Cheshire West & Chester Council

Our changing population

2025 based forecasts

Insight & Intelligence Team

September 2026

Play your part towards a Stronger Future

Cheshire West and Chester

Understanding why local population change matters

Population change shapes demand for public services and influences where resources, infrastructure and support are needed most.

- Understanding who lives here and how the population is changing helps us respond to shifts in age, household composition, diversity and vulnerability.
- Anticipating future demand enables better planning for services such as education, housing, social care, health and transport.
- Identifying where growth, need and inequality are changing helps target resources and investment more effectively.
- Providing a robust evidence base supports strategic decision-making, policy development and long-term financial planning.

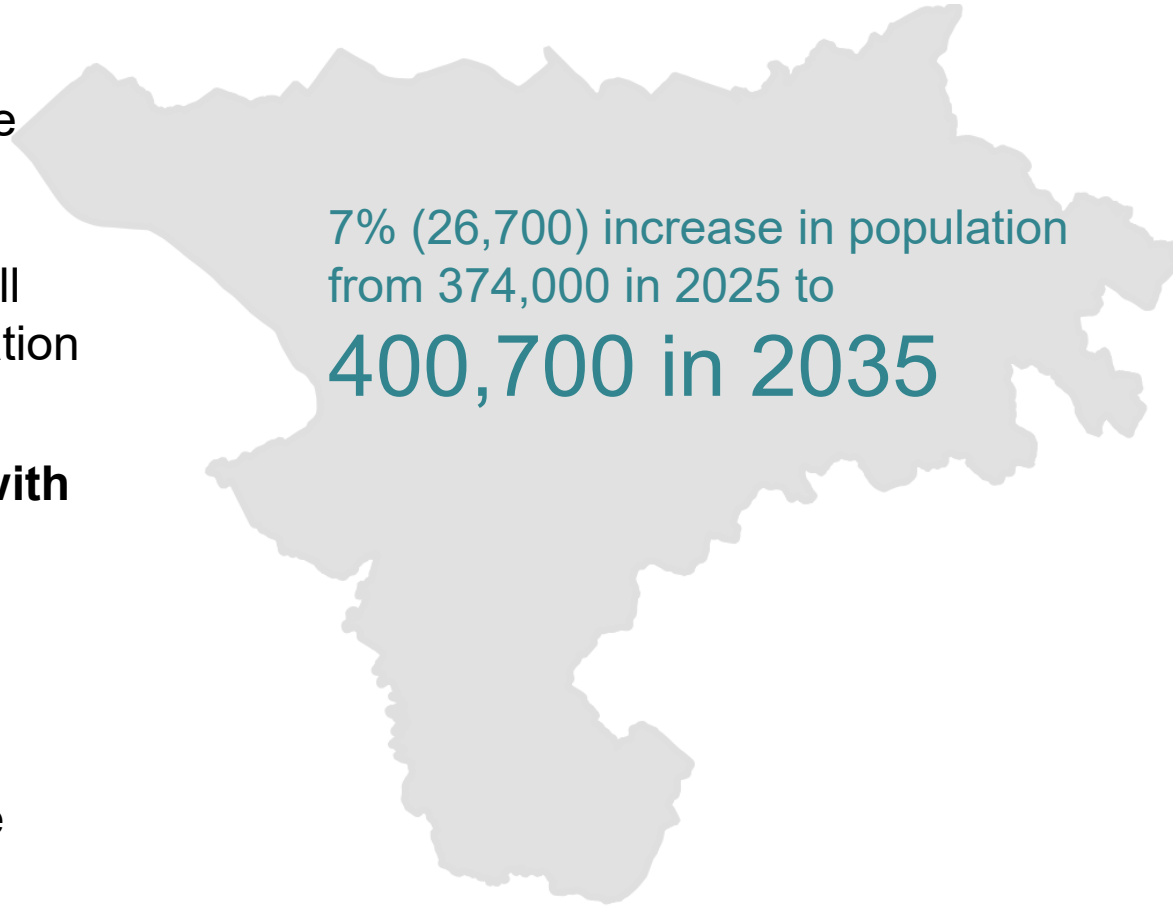
Key population changes – 2025 to 2035

More older people
(aged 65+)
23% (18,600) increase

More deaths than births. Population will increase due to migration

Increase in people with 24-hour care needs
20% (1,200) increase

Increase in people with dementia
28% (1,800) increase



7% (26,700) increase in population from 374,000 in 2025 to

400,700 in 2035

Fewer children
(aged 0-15)
6% (3,800) decrease

More people of working age
(aged 16-64)
5% (11,900) increase

More people living alone
24% (12,200) increase

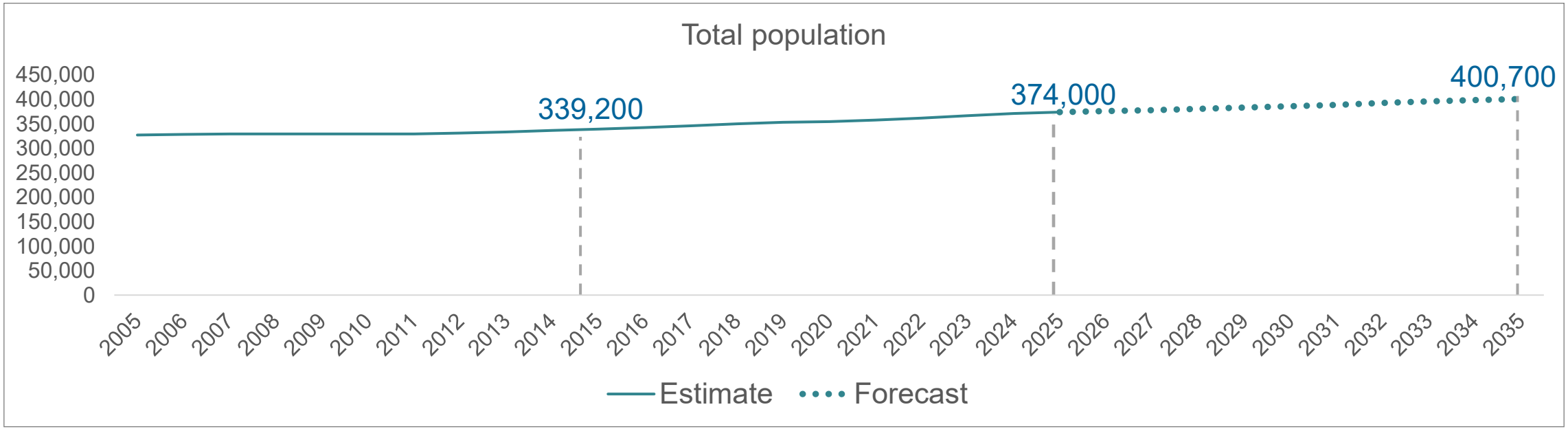
Increase in older people living alone
(aged 65+)
27% (6,700) increase

Notes and sources: All data is independently rounded to nearest 100. Population estimates, Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0
2025-based population forecasts, Insight and Intelligence Team, CW&C.

Contact: insight@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk Insight & Intelligence Team, Cheshire West & Chester Council.

Increasing total population

- Population increased by 10% over the last ten years (2015 to 2025) to 374,000 in 2025.
- Forecast slower increase, 7% (26,700) over the next ten years, to 400,700 in 2035.



Note: All numbers rounded to nearest 100.
Sources: Population estimates, Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Population forecasts, Insight and Intelligence Team, CW&C

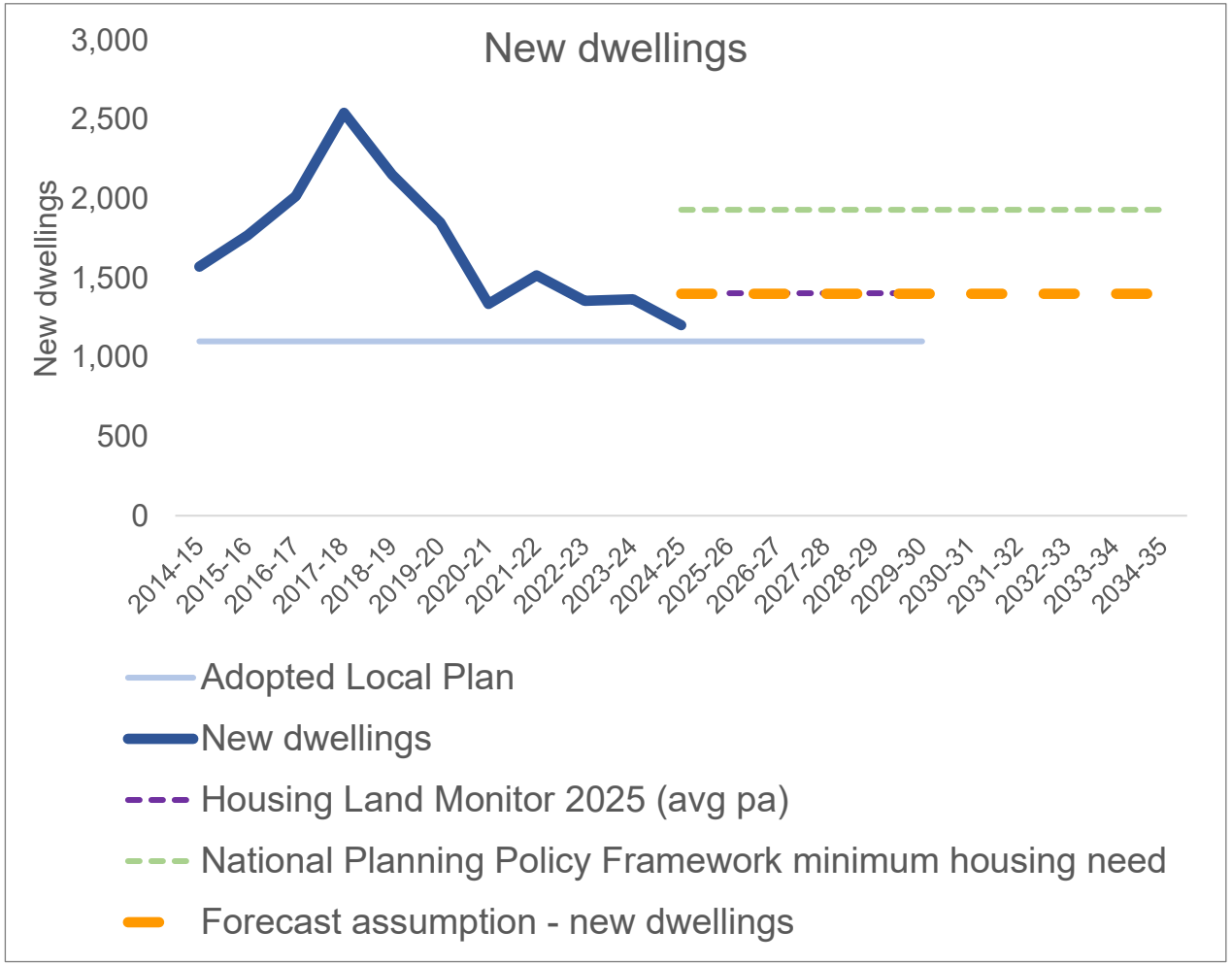
Increasing dwellings

167,800 dwellings (2025)

374,000 population (2025)

New dwellings	Per annum
Adopted Local Plan (2010 to 2030)	1,100 (minimum)
New dwellings (2020 to 2025)	1,400 (actual built)
Housing Land Monitor (2025 to 2030)	1,400 (forecast average)
National Planning Policy Framework housing need (Dec 2024) (not included in Adopted Local Plan)	1,900

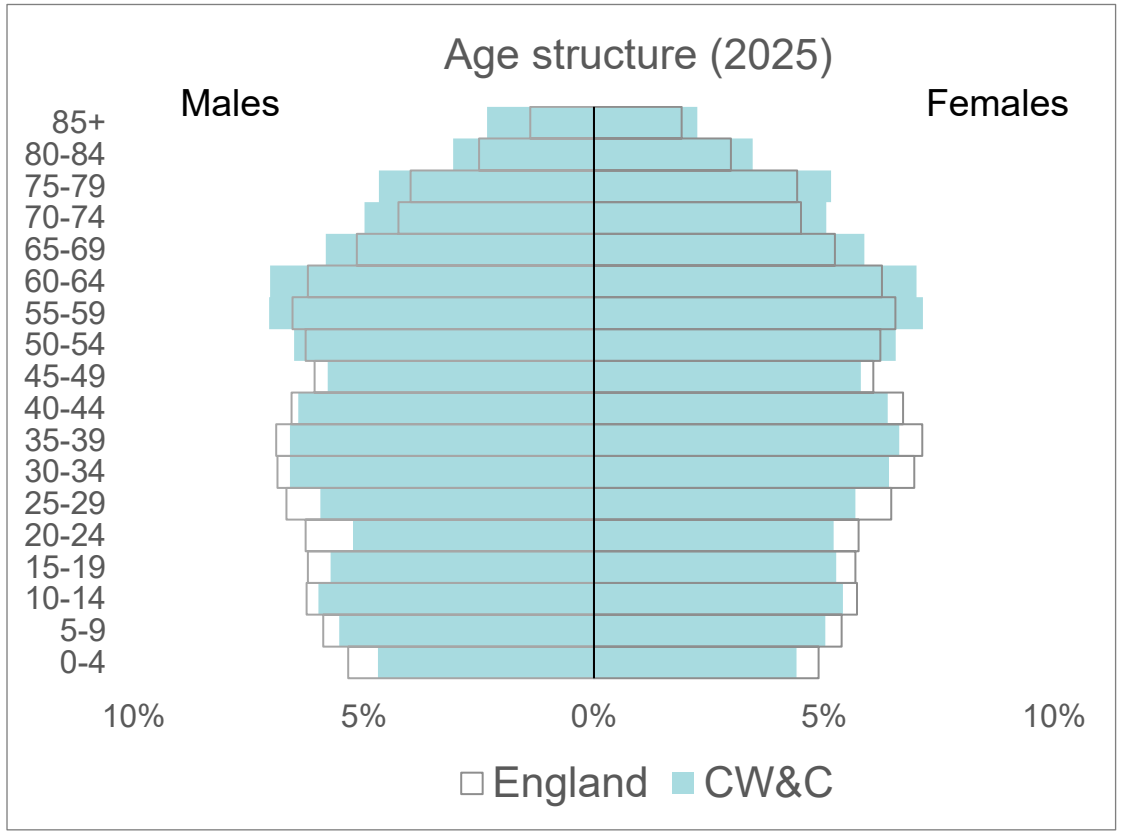
Assumption new dwellings 2025-35 = 1,400 pa
(includes judgements on realistic migration based on past trends and consideration of lead in time for new policy)



Sources:
Table 100: Number of Dwellings by Tenure and district, England, 2025 (provisional), MHCLG
Population estimates, Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0.

Large cohorts in older age groups

Older age structure than England.



Large cohort of people aged 75-79. (WWII baby boom generation).

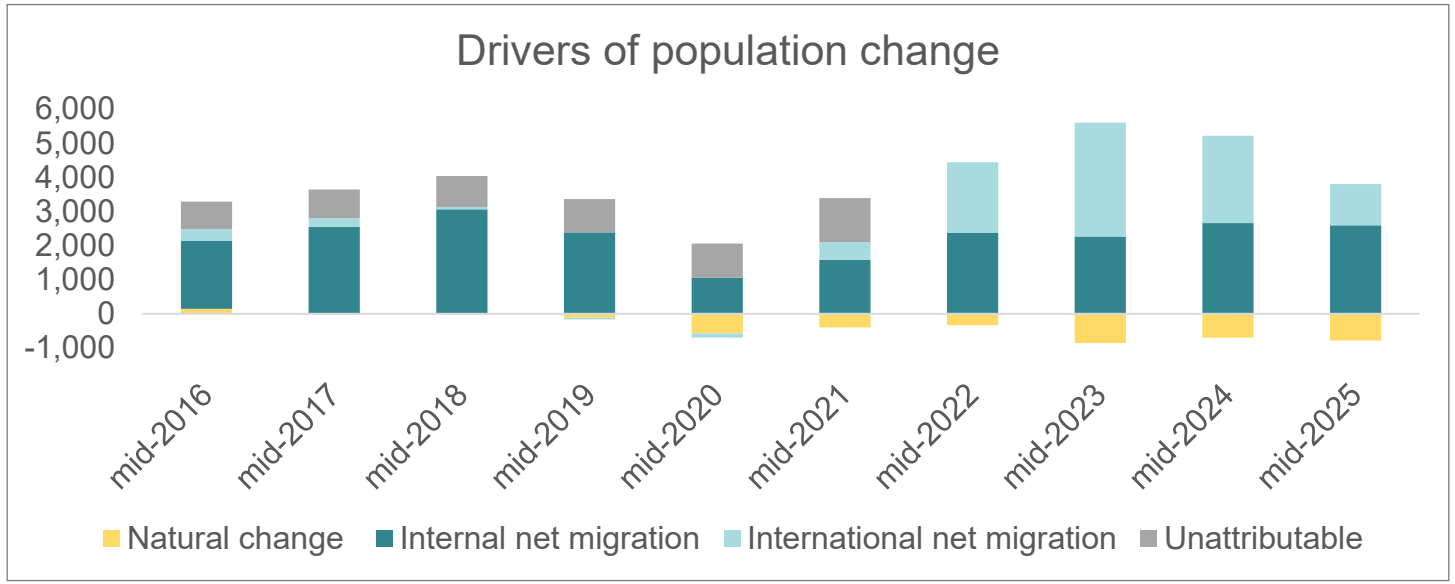
Largest cohorts in 2025 are 55-59 and 60-64s.

Decreasing numbers of births over past decade has led to smaller cohorts aged 5-9 and 0-4.

More deaths than births

Over the last ten years:

- **Natural change** (births – deaths) decreased. From 2019 onwards there have been **more deaths than births**
- Around 21,200 people moved into CW&C each year (**18,500** from UK and **2,900** international)
- Around 16,300 moved out of the borough each year (**16,300** to UK and **1,800** international)
- Net migration (mainly adults aged under 45 and children) is driving population increase.



Recent factors affecting international migration:

- New immigration system & rule changes
- Easing of restrictions after COVID-19
- War in Ukraine

2025 provisional ONS estimates for England & Wales show a decrease in net migration to levels similar to 2021.

Unattributable change = adjustments after 2021 Census (avg. 900 pa).

Population change in key age groups

Estimate:
Over the last 10 years (2015 to 2025):

- Population increased by 10%
- 0-15 increased by 5%
- Largest increases in older ages:
  - 20% (13,500) increase in 65+
  - 26% (2,300) increase in 85+

	2015	2025	Change 2015-25	%
0-15	59,100	62,200	3,100	5%
16-64	211,300	229,500	18,200	9%
65+	68,800	82,300	13,500	20%
85+	8,700	11,100	2,300	26%
Total	**339,200**	**374,000**	**34,800**	**10%**

Note: Numbers independently rounded to nearest 100.

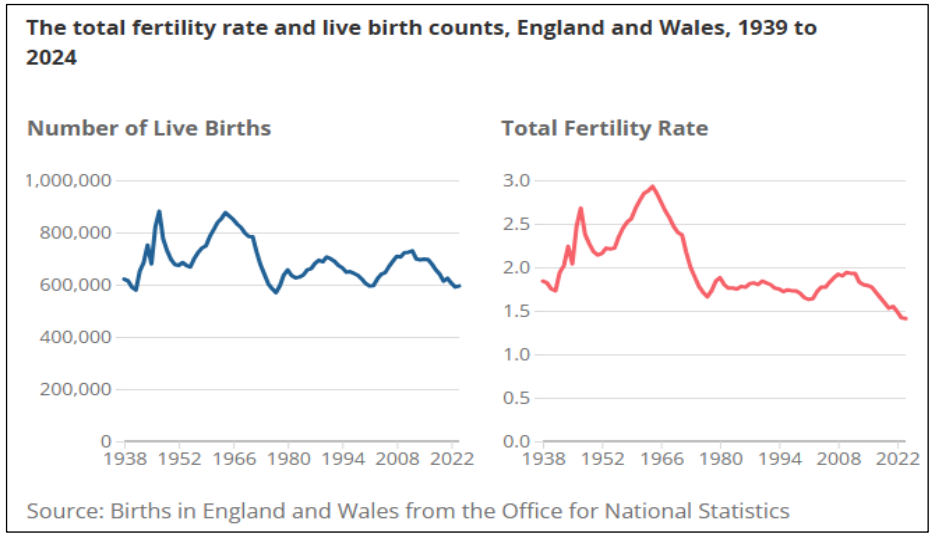
Forecast:
Over the next 10 years (2025 to 2035):

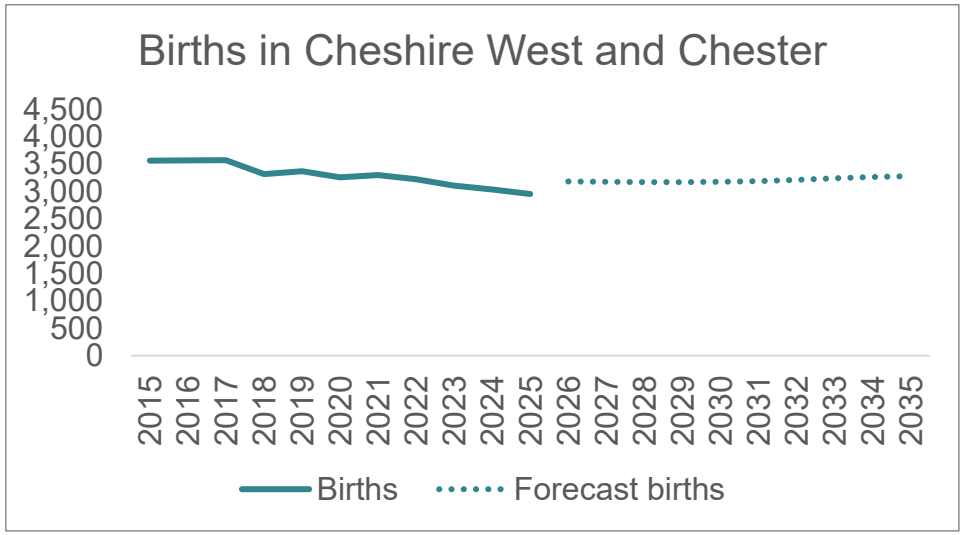
- Population forecast to increase by 7%
- **Children** forecast to **decrease by 6%**
- Largest increases in older age groups:
  - **23% (18,600) increase** in **65+**
  - **55% (6,000) increase** in **85+**
    (more than double increase in previous decade)

	2025	2035	Change 2025-35	%
0-15	62,200	58,400	- 3,800	-6%
16-64	229,500	241,400	11,900	5%
65+	82,300	100,900	18,600	23%
85+	11,100	17,100	6,000	55%
Total	**374,000**	**400,700**	**26,700**	**7%**

Long–term fall in birth rate

- Births have decreased in the borough from around 3,600 in 2015 to 2,900 in 2025. Total fertility rates are at a record low (1.26 in CW&C in 2025, 1.39 in England).
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) project the England fertility rate will remain at a long-term low of around 1.4.
- The forecasts assume a constant low-level fertility slightly below the England rate.
- This may be an optimistic assumption given most recent decreases in fertility rates.





Note: Fertility assumptions sourced from ONS 2022-based Subnational Population Projections (with an adjustment to lower rate in line with change between 2022 and 2024-based National Projections.

Wide range of factors affecting declining births

- Common across developed countries
- 20% births in CW&C either one or both parents not born in UK (changes to international migration may also impact birth rate)
- Potential long-term implications - smaller workforce, pressure on public services and welfare systems.

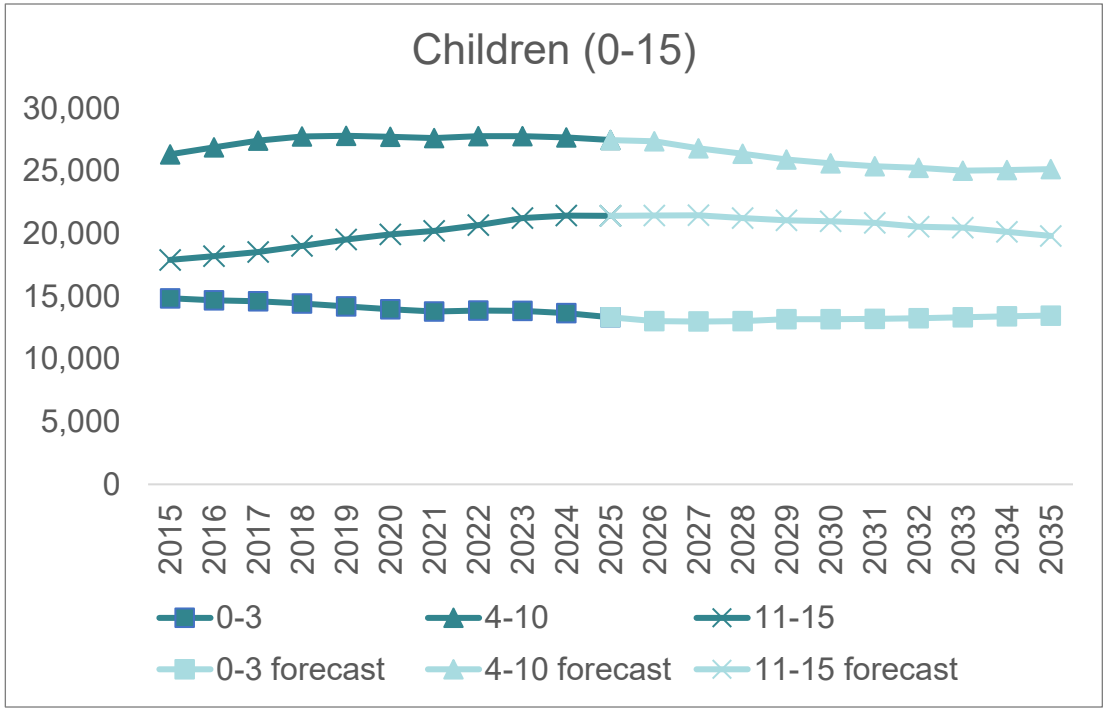


Sources:
Bye bye baby, Resolution Foundation, April 2026
Demographic change and the Welfare State, The Kings Fund, May 2026
Changing Populations Issue 18, Centre for Population Change, ESRC, August 2026.
2025 Births by Parents Country of Birth, Office for National Statistics

Fewer children

- Children increased by 5% (3,100) over the last decade (2015 to 2025), with 20% increase in children aged 11-15.
- Over the next ten years (2025 to 2035):
  - **6% (3,800) decrease in children.**
  - Pre-school children (aged 0-3) will remain constant.
  - Children aged 4-10 will decrease by 8% (2,300).
  - Children aged 11-15 will decrease by 8% (1,600).

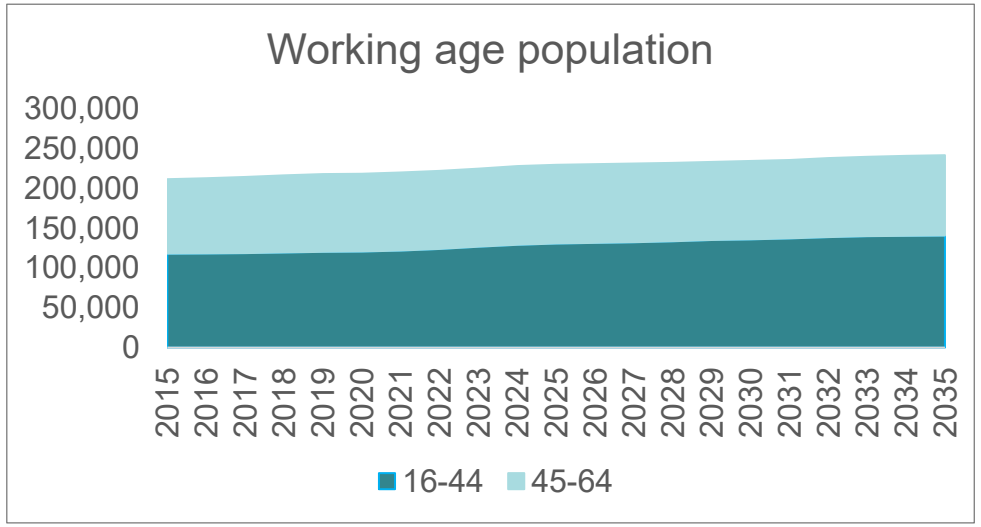
	2015	2025	2035	Change 2015-2025	%	Change 2025-2035	%
0-3	14,800	13,300	13,500	-1,500	-10%	100	1%
4-10	26,300	27,500	25,100	1,100	4%	-2,300	-8%
11-15	17,900	21,400	19,800	3,500	20%	-1,600	-8%
0-15	**59,100**	**62,200**	**58,400**	**3,100**	**5%**	**-3,800**	**-6%**



Note: Cohorts generally reflect past birth trends (plus annual net migration). Over the past decade each cohort of children has grown year on year due to positive net migration. This is forecast to continue. Future fertility assumptions in the forecasts may be overly optimistic. If there was a lower number of births over the next ten years than forecast there would be a lower number of children aged 0-10.

Increasing numbers of people of working age

- Between 2025 to 2035 people of working age are forecast to increase by 5% (11,900), a lower increase than the previous decade.
- Most of the increase will be younger working ages (partly due to net migration in these age groups and shifting age structure).
- Largest cohorts in CW&C in 2025 = 55-59 and 60-64s. By 2035 these cohorts will be aged 65+.

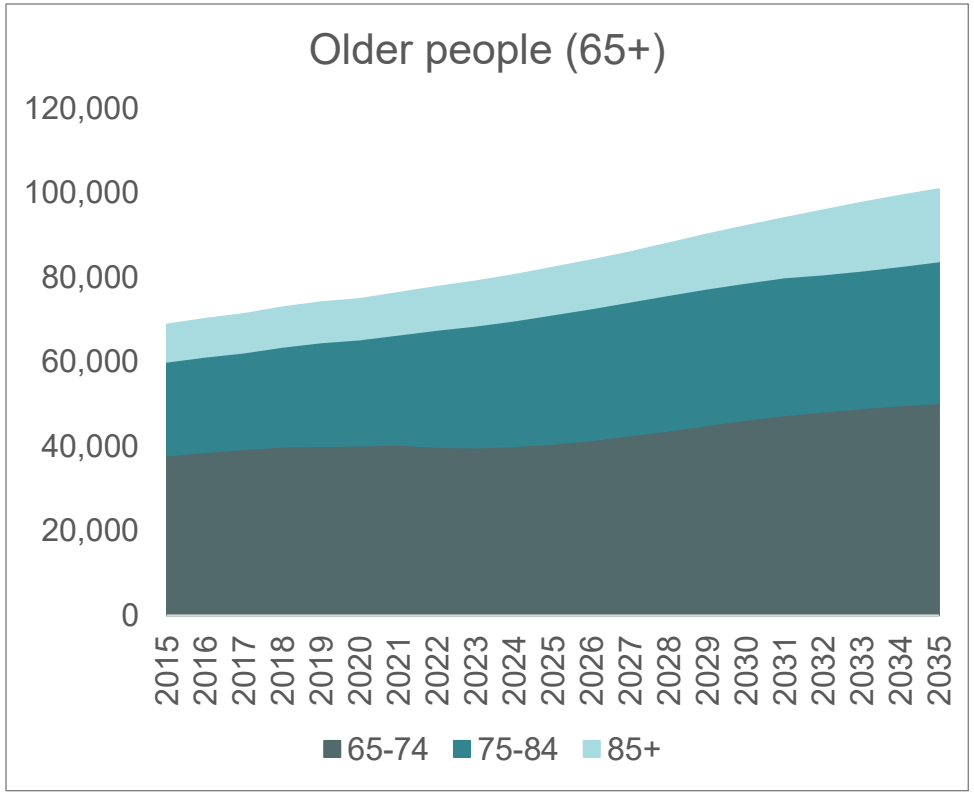


	2015	2025	2035	Change 2015-2025	%	Change 2025-2035	%
16-44	117,900	130,600	140,600	12,600	11%	10,000	8%
45-64	93,400	98,900	100,800	5,500	6%	1,900	2%
16-64	**211,300**	**229,500**	**241,400**	**18,200**	**9%**	**11,900**	**5%**

Ageing population – large increase in numbers of older people

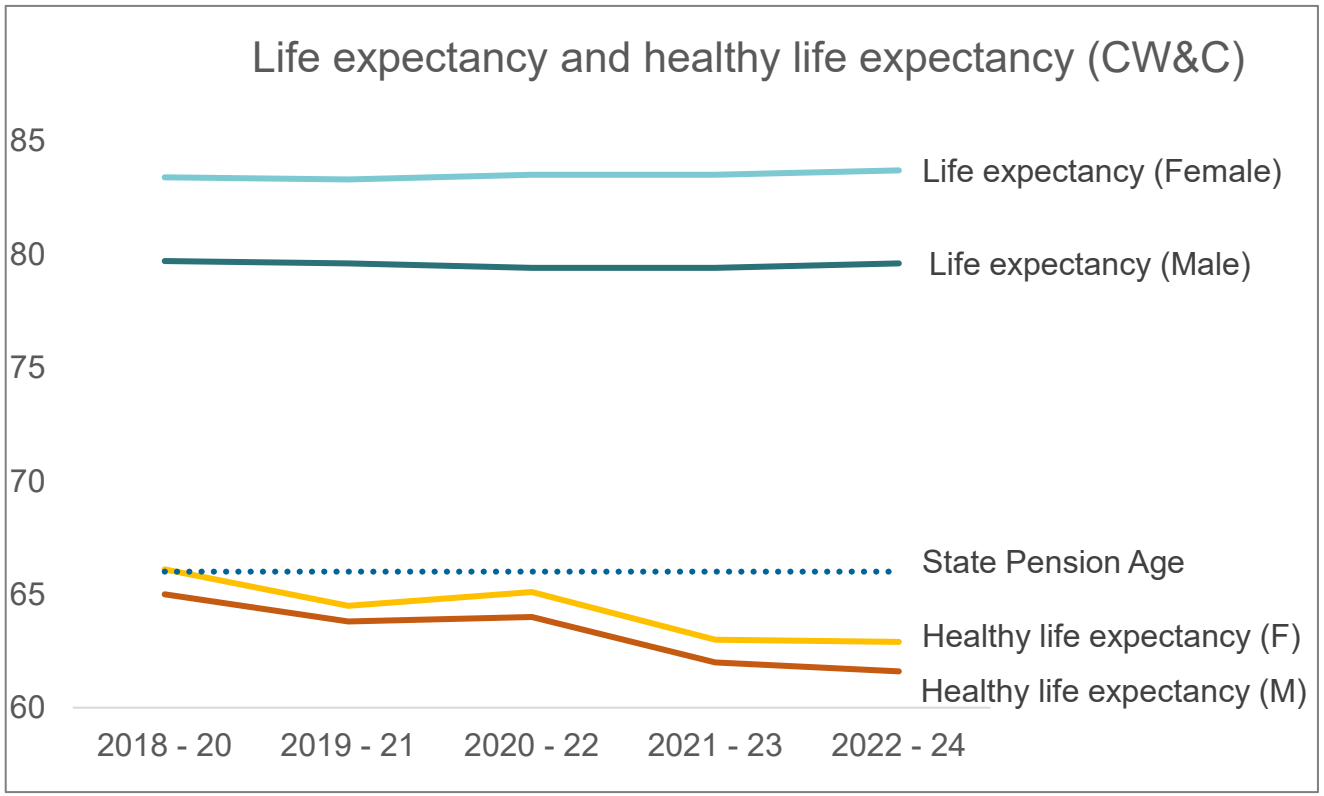
- The number of people aged 65+ increased by 20% over the last decade (2015 to 2025).
- Number of people aged 65+ is forecast to increase by 23% (18,600) over the next ten years.
- Largest increase in 85+ population as WWII baby boomers move into this age group.

	2015	2025	2035	Change 2015-2025	%	Change 2025-2035	%
65-74	37,800	40,600	50,200	2,800	7%	9,600	24%
75-84	22,200	30,600	33,500	8,400	38%	2,900	10%
85+	8,700	11,100	17,100	2,300	26%	6,000	55%
65+	**68,800**	**82,300**	**100,900**	**13,500**	**20%**	**18,600**	**23%**



More older people + living more years in poor health

People can expect to live around 20 years in poor health (increasing trend).



Life expectancy – ONS project gradual increase (2023-25)
Males = 80.0 years
Females = 83.7 years

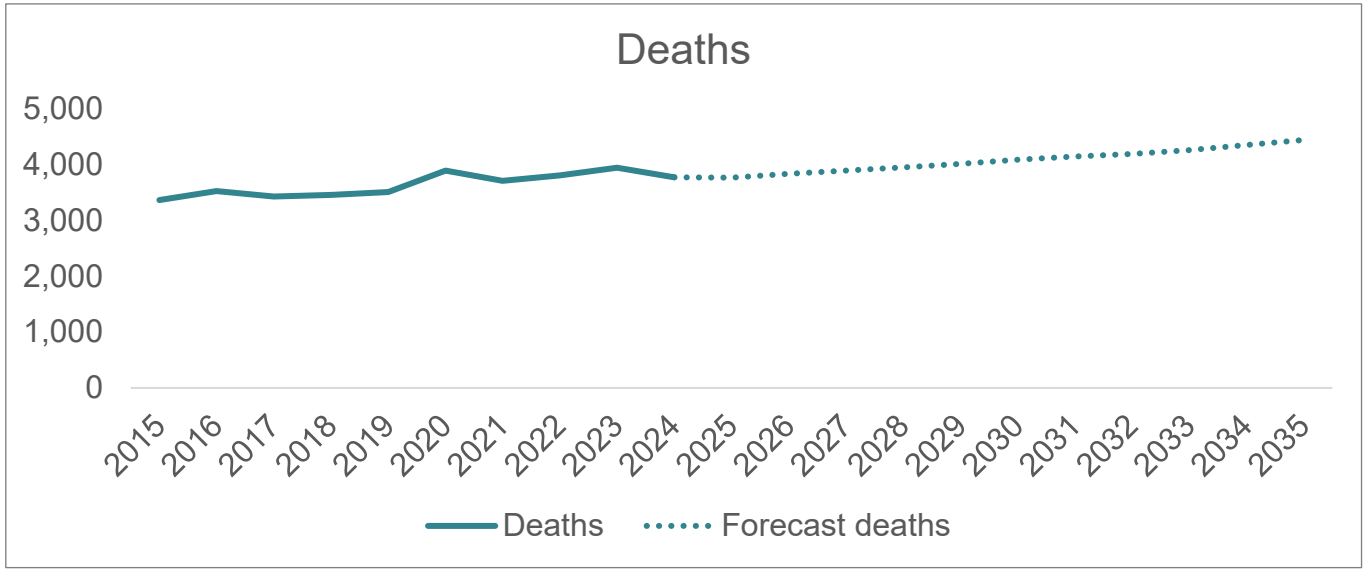
State pension = 66 now → 67 by 2028 → 68 by 2046.

Healthy life expectancy – decreasing trend (2023-25)
Males = 61.6 years
Females = 62.9 years

Source: Fingertips | Public health profiles, Department of Health & Social Care

Increase in numbers of deaths

- The number of deaths has increased from around 3,400 in 2015 to 3,700 in 2025.
- Numbers will continue to increase over the next ten years, as the older population increases.
- By 2035, there are forecast to be around 4,400 deaths a year.
- Implications and pressure points for end-of-life care, services and support.

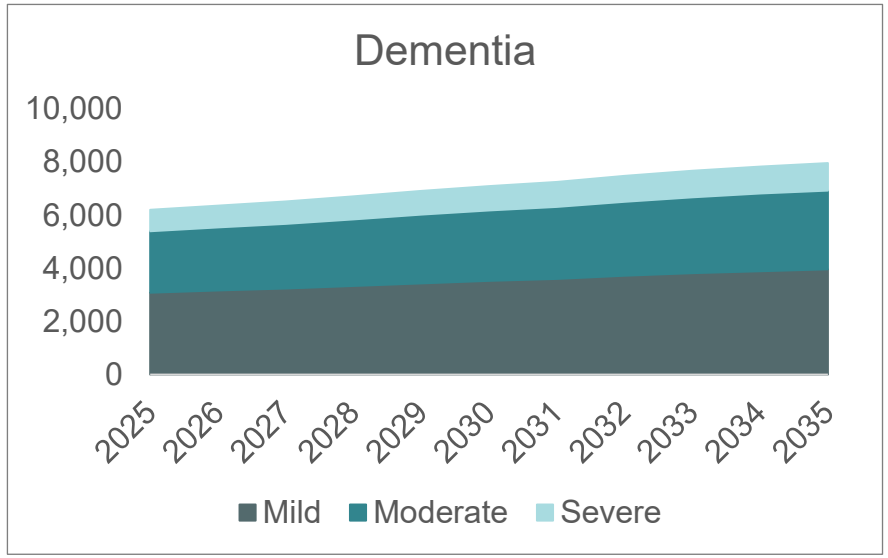


Increasing number of older people with dementia



- The number of people with dementia forecast to increase by 28% (1,800) over next ten years.
- Around 200 more people with severe dementia by 2035 – may increase demand for residential care. The Alzheimer's Society estimate two-thirds of people with severe dementia live in residential or nursing care settings.

	2025 estimate	2035 forecast	Change 2025-2035	%
Mild	3,100	4,000	900	28%
Moderate	2,300	3,000	700	28%
Severe	800	1,000	200	28%
Total	**6,200**	**8,000**	**1,800**	**28%**

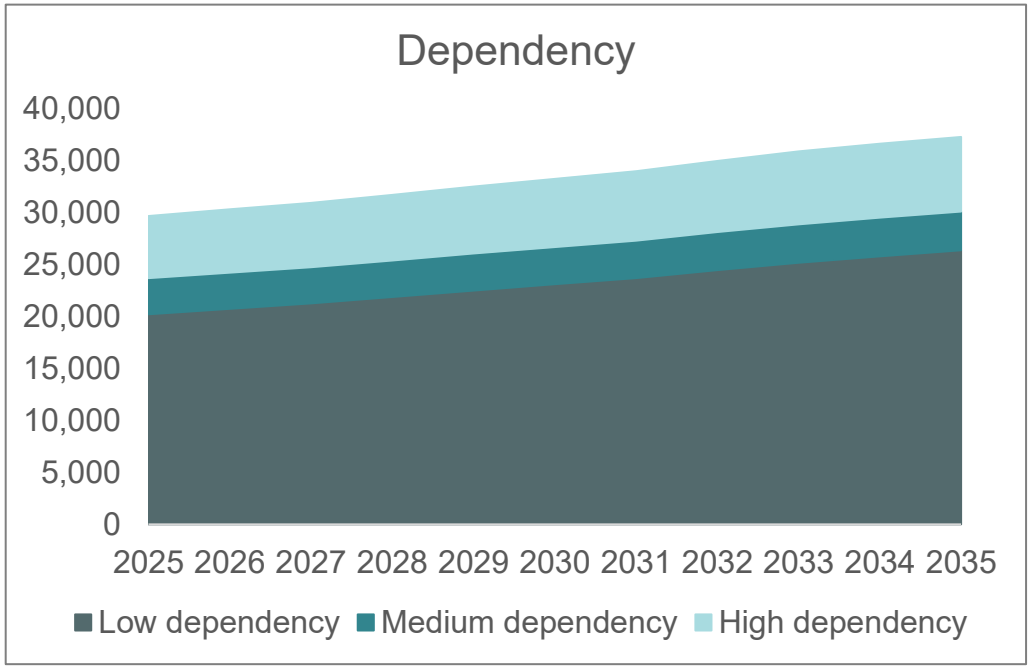


Source of prevalence:
[The annual cost of dementia](), Alzheimer's Society, 2024

Increasing number of older people with care needs

- Large increases in the number of older people living independently or with low dependency needs.
- Small increase in those with medium dependency (daily care needs).
- 20% (1,200) increase in people with high dependency (24-hour care needs).
- Increasing needs are predominantly in people aged 85+ reflecting population increases in this cohort.

	2025 estimate	2035 forecast	Change 2025-2035	%
Independent	52,500	63,600	11,000	21%
Low dependency	20,200	26,400	6,200	30%
Medium dependency	3,500	3,700	200	7%
High dependency	6,000	7,200	1,200	20%



Source of prevalence: Lancet Public Health article - Forecasting the care needs of the older population in England over the next 20 years: estimates from the Population Ageing and Care Simulation (PACSim) modelling study, Andrew Kingston, Adelina Comas-Herrera, Carol Jagger for the MODEM project, Forecasting the care needs of the older population in England over the next 20 years: estimates from the Population Ageing and Care Simulation (PACSim) modelling study - The Lancet Public Health. The MODEM project is also used by Alzheimer's Society for prevalence rates.

Increasing number of people living alone

- Highest growth is in lone pensioner households, with an additional 27% (6,700) older people aged 65+ living alone by 2035.
- 60% (3,300) increase in people aged 85+ living alone.

	2015	2025	2035	Change 2015-2025	%	Change 2025-2035	%
Single person households	**44,000**	**50,600**	**62,800**	**6,600**	**15%**	**12,200**	**24%**
One-person households aged 16-64	23,100	25,800	31,300	2,700	12%	5,500	21%
Lone pensioner households aged 65+	20,900	24,800	31,400	3,900	19%	6,700	27%
Lone pensioner households aged 85+	4,400	5,500	8,800	1,100	25%	3,300	60%
Other households	**101,300**	**112,900**	**119,300**	**11,500**	**11%**	**6,400**	**6%**
All households	**145,300**	**163,400**	**182,000**	**18,100**	**12%**	**18,600**	**11%**

Key population trends in Cheshire West and Chester

- Population growth continues, but is slowing
- Population growth is driven by migration, not births
- Families are smaller, with fewer children being born
- The biggest change is rapid growth in older age groups
- People are living longer, but not necessarily healthier
- Demand pressures will increasingly come from ageing rather than population growth.

Our changing population: challenges and opportunities

Challenges

More complex needs
More people living with major illness and multiple long- term conditions.

Pressure on unpaid carers
More people balancing employment with unpaid care.

Uneven geography of ageing
Older populations tend to be concentrated in rural areas.

More people living alone
Increasing importance of accessible services, housing and social connection.

Fewer children
Demand for schools may change. Potential impact on future workforce.

Opportunities

Prevent or delay ill health
Invest in prevention, early intervention and community-based support.

Enable independence
Adapt homes and places so disability does not mean losing independence.

Older people's contribution
Support flexible work, carers, volunteering and intergenerational participation.

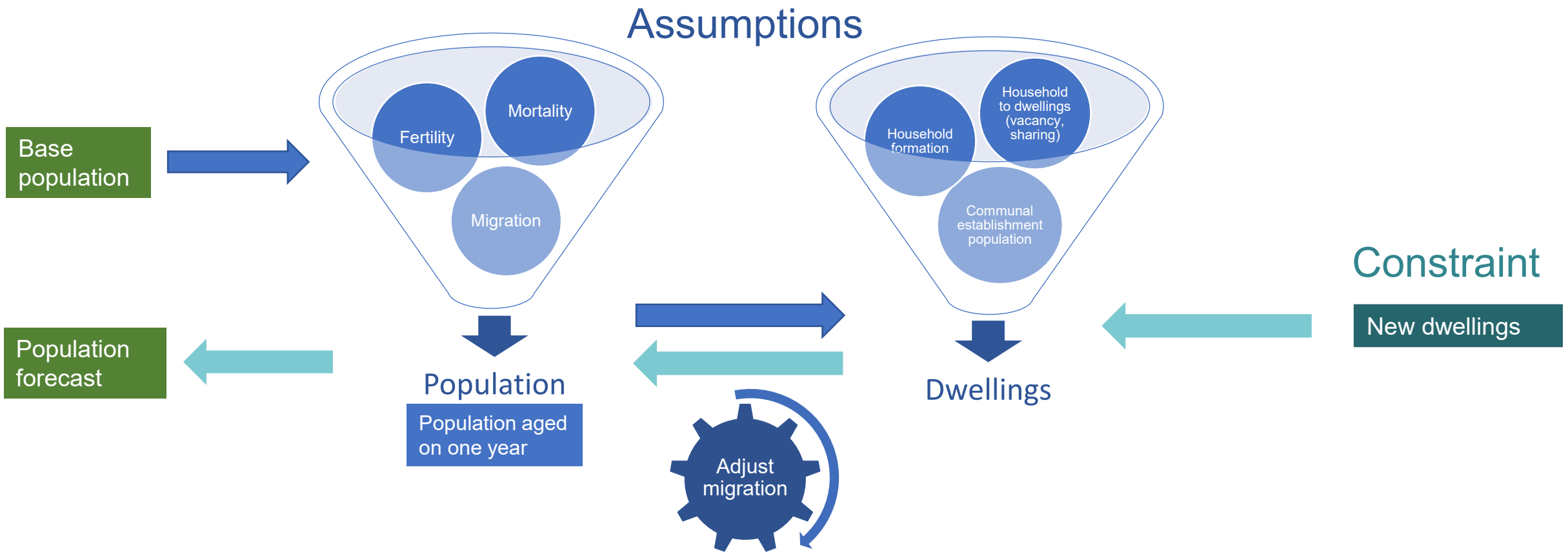
Innovate and redesign
Age-friendly housing, technology and services can improve lives and create opportunities.

Methodology

Forecasting method

Produced using Popgroup model = cohort component model with derived forecasts model.

Forecasts provide a view of the future population, based on a set of assumptions based on demographic trends.



Change from previous forecasts

	Previous forecasts (2023 base)	→	New forecasts (2025 base)
Base	Base = 2023 estimates	Revised and new estimates	Base = 2025 estimates
Assumptions	New dwellings = 1,700 pa	Average new dwellings 2020-2025 = 1,400	Lower new dwellings = 1,400 pa
	Fertility constant low level	Fertility continued to decrease	Lower fertility rate
	Other assumptions	New data updates	Latest demographic data
Forecasts	Change 2023 to 2033: 0-15 = 2% decrease 16-64 = 6% 65+ = 22% 85+ = 50% **Total = 8%**		Change 2025 to 2035: 0-15 = 6% decrease 16-64 = 5% 65+ = 23% 85+ = 55% **Total = 7%**

Forecasting higher decrease in children

Office for National Statistics (ONS) Projections

ONS produce population projections every 2 years – based on past trends (do not factor in future housing levels)

Change 2025 to 2035:

	CW&C forecast	Latest ONS projections*	
		CW&C (2022-based)	England (2024-based)
0-15	-6%	-6%	-12%
16-64	5%	6%	2%
65+	23%	23%	20%
85+	55%	54%	46%
Total	**7%**	**7%**	**3%**

-8% in previous 2022-based England projections. Lower fertility and migration assumptions in latest national projections.

Strengths:

CW&C forecasts = ONS projections PLUS (latest ONS population estimates + factor in changes in latest National Projections + modelled impact of housing development)

= Base for planning service provision.

ONS projections = Consistent method if comparing to other areas.

Sources: 2022-based Sub-National Projections, 2024-based National Population Projections, Office for National Statistics.

Forecasts are uncertain

- Demographic behaviour is inherently uncertain
- Assumptions about the future cannot be certain, patterns of births, deaths, and migration may change and can be influenced by many factors
- Forecasts will differ to actual future population change
- Forecasts become more uncertain the further into the future they go
- Particularly challenging time to produce forecasts due to a range of factors – changes in planning policy, immigration trends, fertility trends.

National research

- Future of an ageing population - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Chief Medical Officer's annual report 2023: health in an ageing society - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Health in 2040: projected patterns of illness in England - The Health Foundation
- Demographic Change And The Welfare State | The King's Fund
- Living longer - Office for National Statistics
- How would you support our ageing population? - Office for National Statistics

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