 Cheshire West and Chester has a notable military presence, including Dale Barracks. The latest MOD location statistics indicate that approximately 410 military and civilian personnel are based in CWAC, down from 700 in 2012.

13.85 However, Dale Barracks are due to close in 2030, and the DIO is currently preparing disposal plans for the site. However, they are not in a position to say whether the service family accommodation will be retained to meet the need. There are other MOD sites within a 40-minute drive, including Sealand, which is just to the west of the borough.

13.86 Annexe 2 of the NPPF identifies frontline public sector employees such as NHS staff, teachers, police and Military Personnel as Essential Local Workers. As such, their accommodation falls explicitly under the definition of affordable housing.

13.87 Depending on their incomes, this group will already be accounted for within the assessment of affordable housing need made in this report, which includes analysis of population growth, incomes and concealed households, and as a result will essentially not be additional to it.

13.88 Although we have suggested that there is no need for first homes, the Planning Practice Guidance for First Homes allows local authorities to set out their own criteria for accessing such housing.

13.89 One such criterion could be a key worker, including NHS and service personnel, but again, it should be stressed that from a purely affordable housing perspective, there is no need for First Homes unless a significant discount can be achieved.

13.90 When looking at service personnel specifically the PPG also stipulates that "local connection criteria should be disapplied for all active members of the Armed Forces, divorced/separated spouses or civil partners of current members of the Armed Forces, spouses or civil partners of a deceased member of the armed forces (if their death was wholly or partly caused by their service) and veterans within 5 years of leaving the armed forces".

13.91 In addition, the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations ensure that service personnel (including bereaved spouses or civil partners) are allowed to establish a 'local connection' with the area in which they are serving or have served.

13.92 This means that ex-service personnel would not suffer a disadvantage from any 'residence' criteria chosen by the Local Authority in their allocations policy.

13.93 The most acute and pressing issue is likely to be finding accommodation for those transitioning out of the forces, as well as existing personnel who are seeking to buy in the Borough.

13.94 Low-Cost Home Ownership could play a part in meeting demand for key local workers as it would provide a discounted route to home ownership. Although, as noted previously, this could be at the expense of others in more acute need.

Other Specific Groups - Summary

Self and Custom Build

13.95 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act made amendments to the way demand/need and supply of self and custom-built dwellings are calculated.

13.96 Need must be calculated cumulatively, with supply permissions needing to be able to demonstrate that they will result in a self or custom-built dwelling.

13.97 The Council are currently meeting the need for self and custom build housing. They should, however, continue to monitor this, and as a guide for future needs, we suggest that around 70 plots per annum should be permitted based on past trends.

13.98 The Council should continue to be supportive of opportunities for Self and Custom build development within Local Plans, and could consider a number of policy levers to address need.

Looked After Children and Care Leavers

13.99 In CWAC, the number of children in residential care is increasing and above national rates and accounts for 0.8% of all under 18s.

13.100 Population projections linked to CWAC's housing need show a declining population aged under 18. This would suggest limited need for additional housing, though reducing costs to independent providers and repatriating some out-of-area placements could justify further provision.

Service Personnel

13.101 Cheshire West and Chester has approximately 410 military and civilian personnel, down from 700 in 2012.

13.102 However, Dale Barracks are due to close in 2030, and the DIO is currently preparing disposal plans for the site. There may be a need for housing for families who want to stay in the area.