

Revised following the meeting of Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee (25 January 2024).



Appendix A

Housing Strategy 2024 to 2029





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Foreword

We are delighted to introduce West Lancashire Borough Council's Housing Strategy for the next five years.

The Strategy has been developed against a backdrop of change and uncertainty in both the housing and economic sectors. Since the publication of our last Housing Strategy, we have faced a global pandemic and a cost-of-living crisis which has created hardship for many.

A safe, secure, and affordable home has never been more important. As we look forward to the next five years, our Housing Strategy is a route map to tackling the current housing challenges and will shape the future of housing in the Borough.

The Strategy is evidence based and reflects the Council's corporate vision and priorities for the Borough. It has been developed after consultation with stakeholders.

The Strategy takes account of several Council strategies and plans including:

- Private Sector Housing Strategy 2017-2020
- Homelessness Strategy 2017-2022 and its emerging replacement
- Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2030
- Tenancy Strategy 2022-2025
- Local Plan 2012-2027 – current adopted plan
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2021
- Financial Inclusion Strategy 2021-2024
- Community Wealth Building Strategy 2023-2028

Ensuring that West Lancashire remains a place of choice to live, work, visit, and invest in is a key focus for the Council. Sustainable regeneration and growth and a Borough which looks and feels cared for remain our strategic priorities.

The crucial role that housing plays in the wider determinants of health is well established. Good housing contributes positively to both physical and mental health. Strengthening the links between housing, health, and the environment will be an essential part of this Housing Strategy, whilst maintaining opportunities for economic growth.

The Council retains and manages its own housing stock and so is well placed to provide access to good, quality, and affordable homes in the right location. We know that creating and maintaining sustainable neighbourhoods is important for our residents. The climate emergency has transformed the way we think about housing. We will continue to do all that we can to ensure that homes within the Borough will be sustainable, built to high environmental standards, consider energy conservation measures and are thermally efficient so our residents can benefit from reduced energy consumption and lower fuel bills. The future design of buildings and their location must be mindful of extreme weather events as well as broader infrastructure requirements.

The Council does not have the resources to do everything. The Housing Strategy therefore acknowledges the need to be innovative in our approach and to continue to work collaboratively with new and existing partners, seeking out different ways of working to help deliver the right housing offer with private developers and other housing providers who wish to work in the Borough. This Strategy is not intended to determine or be regarded as a replacement for Local Plan policy. The development of a new Local Plan for the Borough is



Nicola Pryce-Roberts
Portfolio Holder for Housing

subject to its own statutory development process. This Strategy is a complementary document to be considered alongside existing and/or emerging Local Plan policy.

We have already achieved much since the publication of our last Housing Strategy. We are ambitious for the quality of the housing stock across the Borough and the role that it plays in the health and well-being of our residents. We take pride in our neighbourhoods and therefore as we look forward, we will continue to build on this success.

Housing Strategy for West Lancashire – An Executive Summary





West Lancashire Borough Councils' Housing Strategy sets out our strategic housing delivery priorities which we aim to address over the five-year period from 2024 to 2029. Housing market conditions and housing needs will change over time, but it is important to establish direction and to set out strategies and targets for improving housing circumstances in the short to medium term.








We have based our strategy and action plan on analysis of our housing market and housing needs. We have also undertaken consultation which has influenced the priorities we have established. Achievement of these priorities will be subject to resource availability. Our key delivery actions which accompany our housing strategy priorities are shown on page 9. Our housing strategy delivery priorities are:



- Achieve the right supply of new homes including maximising affordable housing.
- Drive investment in place-based regeneration for the Borough including continued regeneration of Skelmersdale.
- Make the best use of all existing homes while encouraging well-managed and maintained homes across all tenures.
- Attract investment for ending homelessness, addressing older persons housing needs and residents with specialist housing requirements, including the provision of housing-related support.
- Deliver the Residential Sector objectives of the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030

Analysis of needs – Housing sector issues

The profile of West Lancashire is one of a Borough which is sought after, with a strong demand for housing in both the private and public sector.

	<p>House price data suggests that there are three main housing markets. These consist of Skelmersdale, Ormskirk and the more rural areas of the Borough, containing smaller towns and villages. The housing issues within each area range from low to high demand for accommodation.</p>
	<p>Our population is growing – The 2001 Census recorded a Borough population of 108,400. In 2011, the population was 110,700. The 2021 Census records a population of 117,400, an increase of 6.1% since 2011. We need to cater for this confirmed growth while also being mindful of population and household projections, which are also factored into the development of Local Plans.</p>
	<p>Our population is ageing - Alongside population growth, we know that that our population is ageing, and this is in line with the national picture with Census 2021 results confirming there are more people than ever before in older age groups.</p> <p>The Office for National Statistics 2018-based national population projections to 2038, suggest the largest growth for West Lancashire, will be in people aged 65 and over. In 2038 it is projected that there will be 32,600 people aged 65 and over. This is an increase of 5,900 from 2023, representing growth of 22%. The population aged 85 and over is projected to increase by an even greater proportion, 56%. This is likely to increase demand for housing related support and other forms of social care to enable residents to remain in their own homes.</p>
	<p>It's expensive - We know it's expensive to buy a home in most parts of the Borough. The median house price to median earnings ratio in the authority is well above many other Lancashire authorities.</p> <p>Income to house price ratios for Lancashire authorities in 2022 ranged from 4.17 to 7.22, with West Lancashire's ratio at 6.57 the third highest in Lancashire. Only Fylde at 6.63 and Ribble Valley at 7.22 showed ratios above West Lancashire.</p> <p>West Lancashire is seen as an attractive place to live, and this is reflected in the high demand for housing and high price values in many areas. While this is positive news from a demand perspective, we know that affordability is an issue for those seeking to buy a home.</p> <p>We know that economically active households, particularly those who would traditionally be classed as first-time buyers, struggle to find housing at an affordable price in our Borough and as a result may move away.</p>

	We will need to ensure we are providing the 'right' type of housing offer to retain and attract younger and economically active growing families and first-time buyers while at the same time provide suitable housing for older people and other specialist housing groups.
	Affordable housing supply - The Council-commissioned Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment suggests an annual affordable housing shortfall of 277 homes per year (gross). While affordable housing has been developed in the Borough, we still have growing levels of unmet need each year.
	<p>Council Housing Register - Demand for Social Housing is increasing with the number of active applications with West Lancashire HomeFinder, the Council's choice based letting scheme, increasing from 938 in April 2018 to 1365 in April 2023. The proportion of applicants experiencing a higher level of Housing need has also increased, with 20% of applicants now in the High Priority Category (Band B) compared to 10% in 2018.</p> <p>There has been a significant increase in the time taken for applicants in the Band B, to be rehoused (Band B is the banding awarded to those accepted as having a homeless duty owed to them). Applicants in Band B are now having to wait on average over 5 months longer to be rehoused than in 2018/19.</p> <p>It's clear that there has been an increase in demand for social housing and that the supply of accommodation to meet that demand is not there, leading to increased rehousing waiting times. While this statement may seem obvious, what it doesn't convey, is the fact that operationally there are increased pressures upon the Councils Homefinder / Homelessness Teams. For households who are waiting to be rehoused, they may have to live in temporary accommodation for longer periods, or other accommodation circumstances which may impact their health and wellbeing.</p>
	Temporary Accommodation - The numbers of homeless people needing to go into temporary accommodation is increasing as is their length of stay.
	Rough Sleeping - Whilst the last rough sleepers estimate recorded five rough sleepers; there are a significant number of people, particularly single persons, who are sofa surfing and therefore at risk of rough sleeping at any time.
	Housing Related Support – It has been noted that a higher proportion of those presenting as homeless have a history of mental health issues, rising from 41% in 2018/19 to 70% in 2021/22. Access to housing related support is becoming extremely challenging due to a lack of such provision in the Borough. This means there are clients who may require support but are not able to access it. It is known that access to housing related support can help improve the chances of a client moving on to independent living and/or transitioning to successfully living independently.
	Health inequalities in West Lancashire – We are aware that there are differences in both the duration and quality of life within our Borough. Although these disparities are typically addressed within the context of population health, it's important to recognise the housing aspect, where the provision of high-quality housing can play a role. As just one example, based on the data available, it indicates that the life expectancy of a female born in Birch Green is 12 years less than that of a female born in Parbold.
	<p>Private Sector Housing – Building brand new homes is one way of addressing housing and affordable housing need. However, making best use of existing stock is also important, particularly when you consider that around 85% of the overall housing stock in the Borough is privately owned (including the 13.5% private rented stock). This means it's important to ensure that existing private housing remains in good condition, and in the case of the private rented sector, ensuring those homes are well managed as well as maintained, with the homes being maintained to safe and habitable standards – homes that are not a detriment to human health, either physically or mentally.</p> <p>The private rented sector can assist, in part, with some of the matters mentioned above by providing rented homes as an extension to the social rented sector, where waiting lists can mean a significant wait before rehousing occurs. It can also act as an alternative tenure for</p>

	<p>households currently unable to access the home ownership ladder, although the high cost of rent can also make it much harder for households to then save for a deposit to enable the purchase of a home. We are also aware that high demand for housing generally and a lack of overall supply nationally has driven up private rental levels, further creating affordability challenges for households, irrespective of whether this is a preferred tenure choice or not.</p> <p>We do know from the Private Sector Stock (PRS) condition survey 2016 that there are properties in the private sector that still need investment, and in some instances, this can impact on the occupiers' health. Funding to address these issues is limited and so we need to consider how we can tackle stock condition issues and advise and support householders to make their homes more energy efficient. This will also help address the issue of fuel poverty experienced by some households in the Borough.</p>
	<p>Skelmersdale - The new town of Skelmersdale was built in the 1960's, and was the first new town in the North West. It has a vibrant community, but like many former new towns, face specific housing challenges that are a legacy of its development history. These relate to its functional housing market (although has seen improvement in recent years), physical design of the housing and neighbourhoods, along with age of the housing stock and environment.</p> <p>Despite these legacy issue, Skelmersdale continues to thrive as a desirable location due to its vibrant community, planned recreational improvements, existing green space, an improving housing market, evolving infrastructure, and promising prospects for a fulfilling lifestyle.</p>
	<p>Skelmersdale Town Centre – The Council has been keen to improve the attractiveness and functionality of Skelmersdale Town Centre as it recognises that a robust and vibrant town centre serves as a cornerstone in fostering sustainable housing and place making solutions, while at the same time stimulating economic growth and community development.</p> <p>While it is well used, historically, it has not offered the shopping experience that can exist elsewhere in the region, which in many cases now offer entertainment venues, such as cinema or bowling and tend to include a range of well-known eating establishments. While it has taken some time, due to economic viability considerations, positive changes to the Town Centre, can now be clearly seen, with the introduction of new shopping facilities, a cinema in the Concourse and new housing.</p> <p>There are further plans to enhance the visitor and local resident offer. These plans include the development of a Wellbeing and Leisure Hub in Skelmersdale. The new Hub will replace the ageing Nye Bevan Pool and will provide modern fitness and leisure facilities. The proposed development forms part of a larger health and wellbeing vision for the Borough, to provide state-of-the-art facilities, giving people access to a high level of leisure and health support. The modern facility will significantly boost the area's appeal as a great place to live and visit.</p> <p>Ultimately, this work is intended to help improve the local economy by increasing visitors and enhance the overall appeal of the area.</p>

Other relevant themes and housing market challenges - We have highlighted in this executive summary some of the issues which we have considered during the development of this Housing Strategy. They relate mainly to our housing market and housing supply, making the best use of existing stock, the impact of population growth and changes in age profile in the years to come.

Resources - Delivering this Housing Strategy will require a significant amount of inward investment and there are likely to be competing financial demands in relation to financial allocation. The authority is not able to finance all its aspirations from existing resources and so all avenues will be considered to help make progress. To that end we are strongly committed to working in partnership to pursue all funding opportunities, which will allow this authority to deliver real and sustainable solutions, which meet its housing challenges.

Our thanks – We would like to thank all those who have assisted us in respect of achievements to date, responded to our consultation and who have otherwise contributed to this Strategy. We look forward to working with our partners to turn this Strategy in to a reality.

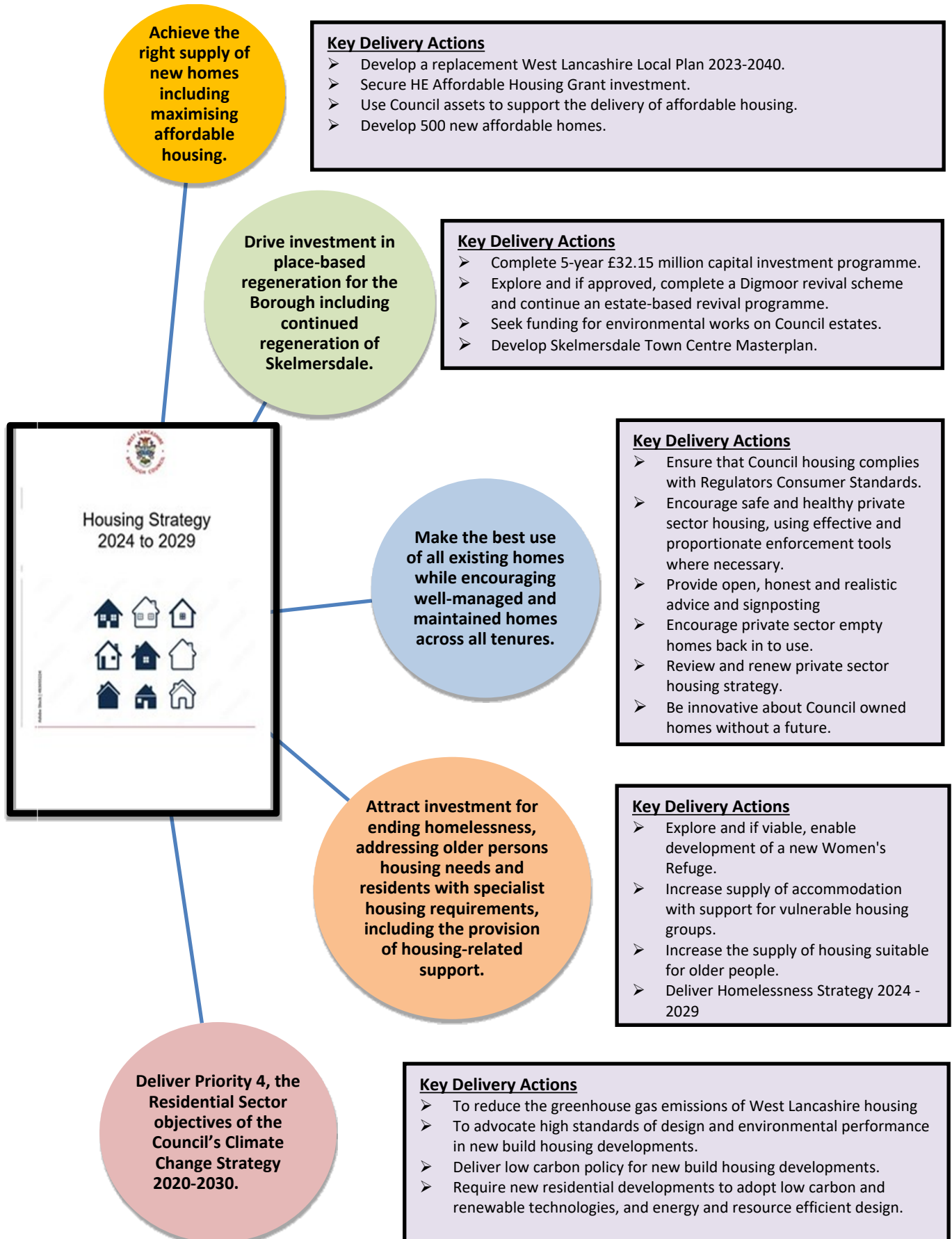
Progress since our last housing strategy

We have made good progress following the publication of our last Housing Strategy in 2014. Below is a summary of some of the achievements:

- Established the Council's development company, Tawd Valley Developments, which supports the delivery of Homes England grant funded units referred to above, as well as other residential / commercial development opportunities in line with its Business Plan.
- Worked with other Registered Providers of Social Housing to develop affordable housing and maximised the delivery of affordable housing through Section 106 agreements resulting in 977 affordable homes completed between 2015–2023 (averaging 108 a year).
- Used New Burdens funding to fund a Domestic Abuse Co-Ordinator to assist the Council in meeting its obligations under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- Secured Homes England Investment Partner status, enabling the Council to directly benefit from Homes England grant funding of £4,345,000 to date, to develop 117 units across five affordable housing schemes, 13 of which use a new affordable tenure for the Council, called Rent to Buy.
- In addition to the five sites mentioned above, also achieved improvements to the Council housing stock by directly redeveloping two sites at Firbeck and Beechtrees in Skelmersdale which included the development of 78 affordable homes, plus new build development of 14 units at Fairstead.
- Redeveloped the former Westec House Council office site in Ormskirk developing 27 residential dwellings, including 9 affordable homes.
- Assisted the Liberty Centre, as part of a Lancashire wide bid, to secure £200k one off funding from the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government which enhanced Domestic Abuse service provision in the Borough.
- Made available two Council properties to the Birchwood Centre to operate a complex needs service funded by Lancashire County Council.
- Provided Council land and worked with Birchwood, Registered Provider (Calico Homes) and Homes England to enable the development of a 24 bed Foyer for young people.
- Undertaken reviews and amended the Council's Allocation Policy to better match households in need to the affordable housing available.
- Developed a Financial Inclusion Strategy 2021-2024
- Developed a new Tenancy Strategy 2022-2025
- Launched and extended the Rough Sleepers Support Service to provide accommodation with support for up to 2 years, to those either rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.
- Delivered the Land Auction Pilot enabling a capital receipt to the Council and development of up to 630 new homes with 146 being affordable.
- Delivered significant energy efficiency improvements to Council housing stock to provide long term fuel efficiencies, reduce fuel poverty and ensure affordable warmth for tenants. Measures include insulation programmes, including external wall insulation, boiler replacements, fuel switching, and installation of renewable technologies including biomass boilers, air source heat pumps, and solar photovoltaic panels.
- Assisted households in the private sector to improve the energy efficiency of their homes through a range of schemes.
- Delivered four affordable units to Future Homes Standard ahead of its mandatory introduction in 2025.

West Lancashire's Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029

(Housing priorities and key delivery actions)



Achieve the right supply of new homes including maximising affordable housing.

- Key Delivery Actions**
- Develop a replacement West Lancashire Local Plan 2023-2040.
 - Secure HE Affordable Housing Grant investment.
 - Use Council assets to support the delivery of affordable housing.
 - Develop 500 new affordable homes.

Drive investment in place-based regeneration for the Borough including continued regeneration of Skelmersdale.

- Key Delivery Actions**
- Complete 5-year £32.15 million capital investment programme.
 - Explore and if approved, complete a Digmaor revival scheme and continue an estate-based revival programme.
 - Seek funding for environmental works on Council estates.
 - Develop Skelmersdale Town Centre Masterplan.



Make the best use of all existing homes while encouraging well-managed and maintained homes across all tenures.

- Key Delivery Actions**
- Ensure that Council housing complies with Regulators Consumer Standards.
 - Encourage safe and healthy private sector housing, using effective and proportionate enforcement tools where necessary.
 - Provide open, honest and realistic advice and signposting
 - Encourage private sector empty homes back in to use.
 - Review and renew private sector housing strategy.
 - Be innovative about Council owned homes without a future.

Attract investment for ending homelessness, addressing older persons housing needs and residents with specialist housing requirements, including the provision of housing-related support.

- Key Delivery Actions**
- Explore and if viable, enable development of a new Women's Refuge.
 - Increase supply of accommodation with support for vulnerable housing groups.
 - Increase the supply of housing suitable for older people.
 - Deliver Homelessness Strategy 2024 - 2029

Deliver Priority 4, the Residential Sector objectives of the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030.

- Key Delivery Actions**
- To reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of West Lancashire housing
 - To advocate high standards of design and environmental performance in new build housing developments.
 - Deliver low carbon policy for new build housing developments.
 - Require new residential developments to adopt low carbon and renewable technologies, and energy and resource efficient design.

Section 1

Introduction

1.0 Profile

West Lancashire has a population of 117,400 (Census 2021) spread across a mix of vibrant towns and villages sitting alongside tranquil countryside. It covers an area of 350 square kilometres (135 square miles) and contains a large proportion of Green Belt land at 89.5%.

The Borough is complex and diverse in its nature and includes rural areas together with the urban conurbation of Skelmersdale and the key service centres of Ormskirk / Aughton, and Burscough. Two thirds of the Borough's residents live in these settlements.

There are three distinct rural areas; the Northern, Eastern and Western Parishes, containing several villages, the largest of which are the linear settlements of Tarleton and Hesketh Bank.

West Lancashire's geographical location in the north west of England is unique. We have a dual identity, being the southernmost Borough in the County of Lancashire, whilst also being located within the Liverpool City Region and adjacent to the Manchester City Region.

The Borough is also adjacent to several large urban areas, including Southport to the west, Liverpool and parts of Knowsley to the south, St Helens and Wigan to the east and Chorley, Leyland and Preston to the northeast. It is a popular area for commuting to other parts of Lancashire and Manchester, whilst there are particularly strong links with the economy of Liverpool.

There is motorway access to Liverpool via the M58 and to Preston, Wigan, and St Helens via the M6. This defines one of the key features of the West Lancashire housing market, namely the strong linkages with surrounding areas which generates demand for housing in the area from higher income groups and those willing to commute, which can create affordability problems for those on lower incomes.

Analysis suggests that there are three main housing markets. These are:

- Skelmersdale which as well as being a free-standing employment centre and settlement has house prices which are typically below those elsewhere in the Borough.
- Ormskirk which is also a free-standing settlement and employment centre along with Burscough and Aughton;
- The more rural areas of the Borough, containing smaller towns and villages. These areas are generally distinguished by higher prices and in some cases a commuter function associated with employment centres outside the Borough. This sub-market covers a large area with significant differences in accessibility to large employment centres.

The profile of West Lancashire is one of a Borough with high demand for housing in the private and public sector, with the median house price to median earnings ratio in the authority well above many other Lancashire authorities.

The purpose of a Housing Strategy

2.0 The purpose of a Housing Strategy

There is no longer a statutory requirement for councils to develop a Housing Strategy. Despite the removal of the requirement, however, most councils continue to prepare and publish a Housing Strategy as it is widely recognised that:

- Housing led initiatives can contribute to improving skills, education, and employment chances, whilst ill health can be improved or alleviated by living in homes which are adaptable and located in safe and supportive environments.
- Local authorities' work in producing housing strategies has been a lever for economic and social change in many areas, reflecting a shift towards ensuring local housing markets meet local demands, rather than a narrower focus on directly providing social housing.

In essence a Housing Strategy is a plan that considers housing issues in an area and sets out how to tackle them over a given period, having regard to identified housing needs and the resources available. It reflects the important strategic and enabling role of the Council in place shaping and meeting and facilitating housing needs in the Borough. It also must consider the delivery and policy context applicable at the time of its development and evolve as policies change. Chapter 3 considers the current national, regional, and local policy context in which this Housing Strategy should be considered.

The Housing Strategy is intended to be an over-arching document that establishes priorities for action, both by the local authority and, where appropriate, by other service providers and stakeholders and sets out a clear action plan.

The strategic housing role therefore has an important part to play in several locally based plans, as it can assist in promoting a joined-up approach to activity that helps support sustainable communities including:

- assessing and planning for current and future housing needs of the local population.
- making the best use of existing housing stock.
- planning and facilitating new housing supply.
- working in partnership to facilitate commissioning of housing support services which link homes to support and other services that people need to live in them.
- having working partnerships that secure effective housing and neighbourhood management.
- ensuring good design which encourages informal social mixing and supports community cohesion within estates and neighbourhoods.
- supporting the economy by having the right number of homes of the right tenure and price.
- linking where people live to the services they want and need.
- ensuring that all residents' voices feed into shaping strategy by encouraging their participation of the housing strategy development process.
- improving poor housing and the corresponding health problems associated with such housing.

In overall terms a Housing Strategy aims to provide an appropriate balance of high-quality housing, which meets the housing needs of the population, provides variety and choice, and is accessible and contributes positively to the well-being of the citizens of the local authority area. It involves making the best use of the housing that is already there, as well as working effectively with the market to supply new homes. It is also about looking and working across all housing tenures and ensuring that appropriate links are made to the support services which people need to live in their homes.

National, regional and local context

3.0 West Lancashire's housing strategy within a national context

This Housing Strategy has been developed against a backdrop of evolving national policy and legislation in housing, welfare, and planning. There is a wide consensus that the country faces a shortage of housing and rising house costs, meaning that much of what is available is unaffordable. The Government has sought to tackle these housing issues through legislation that seeks to boost new housing supply, reduce homelessness, improve housing conditions and standards for tenants, assist people into home ownership, and reduce carbon emissions in new and existing homes. Some of the key policy interventions of recent years are outlined below.

Reducing homelessness and supporting those in housing need

- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, regarded as the most significant change in homelessness legislation in 40 years, introduced new duties on councils to work with homeless households to prevent or relieve homelessness before a main homeless duty is accepted. Prevention and relief duties were extended to households vulnerable to homelessness within 56 days (increased from 28 days), as well as to individuals who are already homeless.
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 contains measures to promote awareness of domestic abuse, protect victims, including through the justice process, and ensure that safe accommodation is available to victims. Under the Act all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse are regarded as being in priority need under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002.
- The Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 sets out the Government's vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it entirely by 2027, following years of increasing numbers of people sleeping rough. The target to end rough sleeping has now been brought forward to 2024, with all local authorities required to produce an Ending Rough Sleeping Plan in 2021.

Increasing the supply of new homes

- The Planning for the future White Paper in 2020, proposed a “once in a generation” reform of England's planning system and included a commitment to build 300,000 new homes a year, a quicker plan-making process, a shift to a new zone-based system and a national levy to replace the current system of developer contributions. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (see below) has largely superseded the White Paper proposals.
- In May 2021, a written ministerial statement launched the implementation of First Homes in June 2021. First Homes are a type of affordable home ownership product available to first time buyers, with a minimum 30% discount on the full purchase price. All residential developments where an affordable housing requirement applies is expected to provide 25% of this in the form of First Homes. However, the Government introduced transitional arrangements for local authorities at an advanced stage of developing new local plans which exempt them from the requirements.
- The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) sets out classes of development for which a grant of planning permission is automatically given. From 1 August 2021 a new change of use right was introduced which allows certain retail and business use classes to be converted to residential use. We will have to note whether these changes have any implications for the stock of retail and business premises in the Borough.

Meeting housing, care and support needs

- The central piece of policy relating to adults with care and support needs is the Care Act 2014. It outlines how housing can support a more integrated approach to care and accommodation and the role of the Local Authority in shaping and developing the market for services to meet care and support needs.
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (CSWA) sets out the corporate parenting principles to be applied when supporting children in care and care leavers and the requirement to publish a Local

Offer, which sets out the services and the support available for care leavers. Local authorities have a duty to provide suitable accommodation for all care leavers aged 16 and 17.

- The 2021 White Paper Integration and innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all seeks greater integration and collaboration across services and proposes new Integrated Care Systems, to bring providers and commissioners of NHS services together with local authorities and other local partners to coordinate and plan services.

Improving housing standards and tenants' rights

- The Social Housing white paper 2020 proposed a new Charter for social housing residents and changes to the regulatory regime.
- The Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, which was published in June 2022, gives the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) stronger powers to regularly inspect landlords on things such as health and safety and repairs performance and to order emergency repairs, with landlords footing the bill. Unlimited fines will be levied at housing associations and councils that are persistently under-performing, while the government will begin a programme of naming and shaming the worst culprits. Housing associations will be subject to a new Freedom of Information-style information-sharing process. The Bill became law in July 2023 and is now known as - Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.
- The fairer private rented sector white paper published in June 2022 aims to improve the situation of households in private rented sector accommodation by removing Section 21 of the 1988 Housing Act, which currently allows landlords to evict tenants without giving a reason, and blanket bans on benefit claimants or families with children. It will double notice periods for rent increases and give tenants stronger powers to challenge them and introduce a new ombudsman for private landlords to help resolve issues without having to go to court.
- The Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Prescribed Description) (England) Order 2018 reformed the mandatory HMO licensing regime, extending mandatory licensing to cover certain HMOs, including flats, occupied by five or more persons in two or more households, regardless of the number of storeys. It also prescribes minimum room sizes for the first time and maximum number of occupants permitted to use each room.
- The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 seeks to ensure that rented houses and flats are 'fit for human habitation', which means that they are safe, healthy and free from things that could cause serious harm. It gives tenants the right to take their landlord to court in cases where their rented property poses health risks, e.g. if their house or flat is too cold and cannot be heated. The Act applies to all tenancies created after 20 March 2019, with all existing tenancies being covered from 20 March 2020.

Reducing carbon emissions

- The Future Homes Standard April 2019 introduced changes to Part L and Part F of the Building Regulations for new dwellings in order that from 2025 new homes will be zero-carbon ready. Homes built under the Future Homes Standard should produce 75-80% less carbon emissions compared with current levels.
- The Heat and buildings strategy 2021 sets out government plans to decarbonise homes and commercial, industrial and public sector buildings, including five core principles, to achieve a net zero carbon target by 2050.
 - A whole-buildings and whole-system approach to minimise costs of decarbonisation.
 - Innovation to drive down costs, improve options and inform future decisions.
 - Futureproofing, building the market and technical expertise.
 - Providing stability for investment and enabling different approaches.
 - Targeted support to enable action for those in most need.

Additional funding through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and Home Upgrade Grant aimed to improve the energy performance of low-income households' homes, support low-carbon heat installations, help reduce fuel poverty and build the green retrofitting sector.

Levelling Up

- The February 2022 Levelling Up the United Kingdom White Paper aimed to reduce regional inequalities by investing in infrastructure, education, skills training, job creation, and extending devolution opportunities, beyond metropolitan areas, all to foster growth and economic prosperity for all. This was followed by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill May 2022 which received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023.

Armed Forces & Veterans

- The Armed Forces Act 2021 enshrines the national Armed Forces Covenant in law for the first time to help prevent service personnel and veterans being disadvantaged when accessing essential services like healthcare, education, and housing.

Whenever new legislation is introduced, it is necessary for the Council to establish whether it needs to respond in some way. At a local level this may involve changing operational approaches and policies alongside responding to any consequential resource implications.

Homes England

Homes England, the Government's housing and regeneration body established its five-year Strategic Plan for 2023-2028, setting out how it will support communities and families by enabling the delivery of more high quality, affordable homes alongside the regeneration of towns and cities across England.

With sustainability, decency, and good design at its heart, and underpinned by over £16 billion of HM Government funding, the updated plan is both a call-to-arms and an offer to the entire housing and regeneration sector. It sets out how, working with its partners, the Agency can deliver a revitalised built environment across England that serves the needs of all communities. The body says it has five objectives:

- Supporting the creation of vibrant and successful places that people can be proud of
- Helping to create homes people need, intervening where necessary to ensure places have enough homes of the right type and tenure.
- Building a housing and regeneration sector that works for everyone.
- Promoting the creation of high-quality homes in well-designed places that reflect community priorities.
- Enabling sustainable homes and places

3.1 West Lancashire's housing strategy within a regional context

One notable advantage of West Lancashire Borough lies in its geographical positioning. While it is not officially part of the Liverpool City Region, the Borough is situated adjacent to some Liverpool metropolitan boroughs. This results in housing market linkages, along with strong economic and transportation ties with Liverpool. We are also influenced by Greater Manchester City Region and being part of the three-tier arrangement of Lancashire County and Parish Council, we recognise the significant housing market linkages between the northern part of West Lancashire and Central Lancashire. This geographical placement means we have strong linkages with surrounding areas which generate demand for housing in our locality from higher income groups and those willing to commute; this creates affordability problems for those on lower incomes.

Understanding the nature of West Lancashire's placement within the region and how the housing and economic issues of nearby city areas and authorities might affect us is important. We highlight some of the regional influences below.

3.2 The Liverpool City Region

Liverpool City Region and its economic and strategic influence is relevant to West Lancashire. With the abolition of Regional Development Agencies in 2012, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) became the focus of activity responsible for determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and local job creation. The Liverpool City Region LEP has focused on growth and increased productivity and a rebalanced economy with private sector led growth driven by low carbon

economy, knowledge economy, visitor economy and the opening in 2016 of Liverpool's "Superport", a deep-water container terminal which is an extension of the Port of Liverpool and is designed to accommodate larger container ships that are becoming increasingly common in global trade.

The establishment of Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA), in 2014 and its plans for transport, economic development, and housing within the region also influence West Lancashire. This is recognised with West Lancashire being an associate member of LCRCA in relation to spatial planning matters with attendance at LCRCA Chief Planners group.

The LCRCA housing ambitions for 2019-2024 are:

- Delivering more homes, improving housing choice and quality
- Supporting our Ageing Population
- Regenerating our Neighbourhoods
- Improving the Quality of Renting
- Tackling Homelessness

The strategic aims and delivery priorities of the LCRCA and Liverpool City Region LEP# may afford opportunities for West Lancashire and so continued dialogue and partnership working on housing, economic and planning issues will remain important to us.

The government has decided to withdraw central government support (core funding) for Local Enterprise Partnerships from April 2024 and transfer their functions to local and combined authorities.

3.3 Lancashire

In Lancashire the LEP's Strategic Framework has been aligned to sectors which have been identified as being key to Lancashire's economic growth. These include tourism and culture, manufacturing, energy, and low carbon, digital, food and agriculture, and health. The importance of housing and regeneration has also been recognised by the LEP as being a positive contributor to driving economic growth.

The Lancashire LEP has been successful in helping to grow the economy across Lancashire, while also enabling training and improved job prospects to help support economic growth generally. The recent withdrawal of Government support for LEPs means that a new delivery framework will need to be developed at County level to address and try to continue the important work, previously undertaken by the Lancashire LEP.

In contrast to Liverpool, which operates with a combined authority system, Lancashire follows a two-tier structure of local government (not taking account of parish councils). This structure comprises the unitary authorities of Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen, in addition to 12 Borough Councils. Each of these authorities faces its own distinct local challenges. This situation can pose difficulties, especially when formulating comprehensive, future-oriented plans for the entire region of Lancashire. Such plans may necessitate substantial external investment.

Recognising this, in January 2022, Lancashire's local authorities collectively considered and endorsed a proposal to develop a long-term Strategic Plan for Lancashire. This plan is designed around a strategic framework known as "Lancashire 2050." The aim is to unite the community with a common vision, shared aspirations, collective goals, and mutual priorities. The strategic framework is structured around eight themes:

- Economic Prosperity / Transport and infrastructure / Environment and climate / Housing
- Early years and education / Employment and skills / Health and wellbeing / Communities and place

The Housing theme aims to deliver decent and affordable housing for every community and in doing so:

- Improve and increase the availability of good quality housing – both on new sites and through existing stock.
- Link housing regeneration to economic and transport plans.
- Secure urban renewal by demolishing and replacing housing stock in some areas.
- Improve the attractiveness of the built environment of our communities.

Lancashire 2050 sets out what this will mean for Lancashire residents:

- We will have higher quality homes and neighbourhoods across the County, that are more energy efficient, and better connected to opportunities through our transport infrastructure.
- We will help tackle concentrated deprivation and provide the housing choices to attract and retain workers in the economy. These actions will help relieve pressures on housing in more attractive locations.

It is expected that in doing so, high quality housing will benefit existing residents, as well as attract and retain the people required to drive the economy over the long term.

It is hoped that establishing Lancashire 2050, as a Lancashire wide, "collective voice" will assist Lancashire to make the case for more devolved powers and investment for the whole of Lancashire, and to strengthen local collaborative decision making.

This Lancashire wide approach may also help to insulate against ongoing policy uncertainty and to take best advantage of emerging opportunities. While councils will continue to decide which of these emerging opportunities will best suit their own priorities on a case-by-case basis, the Lancashire 2050 strategic framework provides an additional tool, that not only helps inform this judgement, but also boosts the credibility of Lancashire's collective engagement with government.

3.4 Opportunity

The economic and housing agendas in both the Liverpool City Region and Lancashire provide significant opportunities for West Lancashire. New employment opportunities are likely to present themselves and local business will be able to benefit. West Lancashire will continue to position itself to ensure that it is considered as an attractive place to live and work, and that local people can benefit from opportunities that develop through our regional partnerships.

In overall terms we recognise the importance of, and need to be part of and influence relevant housing and economic agendas beyond that of our own Borough Council boundary. With that in mind we aim to maximise any opportunities and work within any partnership arrangements across Liverpool, Manchester, and Lancashire to enable us to achieve our broader Council priorities.

The launch of Homes England's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 also provides opportunities for the Council to lever additional funding streams into the Borough to support the development of affordable and supported housing.

3.5 West Lancashire's housing strategy within a local context

In October 2023, The Council refreshed its Vision and Corporate Priorities for the Borough. The Council's Corporate vision is:

West Lancashire together; the place of choice to live, work, visit and invest.

Our Corporate Priorities and corresponding areas of focus are shown below. The Housing Strategy will particularly, contribute to those marked with an asterisk:

- **Create a clean and environmentally sustainable borough.**
 - Build resilience to climate change and reduce our carbon footprint - *
 - Reduce waste production and increase reuse and recycling.
 - Enhance and improve a safe, built environment - *
 - Preserve the natural environment, biodiversity, and landscape - *
- **Generate prosperity in our borough.**
 - Attract investment, support businesses and direct wealth into the local economy and support co-operatives.
 - Provide opportunities for regeneration, housing, and economic business growth - *
 - Identify the housing needs of the borough and work with partners to address them - *
 - Attract high quality job opportunities and support people into employment and training.

- **Foster inclusive and healthy communities**
 - Reduce health and wellbeing inequalities - *.
 - Design services around residents and communities
 - Provide safe, quality, and affordable homes as a social landlord - *.
 - Support our Armed Forces and vulnerable residents - *.

- **Manage a resilient, financially strong Council.**
 - Maintain a balanced budget and transparent decision-making.
 - Continue to improve our services and deliver value for money.
 - Attract, retain, and develop an engaged, skilled and motivated workforce, including through an Employee Recognition Scheme

The Council's Local Plan 2012-2027 remains in harmony with our new corporate priorities. The Local Plan is underpinned by the delivery of good quality housing in terms of type, tenure, size, and location in sustainable neighbourhoods supported by quality services, amenities, and good transport links and this is reflected within the key objectives within the Plan to *'provide a range of new housing types in appropriate locations to meet the needs to West Lancashire's population, including affordable housing and specialist accommodation.'*

The vision for this Housing Strategy is:

The provision of environmentally sustainable and high-quality housing, in locations which also support our economic, regeneration and health priorities, meets people's changing housing needs and is situated within pleasant, safe, and sustainable communities.

Diagram 1 below shows the Housing Strategy as it sits within the National, Lancashire and Local / Corporate context of the authority. Chapter 5 highlights the housing market challenges we face.

Diagram 1 – Housing Strategy in the National, Lancashire and Local / Corporate Context

Homes England Strategic Plan 2023-2028 Delivery Objectives

Supporting the creation of vibrant and successful places that people can be proud of

Helping to create homes people need, intervening where necessary to ensure places have enough homes of the right type and tenure.

Building a housing and regeneration sector that works for everyone.

Promoting the creation of high-quality homes in well-designed places that reflect community priorities.

Enabling sustainable homes and places

Council Vision

“West Lancashire together; the place of choice to live, work, visit and invest.”

Generate prosperity in our borough.

Provide opportunities for regeneration, housing, and economic business growth.

Identify the housing needs of the borough and work with partners to address them.

Council Corporate Priorities

Create a clean and environmentally sustainable borough.

Build resilience to climate change and reduce our carbon footprint.

Enhance and improve a safe, built environment.

Preserve the natural environment, biodiversity, and landscape.

Foster inclusive and healthy communities

Reduce health and wellbeing inequalities.

Support our Armed Forces and vulnerable residents.

Provide safe, quality, and affordable homes as a social landlord.

Lancashire 2050 Vision

“Lancashire 2050 is about bringing people together with a shared vision, shared ambition, shared goals, and shared priorities.”

Housing Strategy Vision

“The provision of environmentally sustainable and high-quality housing, in locations which also support our economic, regeneration and health priorities, meets people’s changing housing needs and is situated within pleasant, safe, and sustainable communities.”

Housing Strategy Delivery Priorities

Priority 1

Achieve the right supply of new homes including maximising affordable housing.

Priority 2

Drive investment in place-based regeneration for the Borough including continued regeneration of Skelmersdale.

Priority 3

Make the best use of all existing homes while encouraging well-managed and maintained homes across all tenures.

Priority 4

Attract investment for ending homelessness, addressing older persons housing needs and residents with specialist housing requirements, including the provision of housing-related support.

Priority 5

Deliver Priority 4, the Residential Sector objectives of the Council’s Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030.

What has changed since the last Strategy?

4.0 Introduction

Since our last Housing Strategy there have been significant changes to the policy context within which we operate. We outline below some of the most relevant changes and impacts for housing and local people in West Lancashire and how the Council has responded to date.

4.1 Welfare reforms

Since 2013, the UK has undergone significant welfare reforms, with the Welfare Reform Act 2012 at the forefront. This legislation introduced transformative measures, including the consolidation of various benefits into Universal Credit a single monthly paid benefit aimed at simplifying the benefit process. Changes to housing benefit and disability benefits have also taken place.

For housing benefit, the Act introduced, in April 2013, the Spare Room Subsidy, or bedroom tax. Primarily affecting social housing tenants, it reduces housing benefit for those deemed to have surplus bedrooms. Simultaneously, the Benefit Cap, initiated in 2013 and adjusted in 2016 limited the total amount of benefit that could be paid to claimants.

A freeze on most working-age benefits from 2016 to 2019 and the Two-Child Limit in 2017, restricting certain benefits to the first two children in a family, were also introduced.

By 2014, Incapacity Benefit claims had largely ceased being replaced by Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) as the primary means of providing support for individuals with limited capability for work due to illness or disability. Personal Independence Payment (PIP) was introduced in April 2013, replacing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for individuals aged 16 to 64. PIP is designed to provide financial assistance to people with long-term health conditions or disabilities. The rollout of PIP occurred gradually, with a focus on new claims and individuals undergoing reassessment.

In 2017, changes to Universal Credit led to the abolition of the Severe Disability Premium for new claimants. There were some transitional arrangements subsequently introduced to address the financial losses experienced by certain claimants. The phased rollout of Universal Credit continued, signifying an ongoing transformation in the welfare system.

The summary above does not capture all welfare changes and it should be noted that these welfare reforms have not been without controversy with some arguing that they promote government fiscal responsibility and encourage self-sufficiency, others contend that these changes disproportionately affect vulnerable households and exacerbate poverty.

Throughout this period the Council recognised the need for practical support and timely advice, particularly for Council tenants facing potential housing benefit reductions due to under-occupied homes. Early interventions in 2013 included the appointment of a financial inclusion officer and additional staff, extending support to tenants in the private rental sector through joint working with partners.

The Council's proactive response has led to the establishment of a dedicated Financial Inclusion Team. This team actively respond to the changing welfare and economic landscape. They are on hand to provide advice and support to tenants and residents, assisting them in navigating financial pressures stemming from welfare reform and the cost-of-living crisis.

The Council is committed to addressing the disproportionate impact on low-income households by enhancing financial resilience and inclusion. To reinforce this commitment, the Council will be developing a new Financial Inclusion Strategy for publication in 2024.

4.2 Funding for affordable housing

Since 2015, the UK has witnessed significant changes in affordable housing funding, transitioning from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to Homes England. The HCA, established in 2008, was a non-departmental public body in England which focused on the development of affordable housing, supporting

regeneration and economic growth. In 2018, it evolved into Homes England, with an increased emphasis on accelerating home construction and addressing the housing crisis.

Under Homes England, there's been a commitment to increasing the overall supply of affordable homes, fostering partnerships with private developers and local authorities. The Affordable Homes Programme (AHP), a key initiative, has aimed to deliver a substantial number of affordable homes.

The current Affordable Housing Programme 2021-2026 consists of a larger, £11.5bn Affordable Homes Programme 2021-26, including funding for social rent, supported housing, and a renewed commitment to delivering homes using modern methods of construction (MMC).

The programme plans to deliver up to 180,000 new homes and underscores the continued commitment to addressing housing challenges, with the programme including the provision of grant funding as a crucial component. Homes England grant funding is allocated to support the development and construction of affordable homes, aiming to encourage a mix of affordable tenures and promote sustainable, quality developments. This financial assistance is often provided to housing developers, local authorities, and other stakeholders involved in affordable housing projects. The grants serve to make the overall cost of construction more feasible, encouraging the creation of affordable homes that meet specific affordability criteria for a range of income groups. Grant funding is a key tool used to stimulate the supply of affordable housing and address the housing shortage and affordability challenges in the UK.

In mid-2023 Homes England announced that grant funding provided through the Affordable Homes Programme 2021-26 can now be used to fund replacement homes, alongside new affordable homes, as part of wider estate regeneration plans. This flexibility may help to replace housing that is outdated and no longer fit-for-purpose, with a larger number of high-quality, energy efficient new affordable homes.

It is recognised that Homes England plays a pivotal role in supporting the Council and its Registered Provider partners to develop much needed affordable housing in the Borough.

In addition to funding from Homes England the Council continues to commit its own capital funding, retained right to buy receipts from the sale of Council housing through Right to Buy, as well as making its own land available to support new affordable and supported housing schemes.

4.3 Investment Partner Status / Tawd Valley Development Company

To be eligible to apply for an AHP grant, it is necessary to hold the status of Homes England Investment Partner.

In 2008, the Council obtained Investment Partner status and developed affordable homes. However, the absence of a delivery mechanism, such as a development company, posed challenges in scaling up the Council's affordable housing development efforts.

This didn't prevent affordable homes being developed in the Borough as the Council works effectively with Registered Providers of social housing to help increase affordable home supply as part of the Council's enabling role. It did however, mean that the Council was not able to directly intervene in the development of affordable housing at scale. This limitation meant the Council didn't fully benefit from any grant funding through the affordable housing programme and meant there was a reliance on the Council's enabling role to facilitate affordable housing development in the Borough.

The Council recognised, to directly build affordable homes at scale, we needed to establish a development company. This led to the establishment of Tawd Valley Developments which now enables the Council to build houses to be retained as Council owned affordable homes as well as develop market sale housing and help support other Council strategic projects.

The establishment of the Development company means that as the Council is the only shareholder, any financial surplus made by Tawd Valley Developments is returned to the authority to be reinvested. To further support our approach, the Council re-applied for Investment Partner status in 2020 to enable the Council to apply for grant funding from Homes England. This then supports Tawd Valley to develop much needed affordable homes.

Since securing Homes England Investment Partner status in 2020, the Council has directly benefited from grant funding of £4,345,000 supporting the development of 117 units across five affordable housing schemes.

4.4 Access to affordable housing

Access to affordable housing must be equitable, ensuring those in genuine need have access regardless of their socio-economic background. It is therefore important to ensure that the tenancy approach and allocation policies that underpin the allocation of Council Housing and other social housing in the Borough not only makes the best use of existing housing but strikes a balance in addressing a range of housing needs and housing circumstances. The legislative framework provides direction to local authorities on how it should consider local housing circumstances to help shape allocation policies including the provision of different types of tenancy.

The Localism Act 2011 gave social landlords the option of introducing fixed term tenancies which gave social housing providers the ability to provide flexible fixed term tenancies rather than having to provide a 'lifetime' tenancy. In 2013 the Council decided to introduce five-year fixed term tenancies as this was seen as a way of making best use of Council housing. The use of fixed term tenancies for our tenancies ended in July 2019, as the Council values the stability that a lifetime tenancy offers to its tenants particularly those in the most vulnerable client groups.

The allocation of Council rental properties uses a choice-based lettings approach through a website called West Lancs Homefinder with introductory and secure tenancies being granted. The introductory tenancy is a probationary tenancy for twelve months. After the trial period, an introductory tenant will become a secure tenant if they meet the conditions in their tenancy agreement.

With a rise in the number of applicants on the Councils Homefinder list, the Housing service has documented an increased level of homelessness and a significant use of temporary accommodation since the production of the last Housing strategy. Recognising the increases and being mindful of the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the Council reviewed and introduced a new allocation policy in 2023 with the aim of making the best use of council housing stock, and addressing issues associated with the increased level of homelessness. The allocation policy had been updated in 2018. Its introduction provided a fair and transparent way of allocating homes, however the increased homelessness challenge prompted a fresh review. Some recent changes are mentioned below:

- A 6-month time limit has been introduced to those applicants who require urgent re-housing to actively encourage them to bid for accommodation which addresses their housing needs, rather than waiting for their preferred property.
- Applicants assessed as being owed a homelessness relief duty or those where a statutory decision has been issued finding them to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need and owed the 'main housing duty' will be made an offer of accommodation through Direct Matching. This offer will discharge the Councils duty.
- The allocation policy takes people's earnings and savings into consideration. Feedback from consultation suggested that existing income and asset rules were fair, however in order to take account of cost-of-living pressures, the threshold for household income has been increased from £40,000 to £50,000 and for assets, an increase from £60,000 to £80,000.
- The needs of mums-to-be will now be considered at an earlier stage to support expectant parents in securing suitable accommodation prior to the birth of their child along with more flexibility to allow single people or couples to bid on both small two-bedroom properties and one-bedroom properties, subject to an affordability assessment.

Council housing is the main source of affordable housing in the Borough with Registered Providers providing in the region of 1600 affordable homes. The Council has established nomination rights for the rented homes and works closely with our partners to allocate them in line with the principles established by our Allocation Policy 2023 and updated Tenancy Strategy 2022.

4.5 Council housing finance

The Localism Act 2011 set about reforming the system for financing Council housing by introducing a model known as self-financing. Previously, the Government decided the level of rent that local authorities could charge, this was then 'pooled' nationally and redistributed in line with an agreed formula. West Lancashire was a loser under this arrangement in that up to £6.2 million pounds per year of rental income out of £20 million was paid into this national pool.

In 2012 the Council opted to become a self-financing local authority so that it would have greater control over housing finances by being able to retain all the rent received from tenants for use within West Lancashire housing stock. At the time the Council had to buy itself out of the national subsidy arrangement and took on debt in the region of £88 million.

However, in 2016, the Welfare Reform and Work Act, introduced a rent cap over a four-year period which saw rents in social housing reduce by 1% a year. According to the Local Government Association, this led to an estimated 12 per cent reduction, in real terms, in average rents by 2020/21.

This legislative measure restricted annual rent increases, a move aimed at fostering tenant affordability and supporting treasury savings estimated to be £1.4 billion by 2020/21 primarily in reduced Housing Benefit expenditure. The policy ended in 2020 but during its duration, it created substantial financial challenges for social landlords, including West Lancashire, as it constrained rental income which could have otherwise been used to support much needed investment in homes and housing services. This was set against a backdrop of social landlords, having been previously informed that from 2015-16 social rents will rise by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1% each year for 10 years. This had been welcome news as it seemed to bring about a degree of certainty in terms of rental income growth, however this was soon short lived as the rent cap became the new reality.

Until 2018, local authorities were constrained by a borrowing cap within the housing revenue account, limiting their capacity to invest in housing projects. This cap, designed to manage public debt and ensure financial prudence, unfortunately restricted councils' flexibility in responding to local housing needs. However, in 2018, a significant policy shift occurred as the cap was lifted, granting local authorities the freedom to borrow without predefined limits for housing-related investment, giving Councils flexibility to address housing needs in their areas.

As a Council landlord it has been challenging to not only remain financially prudent but maintain quality housing services, invest in improving our existing housing and embark upon the delivery of new affordable homes. We know that other Registered Providers of social housing will have faced similar challenges when addressing the financial realities of being a social landlord.

4.6 West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027

In October 2013, the Council adopted its current local plan, which continues to guide development within West Lancashire. It sets out:

- The distinctive features, issues, and challenges in the Borough.
- A vision of how we would like the Borough to be.
- What we need to do to achieve this vision.
- Key policies to help meet our goals.

It contains clear objectives for housing 'to provide a range of new housing types in appropriate locations to meet the needs of West Lancashire's population'. This includes delivering on brownfield sites where the sites are available, viable and deliverable. They will also be provided, where available, in the major urban areas, where services and transport facilities are established. The plan allows for the delivery of 4,860 net new dwellings with 2000 of the homes being in Skelmersdale. Over the plan period this breaks down to 302 per year for the period 2012-2017 and 335 per year for the period 2017-2027.

The existing Local Plan remains in operation and has contributed to making West Lancashire a place where people want to live. It is, however, nearing the end of its operating term so work is underway to develop a new Local Plan for the Borough which will need to take account of changes in national planning policy.

4.7 Planning Reform and the National Planning Policy Framework

The current Government has diagnosed the planning system as central to the failure to build enough homes, particularly where housing need is at its most severe.

The Planning for the future White Paper in 2020, proposed a "once in a generation" reform of England's planning system and included a commitment to build 300,000 new homes a year, a quicker plan-making process, a shift to a new zone-based system and a national levy to replace the current system of developer contributions. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (see below) introduced to the House of Commons in May 2022, largely superseded the White Paper proposals.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act became law in October 2023 and introduces fundamental changes to local planning and infrastructure regulations, as well as measures to increase local devolution and levelling up. Some of the key changes in the Act shown below, also aim to support the Government housing delivery targets:

- The national planning policy framework (NPPF) to be amended to remove the current requirement for a five-year supply of housing land where the local plan is up to date to help “curb perceived ‘speculative development’ and ‘planning by appeal’”.
- A “simple, non-negotiable, locally set” infrastructure levy to replace the Community Infrastructure Levy and most S106 obligations to deliver affordable housing, schools, health care, roads etc based on gross development value rather than floorspace, with local authorities able to determine what portion of the levy they should receive ‘in-kind’ as onsite affordable homes through a new ‘right to require’.
- Every local planning authority to be required to produce a design code for its area, which will have full weight in making decisions on development.
- New ‘street vote’ powers to allow residents to bring forward proposals to extend or redevelop their properties, in line with prescribed development rules and other statutory requirements, which will be put to a referendum of residents on the street, to determine if they should be given planning permission.
- National development management policies to be introduced on issues such as green belt and heritage protection.
- Local Plans to be given greater weight when decisions on applications are made.
- New penalties will be issued to slow developers failing to build already approved homes
- Compulsory purchase powers to be strengthened.

The Council has embarked on creating a new Local Plan for the Borough while also monitoring proposed changes to the Local Plan development process. The objective is to understand how these potential changes might influence our course of action and the expected timetable for implementing the new Plan.

4.8 Economic Strain: Impact on Housing

The cost-of-living crisis coupled with the wider economic turmoil of rising energy prices, high inflation, stagnating growth, increasing cost of building materials and recession will all present barriers to improving our housing offer. Incomes will be squeezed, and our residents will continue to struggle to set up home and live in warm and healthy housing that meets their needs. High demand for housing, particularly for affordable options, will continue to place enormous pressure on our housing supply, especially on the social and private rented sectors.

In the post-COVID recovery world the UK has high employment but continues to have low-productivity and low paid jobs, which leads to difficulties delivering economic growth and tackling the housing crisis. An uncertain political terrain and emerging pressures on public funding, creates a challenging mix to navigate and deliver the high-quality housing in the numbers that we need for the Borough.

4.9 Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards.

The Regulator of Social Housing is responsible for regulating registered social housing providers to ensure their financial viability, governance, and the quality of services they deliver to tenants. Its role includes monitoring and assessing the performance of social housing providers to maintain standards and protect the interests of tenants and the public.

In July 2023, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 became law and updated the regulators responsibilities and powers in the way they regulate social housing providers. From April 2024, social housing providers will be assessed against a new set of consumer standards, namely:

- The Safety and Quality Standard will require landlords to provide safe and good-quality homes for their tenants, along with good-quality landlord services.

- The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard will require landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so they can access services, raise concerns, when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.
- The Neighbourhood and Community Standard will require landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.
- The Tenancy Standard sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting of homes, as well as requirements for how tenancies are managed by landlords.

Collectively, the new consumer standards aim to prioritise the well-being and rights of tenants including ensuring tenants receive high-quality services, fair treatment, and effective resolution of issues within the social housing sector. By implementing consumer standards, the regulator seeks to promote transparency, accountability, and a better quality of living for tenants, emphasizing their importance in driving improved services and fostering trust between landlords and tenants in the social housing sector.

In preparation for the introduction of the new standards the Councils has established a work programme looking at all areas of the landlord function and related broader Council functions. This is to ensure that our services and systems not only meet the standards but also remain flexible enough to adjust as necessary, ensuring our services consistently uphold the highest quality standards.

4.10 Armed Forces Act 2021

The Armed Forces Act enshrines the national Armed Forces Covenant in law for the first time to help prevent service personnel and veterans being disadvantaged when accessing essential services like healthcare, education and housing. The provisions apply to:

- a) members of the regular forces and the reserve forces.
- b) members of British overseas territory forces who are subject to Service law.
- c) former members of any of Her Majesty's forces who are ordinarily resident in the UK (veterans/ex-service personnel; and
- d) relevant family members [of those in (a) to (c) above

The national Armed Forces Covenant sets a framework for how the armed forces community can expect to be treated by certain public bodies, including local authorities, governing bodies of certain state schools, various NHS bodies, and other organisations.

Because of the Armed Forces Act, the Council needs to undertake work to ensure that the services offered and the way in which they are provided, take account of the principles of the national Armed Forces Covenant, namely:

- No member of the Armed Forces Community should face disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen.
- In some circumstances special treatment may be appropriate especially for the injured or bereaved.

This means that the Council and particularly in its capacity as a landlord will need to ensure that it delivers its service which are not in conflict with the above. To support this aim, an Officer Working Group has been established to review relevant services to ensure they operate in line with the required principles.

The following chapter considers our housing challenges.

The challenges in our housing market

5.0 Introduction

Our Borough is predominately rural in nature and is widely recognised as a very popular place to live but we also face challenges, some of which are explained in this chapter:

5.1 Population growth

Our population is on the rise. According to the 2001 Census, the Borough had a population of 108,400. The 2021 Census reveals a 6.1% increase in the population between 2011 and 2021, growing from approximately 110,700 to 117,400. West Lancashire's population increase of 6.1% surpasses the North West's increase of 5.2% over the same period, although it's not the highest percentage increase in Lancashire, when compared to Chorley and Fylde, whose populations have grown by approximately 9.9% and 7.4% respectively. We must accommodate this confirmed growth while also considering population projections as part of our future plans.

In our current population, West Lancashire's age distribution tends to be skewed towards older age groups when compared to the sub-region, the wider region, and England as a whole. We have a higher proportion of residents aged 35 and above, while the proportion of individuals under the age of 35 is notably lower, as indicated in the following tables. The data source for this information is the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

	2021_West Lancashire_%	2021_North West_%	2021_England_%
85 years and over	2.6	2.3	2.4
75 to 84 years	7.6	6.2	6.1
65 to 74 years	11.7	10.2	9.8
50 to 64 years	21.3	19.8	19.4
35 to 49 years	16.6	18.7	19.4
Total 35 and over	59.8	57.2	57.1

There are, however, variations in the population age structure between settlements. In general, the rural areas of West Lancashire are more attractive to people of middle or retirement age, whilst Skelmersdale has a younger, more varied population structure.

	2021_West Lancashire_%	2021_North West_%	2021_England_%
25 to 34 years	10.5	13.2	13.6
20 to 24 years	6.9	6.1	6
16 to 19 years	6.5	4.6	4.6
10 to 15 years	6.7	7.3	7.2
5 to 9 years	5.1	6	5.9
4 years and under	4.5	5.5	5.4
Total under 35	40.2	42.7	42.7

England experienced a baby boom of 6.9 million live births between 2001 and 2013. The first children from this boom will now be of an age where they may be looking to move out, find work and kick-start their adult lives. It is important that West Lancashire doesn't lose its younger households to other areas as younger people support economic growth and ensure the future supply of a skilled and active labour force.

This means that one of our priorities is to deliver more homes for the future needs of our residents including downsizing opportunities for those households requiring smaller accommodation. Housing is a long-term issue, and we need to plan accordingly. Our housing offer will need to be realistic and market facing, and we must consider how best to encourage development by using all the tools at our disposal including seeking out new models for housing delivery. The Council's 2022 Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment highlights, along with other housing data research, a general need to ensure we are providing a

range of both affordable and market tenures as well as different sizes of homes to reflect our existing and projected population profile. This will aid in retaining and appealing to younger, economically active families who are growing, potentially including those who had previously departed from the Borough. It will also serve to entice first-time buyers to consider the Borough as an attractive option.

5.2 An ageing population

We know that our population is ageing, and remaining in their own homes for longer which has an impact on the flow of housing supply. This is in line with the national picture with Census 2021 results confirming there are more people than ever before in older age groups. The Office for National Statistics 2018-based sub-national population projections to 2038 suggest the largest growth for West Lancashire will be in people aged 65 and over. In 2038 it is projected that there will be 32,600 people aged 65 and over, an increase of 5,900 (22%) from 2023. The population aged 85 and over is projected to increase by an even greater proportion, 56%. This is likely to increase demand for housing related support and other forms of social care to enable residents to remain in their own homes.

It is therefore important to work to develop suitable housing tenure and property type housing offers, including specialist supported housing solutions for our ageing population. In instances where designated accommodation for older people is developed then it will also contribute to freeing up, what may be a former family sized dwelling, back into the market.

5.3 Specialist housing requirements

We recognise that there are vulnerable client groups who need particular types of housing of housing to help them have an opportunity to live independently. The following should not be regarded as a definitive list of potential client groups, but is provided to give an indication of who may have a specialist housing need and where there also may be a need for housing related support services to be provided.

- Vulnerable clients with a range of complex needs.
- Victims of Domestic Abuse.
- Homeless people including young homeless people / young people leaving care.
- Single adults with mental health / drug induced psychosis.
- People with Disabilities such as Learning Disability, Autism, Acquired Brain Injury, Physical Disability.
- Older People who require support / Extra Care type accommodation.
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers.
- Veterans
- Ex-offenders

Specialist housing can come in many forms and often, "no one size, fits all". This means that it can be difficult to create a supply of ready-made accommodation and support services suitable for such a wide range of client groups.

Our own records show an increase in the number of homeless individuals needing temporary accommodation, along with a lengthening of their stays. It's been noted that a higher proportion of those seeking help for homelessness have a history of mental health issues, rising from 41% in 2018/19 to 70% in 2021/22. Some homeless individuals could benefit from accessing housing related support.

Some individuals may exhibit significant disorderly behaviour, which introduces potential risks when it comes to relocating them to permanent housing. Consequently, it may be necessary to initially place these clients in a form of temporary accommodation with a tailored support plan and services. This plan with support, would offer the opportunity for clients to acquire essential independent living skills and receive additional support to facilitate their transition to more stable, long-term housing.

We are aware that there is more work required to increase the supply of temporary and permanent accommodation for a range of client groups and so we will continue to work with the voluntary sector and statutory agencies in health and social care services to try to assist in increasing accommodation provision.

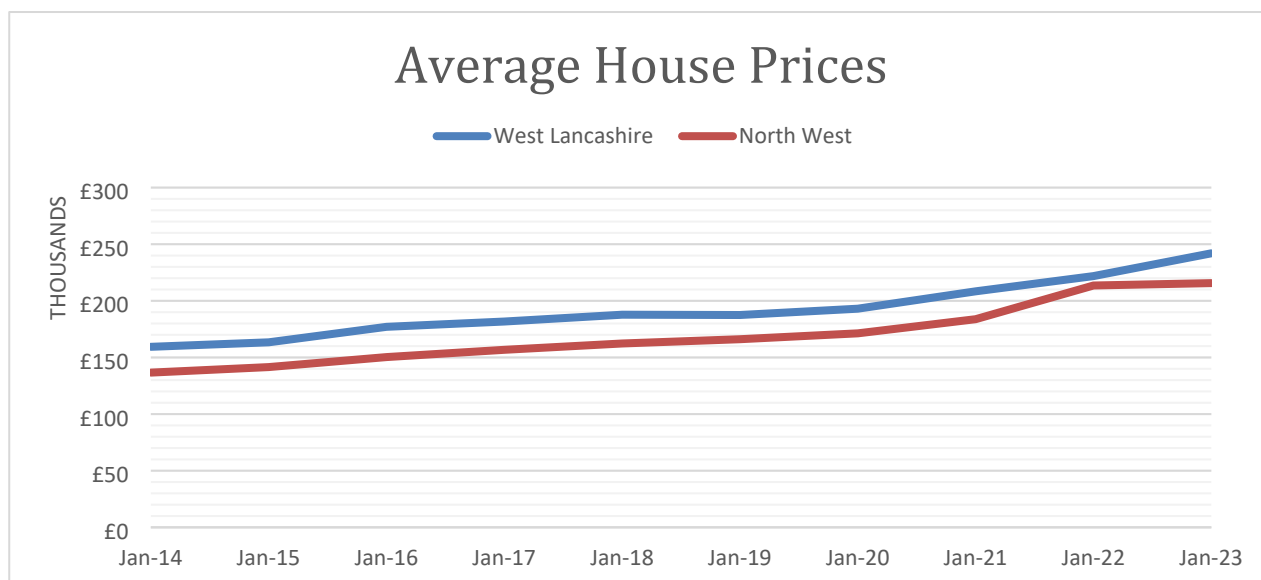
We know from these agencies that the lack of appropriate supported accommodation options available has meant that people have been placed in out-of- area residential placements, moving them away from their localities – family, friends, and community infrastructure.

We want to work with health and social care statutory agencies to stop this happening. We have the desire to assist, however the challenge is providing the right type of accommodation along with the right model of support that proves both economically viable and provides a suitable housing solution for the target client group.

5.4 It is expensive to buy a home.

According to data from the UK House Price Index, the average house price in West Lancashire in July 2023 stood at £241,973 for all property types. This figure reflects a notable 9.1% rise from the previous July when it was £221,845. While West Lancashire's average property price is lower than the national average in England, which stands at £308,633 (and is skewed by London prices), it's evident that purchasing a home in West Lancashire comes at a relatively high cost, especially when considering the substantial price increase over the 12-month period mentioned. In comparison, the North West region recorded an average house price of £215,648 in July 2023.

The average prices and the lower quartile prices, often geared towards first-time buyers, in West Lancashire surpass the Northwest regional averages. As a result, neighbouring local authorities offer more affordable housing options, making them an appealing choice for households considering moving to the area. In their property search to enter the housing market, these households can find more budget-friendly properties outside West Lancashire, and in certain cases, they may choose to relocate to a more affordable home in a different borough. This decision, however, might also mean they cannot live near their families. The chart below visually illustrates the consistent trend of West Lancashire house prices being higher than the Northwest regional average.



House price is just one aspect of the issue of affordability. Household incomes need to be understood along with other factors such as changes to financial institutions lending criteria or deposit requirements for those wishing to buy a home. Lending criteria and deposit requirements do not remain static.

Recent increases in mortgage rates and high deposits required to purchase a property has made home ownership even less accessible for first time buyers in the Borough and there are a growing number of households that make up what has become known as the 'excluded middle market'; those unable to access home ownership and unlikely to qualify for social housing. It is important that we have a housing offer for this group.

The Government has responded with different house purchase initiatives to help households bridge the deposit gap, historically with equity loan type products or stamp duty holidays. When available, these products are helpful, however they do not assist all household income types and so we need to ensure that purchasers in West Lancashire can access a range of low-cost home ownership products, such as shared ownership and rent to buy options which are currently in short supply.

An attractive option for first time buyers is new build properties, having relatively low maintenance costs, and are often offered with moving in 'incentives. However, these homes tend to come to the market with a new build premium built into the price, which makes it a challenge, for many first-time buyers to afford a new build

home, even with the added incentives. The Land Registry recorded, in May 2023 that the average new build price in the Borough was £377,822, whereas the average price for an existing property was £228,519.

There are house price variations across the Borough with property values being more affordable in Skelmersdale.

We need housing that's not just affordable but also attracts and keeps young, working families and first-time homebuyers. This is important because it helps the economy grow and ensures the future supply of a skilled and active labour force. Offering Low-Cost Home Ownership options can be a helpful as part of a housing solution.

The table below illustrates the ratio of median house price to median earnings average earnings in relation to neighbouring authorities and Liverpool and Lancashire wide. This table, which has used ONS data, further demonstrates that housing affordability is an issue in the Borough and that neighbouring authorities are likely to be more appealing to prospective purchasers from a house price perspective.

Location	Ratio as at 2022	Median House Price	Median Earnings
West Lancashire	6.57	£200,000	£30,424
Chorley	5.64	£183,000	£32,453
South Ribble	5.99	£185,000	£30,899
Sefton	6.45	£200,000	£31,031
Wigan	5.65	£167,000	£29,553
St Helens	4.74	£156,000	£32,885
Knowsley	5.34	£165,000	£30,901
Lancashire	5.61	£170,000	£30,300
Liverpool	4.90	£150,000	£30,590

For those looking to enter the housing market for the first time, then its useful to consider the ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings. This is shown in the table below.

Location	Ratio as at 2022	Lower Quartile House Price	Lower Quartile Earnings
West Lancashire	6.28	£149,995	£23,894
Chorley	5.64	£136,000	£24,125
South Ribble	6.44	£145,000	£22,506
Sefton	6.26	£140,000	£22,380
Wigan	5.55	£125,000	£22,506
St Helens	4.74	£115,000	£24,268
Knowsley	5.42	£123,000	£22,678
Lancashire	5.30	£120,000	£22,648
Liverpool	5.02	£112,500	£22,399

When adopted, the Local Plan (2012-27) anticipated a significant increase in housing delivery from 2015 onwards. It was expected that the increased housing delivery would help to increase the supply of affordable housing. This is because there is a planning policy requirement to provide affordable housing on market housing sites, where certain criteria are met. The increase in housing delivery has indeed, contributed to an increase in the supply of affordable housing. That said, there remains a need to increase the supply of affordable housing suitable for those wishing to get on to the home ownership ladder.

5.5 We need more affordable housing.

As stated previously housing is relatively expensive in West Lancashire. This coupled with a household's income and lending criteria can affect whether a household is able to find housing, whether to rent or buy within their household budget.

However, when household income is considered within the context of a household trying to gain access to the housing ladder, then even the cheapest of homes, remain unaffordable for some households.

Based on data as of April 2023, there were a total of 1,365 households on the Council's Housing Register, which is a notable increase compared to the 938 households in April 2018.

The Council commissioned Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA 2022) suggests an annual affordable housing shortfall of 277 homes per year (gross). While affordable housing has been developed in the Borough, we still have growing levels of unmet need each year.

Affordable housing is also geographically limited in West Lancashire, with the majority located in Skelmersdale. This is an important factor, and one we need to consider when looking at affordable housing requirements and supply at local level. While there has been significant affordable housing development success in recent years, there remains a pressing need for affordable housing in the Borough, particularly in rural areas and the towns of Ormskirk, Burscough and Aughton.

Rebalancing the housing market, to increase the proportion of affordable housing outside of Skelmersdale and increase the proportion of affordable housing for families and accommodation for older people in Skelmersdale, will be a priority within our overall aim of increasing the supply of affordable housing across the Borough.

5.6 Use of the private rented sector.

The construction of new homes is one solution to help address housing supply and affordable housing need, but it's equally important to consider the existing housing supply. Maximising the use of the existing housing stock holds significance, especially given that roughly 85% of the Borough's housing comprises privately owned properties, including 13.5% within the private rental sector.

The rising demand for market-rented homes nationwide underscores the potential of this sector:

- It already is an extension to the social rented sector, where lengthy waiting lists and allocations based predominately on need mean many households are less likely to ever gain access.
- Provides an alternative tenure for households who are priced out of the home ownership market or require the flexibility of rental accommodation.

It is noted though that escalating private sector rent levels heighten affordability challenges for numerous households seeking housing in this sector. The substantial rise in rents limits the capacity to save for a mortgage deposit, as a higher proportion of household income is directed toward rent payments, further compounded by increasing living costs. The increasing costs could also affect the tenant's ability to efficiently heat their home while striving to manage their finances effectively.

Despite the affordability and supply issues within the private sector, it plays an important role in meeting housing needs and supporting economic growth. It enables individuals to relocate within or to the Borough in response to job opportunities and changing household circumstances.

Therefore, ensuring the upkeep of existing private housing, including in the rental sector is sensible. This involves maintaining well-managed and habitable homes that do not compromise human health, both physically and mentally.

5.7 Many properties still need investment.

The relationship between poor housing and poor health has been recognised for a long time. Poor housing conditions can have detrimental effects on individuals, particularly children residing in such environments, impacting their health, education, and overall well-being. In addition to the wider benefits to society of improving housing, there is a direct benefit to the NHS through reduced injury rates and treatment costs where the condition of housing is improved.

Our 2016 report on Private Sector House Stock Modelling offers detailed information into the condition of housing within the Borough. It identifies that where homes have failed the decent home standard and the proportion of properties with specified category one and category two hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System that there is often a link between improvement works being necessary and the household residing in the property not being able to cover the costs. This results in improvements that could remedy problems such as inadequate heating, damp and mould and any associated health conditions not being undertaken. Funding to address these issues is limited and so we need to consider how we can tackle stock condition issues and advise and support householders to make their homes more energy efficient. This will also help address the issue of fuel poverty experienced by some households in the Borough.

In addition to stock condition in the private sector, the Council, as a landlord ensures it understands the condition of its homes so that it can undertake any works to ensure they are well maintained. directing capital investment where required. This includes evaluating where upgrades, such as installing new bathrooms and

kitchens, are needed. Making these improvements, including enhancing energy efficiency, and resolving identified damp issues, presents challenges due to non-standard construction in some Skelmersdale homes.

5.8 Reducing greenhouse gas emissions of homes.

As a landlord of around 5,800 council owned properties, we understand our responsibility to provide good quality housing to our tenants that meet the decent homes standard. We also understand that we have a responsibility to make sure our properties are as energy efficient, warm, and comfortable as possible, keeping fuel bills manageable and greenhouse gas emissions low.

Our Council owned homes consist of both standard and non-standard construction, with each having a different requirement in terms of increasing its energy performance to reduce greenhouse gas emission and energy costs. Our capital investment plan includes activity to improve the energy efficiency of our homes, but as would be expected, cost is always a consideration. Due to the cost of undertaking such work, it is necessary to seize upon funding opportunities as they arise to support the Councils own investment goals.

Heating of both the home and cooking (if from gas) needs to be decarbonised, which will also improve indoor air quality. Council owned homes are mainly heated using gas, including for communal heating systems. A sheltered accommodation property has a biomass boiler to supplement gas heating in the winter and 149 properties have air source heating pumps. While the Council has taken a fabric first approach to reduce heating demand, it has also invested in renewable technology, by installing solar photovoltaic panels to generate electricity on 588 properties.

In 2023, the Council secured £1.8m from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund which, with £5m in funding from the Council, enabled decarbonisation works to commence on 250 homes Council homes. Continual energy improvements to our homes will remain an integral part of our ongoing property management approach.

While the Council remains dedicated to enhancing and investing in its existing stock, it also prioritises the development of new energy-efficient homes for affordable housing through its development company Tawd Valley Developments (TVDL). TVDL successfully constructed four homes meeting the new Future Homes Standard (a set of building regulations), ahead of its mandatory introduction in 2025. The Future Homes Standard aims to ensure that new homes built from 2025 will produce 75-80% less carbon emissions than homes built under the current Building Regulations.

Turning to the private sector, the Councils 2010 Private Sector Stock Condition survey reported a median Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating of 53. The SAP is the government's method for calculating the energy performance of dwellings. At the time this was better than the then national average of 48, but it was noted that there was scope to reduce emissions from this sector. It went on to say that, typically, the lower SAP ratings are found in older, pre-1919 dwellings and converted flats, which suffer with high heat loss. The privately rented dwellings across the Borough at the time had a mean SAP rating of 51.

The 2016 Private Sector House Stock Modelling report presented 55 as the SAP figure for owner occupied homes while for private rented it was 56. This shows a slight improvement from 2010. The Council does not have an up-to-date modelling report and so our understanding of stock condition in the private sector needs to be refreshed. This will help the Council to understand private sector stock condition, any emerging themes and how we might provide support and advice to enable households and private landlords to improve their homes.

The table below shows the latest Government SAP data for West Lancashire to March 2023, the data shows new dwellings are more energy efficient than existing dwellings.

Median Energy Efficiency of Dwellings in West Lancashire to March 2023

All Dwellings	Existing House	New Houses	Existing Flats	New Flats
67 (EPC Band D)	65 (EPC Band D)	84 (EPC Band B)	71 (EPC Band C)	81 (EPC Band B)

Data Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – Energy Performance Certificate data on Open Data Communities and Valuation Office Agency - Property Attributes data.

5.9 Housing, health, and social care system

It is recognised that enhancing housing quality positively impacts health, yet aligning efforts with health and social care sectors holds greater potential to maximise the health of West Lancashire residents and minimise health inequalities through housing.

The challenge in this context is aligning our organisational strategic priorities and wider resources, as well as developing a strategic and operational framework, in which health, housing and social care collaborations can work effectively in partnership.

5.10 Housing digitalisation and health

While not a historic challenge, it could be a challenge for the future if its potential is not considered at this time.

Digital technology has an important role in supporting people to be healthy and independent in their home. Through the life of this strategy the digital opportunities will no doubt develop considerably, and it is important that the housing and health sector in West Lancashire embrace suitable and viable opportunities, perhaps working proactively with developers to bring innovation to the market.

Such innovation will include using digital technology to monitor the conditions of the home and associated health risks and create healthier living environments, using digital assisted living technologies to support independence, providing support services digitally and maximising digital opportunities for data sharing/referral pathways across the sectors.

Our housing strategy priorities

6.0 Introduction

In developing our housing strategy priorities, we have examined housing data, reviewed our existing policies, and identified potential areas for action for the Council. Based on these findings; the wider strategic housing agenda and following discussions with officers we started to shape our draft priorities. We then consulted with relevant partners and residents of the Borough to determine if the housing strategy priorities are the right ones to focus upon over the next five years.

Throughout the consultation process it has been made clear that the Council has finite resources. It was acknowledged that the Council, as it works on delivering this Housing Strategy, will therefore have to:

- Manage housing demand by having open and honest conversations with our customers and provide quality advice so they have a clear understanding of their housing options. This empowers them to make informed choices, potentially adjusting their housing expectations to find solutions for their housing situation.

We have chosen five housing strategy delivery priorities which are discussed further in this section.

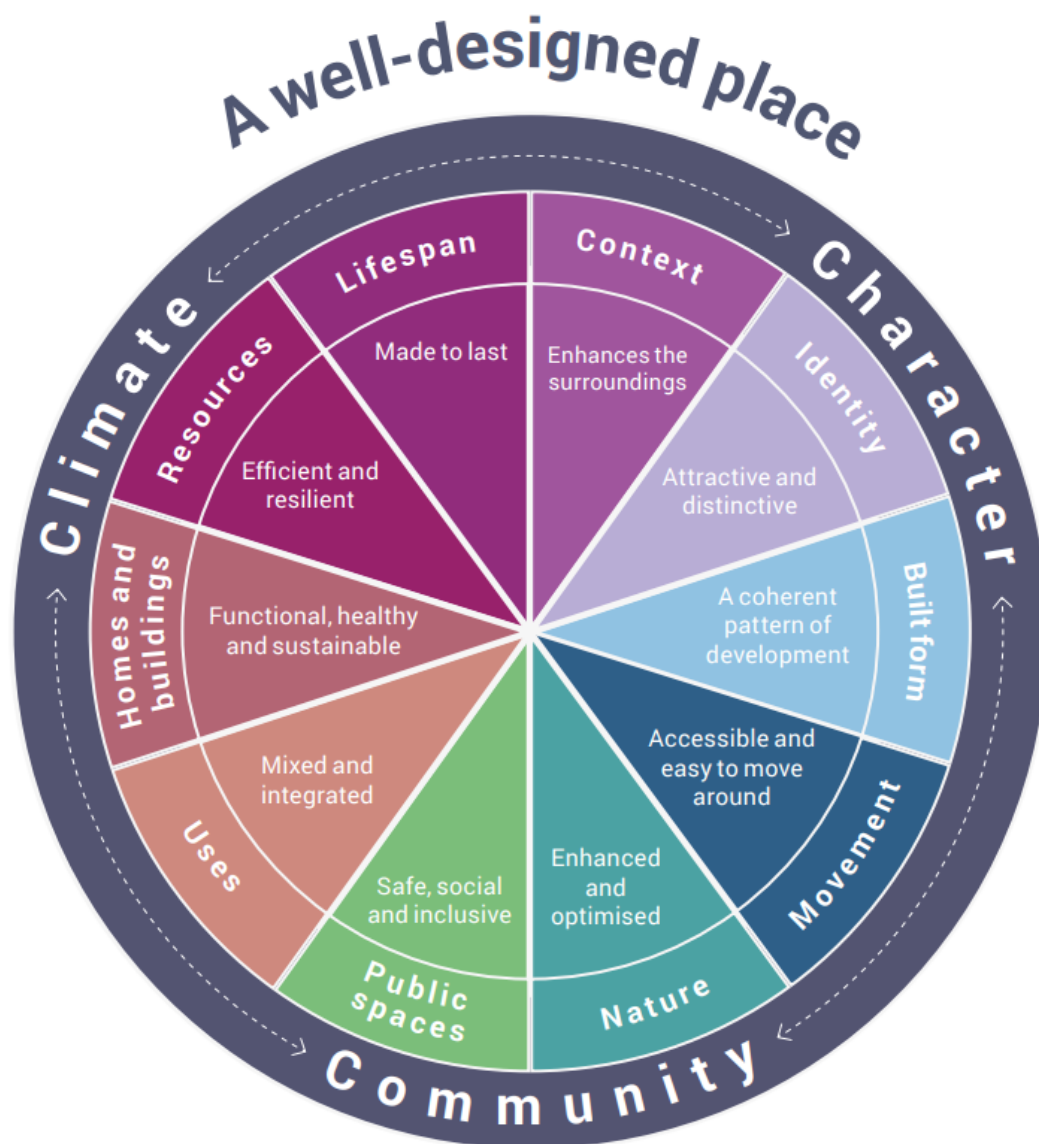
6.1 Priority 1 - Achieve the right supply of new homes including maximising affordable housing.

For this priority we want to encourage a choice of environmentally sustainable and high-quality homes that meet the needs of our existing residents, including a housing offer for those households wishing to downsize as well as provide a suitable housing offer for those households wishing to invest and make their home in West Lancashire. The homes should be in locations which support our economic, regeneration and health priorities, be able to meet people's changing housing needs and be situated within and/or contribute to creating pleasant, safe, and sustainable communities.

Defining what high-quality housing might look and feel like can be challenging. Nonetheless, the following is provided to give a sense of what it might mean and the elements that should be considered:

- High-quality developments that not only meet or exceed established construction standards but also ensure optimal land use by delivering an ideal density tailored to the site and location, all while considering and adhering to any specified density requirements outlined in the Local Plan.
- Aiming to achieve Nationally Described Space Standards for all new homes
- Superior craftsmanship and durable materials ensuring longevity and comfort.
- Incorporation of sustainable energy-efficient and low greenhouse gas emission features and modern amenities
- Thoughtful design elements for a positive living experience, e.g., higher ceiling heights to kitchen, bathrooms, and circulation areas to accommodate services. This can positively impact on how spacious, light, comfortable the dwelling is and improve the amount and quality of natural light and ventilation.
- Consideration of accessibility, safety, and integration with the environment including maximising opportunities to provide designs which improve access to natural light and cross ventilation.
- Holistic approach for enhancing residents' well-being and satisfaction.
- Internal layouts that are ergonomic and adaptable to facilitate flexible use of space, increase living choices, enable home working, and make life easier for wheelchair users.
- Consideration of environmental quality in relation to how air and noise pollution can be mitigated in dense urban environments adjacent to busy vehicular routes.
- Schemes that deliver a comfortable micro-climate for occupants and respond positively to the existing context.
- Contribution towards creating a vibrant and equitable neighbourhood.
- Access, car parking and servicing have been creatively integrated into the scheme as well as enhancing opportunities to access active travel and low carbon transport
- Promotion of a sense of community and healthier living experiences.
- Developments which are designed to take account of extreme weather events and consider what resilience will be needed in relation to the design of buildings and the location of the development.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduces a new requirement for Local Planning Authorities to develop Design Codes, which set out design requirements for the physical development of a site or area – a well-designed place. Design code guidance introduces the following graphic which aims to capture some of the "place" considerations.



It is hoped that private developers, other housing providers and potential partners who wish to work in the Borough, will recognise the importance of creating high quality housing and neighbourhoods and will wish to be a part of that journey, developing homes and neighbourhoods to be proud of.

Supporting this priority is the Council's adopted Local Plan 2012-2027 which sets out the Council's land use policies. In the case of affordable housing, Local Plan policy RS2 requires the provision of affordable housing from market housing sites as shown in the box below:

Proposed development size (Number of units)	Affordable housing requirement (minimum % of units)
8-9	25%
10 to 14	30%
15 and above	35%

Other than in Skelmersdale, affordable and specialist housing will be required as a proportion of new residential developments of eight or more dwellings in the boroughs key service centres, key sustainable villages and rural sustainable villages as shown above.

Within residential developments in Skelmersdale town centre 10%, of units will be required to be affordable, in accordance with local plan policy SP2. Elsewhere in Skelmersdale, no affordable housing will be required for developments of fewer than 15 units, whilst on sites of 15 or more dwellings, 20% of units will be required to be affordable, with up to 30% on greenfield sites on the edge of the built-up area.

Within small rural villages, as defined by the settlement hierarchy in policy SP1, affordable housing should be provided on sites comprising five or more dwellings, as defined in policy RS1.

In addition to affordable housing being delivered through planning policy, the Council will continue to be proactive and seek opportunities to build both market and affordable housing through Tawd Valley Developments Ltd, the Councils development company. In doing so we will consider using Council owned land where appropriate to support development.

The Council will continue to work in partnership with Registered Providers of Social Housing to further increase affordable housing supply, including supporting where appropriate, their applications for grant funding to Homes England.

In developing affordable housing in the Borough, we will seek to deliver Affordable Rent, Shared Ownership and Rent to Buy tenures which are aimed at helping varied household income profiles. Depending on feasibility, we may also need to consider incorporating Social Rent. Specifically concerning Affordable Rent properties, it will be important to monitor how market rent increases might influence rent setting for these properties. Given that Affordable Rent is usually set at up to 80% of market rent values, rising market rents directly affect Affordable Rent values, potentially impacting affordability.

It is also important to remember the critical link between housing and physical and mental health. By delivering the right type of housing to a high standard, this will contribute to improved health and well-being outcomes, particularly for people who are able to relocate to the new housing where their existing housing is having a negative impact upon their wellbeing. In this regard, accessibility to housing is also important.

As part of delivering high-quality homes, the Council will work to ensure both the new and the existing housing offer works towards promoting health and wellbeing, so that we have in place the best conditions for people in West Lancashire to live healthy & fulfilling lives.

6.2 Priority 2 - Drive investment in place-based regeneration for the Borough including continued regeneration of Skelmersdale.

This priority is principally focused upon the continued regeneration of Skelmersdale while also acknowledging that across the Borough there will be circumstances where investment in place-based regeneration will be of benefit.

Formerly a small mining town, Skelmersdale was designated in 1961 as a New Town to accommodate some of the rapidly expanding population of Liverpool and wider Merseyside. It has clearly defined industrial and

residential areas and a significant green space resulting from its New Town status. It has a good central location, near main transport routes such as the M58 and M6, providing excellent links with the wider region.

Today, Skelmersdale is the largest and most densely populated settlement in West Lancashire. It has a vibrant community, but like many former new towns, faces specific housing challenges that are a legacy of its development history. These relate to its functional housing market, although this has seen much improvement in recent years, along with the construction approach used for some of the housing and use of Radburn design principles in neighbourhoods. The Radburn layout, placed an emphasis on pedestrian-friendly, green spaces and separates vehicular traffic from pedestrians. The approach aimed to create a more organised and community-oriented urban environment.

For many years West Lancashire Borough Council has recognised the need to regenerate the town by improving existing facilities and attracting new retail and leisure elements. This work is well underway, the benefits of which can be seen locally with the opening of Tawd Valley Centre, a partnership between the Council and developer St. Modwen and supported by £2 million from the Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership's Growth Deal Fund.

The new town centre complex is part of the regeneration plan for Skelmersdale. This also includes drawing up a detailed masterplan for the site of the former Glenburn Sports College to further support delivery of a night-time economy, a further improved retail offer within the town centre, along with public realm improvements.

Continuing to improve the housing offer is seen as an essential part of supporting town centre regeneration. For housing, we are aware of:

- Some areas of low demand, in both social housing and owner-occupied stock, associated with poor design and/or neighbourhood reputation.
- High housing densities and poor estate layout can contribute to feelings of insecurity.
- Low house prices when compared with the rest of the Borough and a lack of variety in housing types, leading to more affluent households moving out of the area.
- Some evidence of properties being bought up by absentee private landlords, with unstable private tenancies undermining the sustainability of some neighbourhoods.
- Relatively high concentrations of deprivation in some areas.

This is not unusual in former New Towns as reported in the Department for Transport, Local Government and Regions report (2002) - 'The New Towns: Their Problems & Future' which highlights some of the problems faced by former new towns.

Skelmersdale is known to have a higher percentage of people affected by a long-term illness, or a physical health problem, than elsewhere in the Borough and this means there is a continuing and long-term demand for specialist and adapted accommodation. It is important to ensure that these health inequalities are considered as part of the regeneration activity in the town, so that improvements in health outcomes are achieved, including better life expectancy outcomes.

Over the last two decades there has been building of new private housing estates, mainly on the outskirts of the town. These estates have proved popular, but there is still a need to diversify the style and range of homes.

The Council, as a social housing landlord with a significant number of homes in Skelmersdale, understands its responsibility towards ensuring its existing homes and estates are maintained to a high standard, so that its own social housing offer supports not only housing needs but the broader goal of regenerating Skelmersdale.

The regeneration activity linked to this priority will also be a catalyst and driver of growth, exploiting Skelmersdale's location, to help develop Skelmersdale as a strategic location on the Liverpool-Manchester corridor and motorway network.

6.3 Priority 3 - Make the best use of all existing homes while encouraging well-managed and maintained homes across all tenures.

It is important to make the most of our existing housing resources, including reducing the number of properties left empty for extended periods. Our goal is to maximise the effective use of all available homes

throughout the Borough, connecting people with improved housing options, whether they need a bigger or smaller home or one with specific adaptations.

The Council recognises private sector renting as an important part of meeting the Borough's housing needs. It is important that landlords understand their obligations and so the Council will ensure that signposting and advice is in place to assist owners and managing agents. However, where landlords fail to maintain health and safety standards within properties proportionate regulation will be put in place to achieve compliance.

Longstanding empty properties can have significant impacts on neighbouring properties and the wider community and bringing properties back in to use has wider social, economic, and environmental benefits. The Council will continue to work with property owners to encourage empty properties back into use and will use proportionate regulatory tools where necessary to seek improvement. This will include exploring options for their use as affordable homes.

The Council will also continue to assist vulnerable owner occupiers as far as they are able, in order to provide signposting and advice and connect vulnerable people with available resources and assistance.

The increased focus on housing conditions, particularly dampness and mould, through media coverage, legislation, and recent regulatory changes, underscores the need for this housing strategy priority. It aims to make best use of all housing, ensuring it is of a standard that does not harm the health and well-being of the occupants.

6.4 Priority 4 - Attract investment for ending homelessness, addressing older person housing needs and residents with specialist housing requirements, including the provision of housing-related support.

We are keen to encourage investment in all parts of the Borough, including our rural communities to help assist in meeting specialist housing requirements. Vulnerable client groups such as individuals with age related needs, a learning disability, physical disability, those subject to domestic abuse, sensory impairment, and those with mental health issues sometimes require both accommodation and appropriate support to help sustain independent living. Dependant on the circumstances, such support may also be required for young people who are affected by homelessness, are estranged from home or are in need of appropriate support for some other reason. Older people's health or social circumstances can also mean that on a case-by-case basis, older members of the population may need access to specialist housing, such as extra care and/ or other form of support. This priority aims to develop suitable housing tenure and property type housing offers, including specialist supported housing solutions for our ageing population.

This is a diverse area of development that not only requires use of capital assets but also revenue funding to support the provision of the required support services. Encouraging investment and achieving delivery will be challenging in the current environment as budgets continue to be squeezed. The Council, along with statutory agency colleagues across the social care and health spectrum will need to work together and explore the availability of funding streams and delivery models to support investment. This will include exploring funding availability from the recently established NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board, a replacement for Clinical Commissioning Groups.

6.5 Priority 5 – Deliver the residential building objectives of the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030

West Lancashire Borough Council recognises the impact of climate change, both locally and globally. We strongly support the need for urgent action to tackle the impacts that greenhouse gas emissions are having on our climate and the associated risks this presents. In support of this, the Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019. The declaration included an aspiration to be a carbon neutral Council by 2030 and to act across the Borough.

Following our Climate emergency declaration, the Council developed and adopted a Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030 which sets out our aspirations to reduce emissions directly associated with Council operations and across the wider Borough.

Based upon the information available at the time of the Climate Change Strategy's development, the Council identified key contributors of greenhouse gas emissions both from Council operations and Borough-wide activities and developed seven key priority areas for action:

- Priority 1 - Delivering a Carbon Neutral Council

- Priority 2 - Sustainable Procurement
- Priority 3 - Transport and Travel
- Priority 4 - Residential buildings
- Priority 5 - Commercial activity
- Priority 6 - Community Action
- Priority 7 - The Natural Environment

It is important to recognise the importance of the Climate Change Strategy. Its Priority 4 theme relates to housing and so has a significant role to play in terms of reducing fuel poverty, improving the energy efficiency of existing housing stock, and ensuring that all new housing built is sustainable, built to adapt to a changing climate and resilient to the effects of extreme weather events. This housing strategy will, in its action plan, replicate in summary form the priority 4 residential buildings action plan.

The following narrative is taken from the Climate Change Strategy:

Background

Residential buildings account for approximately 20% of greenhouse gas emissions both nationally and locally. Not only do inefficient homes enlarge our carbon footprint, but they also have a negative effect on quality of life. Fuel poverty and the negative health impacts of living in a cold home are also major considerations that need to be addressed.

The Council has a housing stock of circa 5,880 properties located across the borough, predominantly in Skelmersdale and Ormskirk. Whilst much work has been done over the last decade to improve the energy efficiency of these homes, there is still far more to be done. Similar to our corporate work, this will be a primary focus for us, to get our own homes in order and lead by example, whilst also supporting homeowners and the private rented sector to do the same.

The Climate Change Strategy then introduces the following **residential** building objectives:

- To deliver energy efficiency in Council owned housing and support housing retrofit opportunities.
- Decarbonise home heating by supporting local energy and district heating networks, where viable.
- To lead by example and increase renewable energy generation in the housing sector.
- To utilise available funding streams to deliver energy efficiency measures to privately owned and rented housing stock.
- To advocate high standards of design and environmental performance in new build housing developments.

Whilst the primary link of this strategy to the Climate Change Strategy is Priority 4: The Residential Sector, the challenge is to implement the other Climate Change Strategy priorities beyond the house structure to enable low carbon living and resilience to climate change, they are:

- Priority 2: Sustainable Procurement. To consider products purchased and their impact at all stages of their life, such as the construction of new builds by TVDL or bulk buying of energy efficient white goods and reuse schemes.
- Priority 3: Travel and Transport. To enable active travel, e.g. walking and cycling, and low carbon travel, e.g. electric vehicle charging infrastructure, by residents to move away from fossil fuel vehicles.
- Priority 7: Natural Environment. To use Council owned Housing land to plant native trees, that will not only provide shade during extreme heat, but will also provide biodiversity benefits, and to reduce the impact of extreme rainfall by slowing the flow.

As with all the priorities presented in this Housing Strategy, they will be dependent on the availability of finance and establishing partnerships where required. For this priority however, it will be important to also recognise, not only the financial outlay, but the value of the positive impact that will be achieved. There may be more than one positive impact which can be described as co-benefits. Co-benefits of climate actions refer to the positive outcomes and advantages that arise from implementing measures to address climate change. These benefits extend beyond environmental considerations. Examples are shown below.

- **Health Improvements:** Climate actions like reducing air pollution and promoting active transportation can lead to cleaner air and better public health.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Investing in renewable energy and sustainable practices can create new job opportunities and stimulate economic growth.
- **Energy Efficiency:** Energy-efficient technologies and practices to reduce energy demand can reduce energy costs for individuals and businesses.
- **Reduced Vulnerability:** Climate adaptation measures can enhance the resilience of communities to extreme weather events and disasters.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Protecting ecosystems and conserving natural habitats can safeguard biodiversity and support ecosystem services.
- **Improved Water Quality:** Climate actions often involve better management of water resources, leading to improved water quality for both human and ecological systems.
- **Social Equity:** Climate policies can be designed to address social justice issues and reduce disparities in vulnerable communities.
- **Reduced Energy Dependency:** Diversifying energy sources can enhance energy security and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- **Innovation and Technological Advancement:** Climate actions drive innovation and the development of new technologies that have broader applications.
- **Enhanced Quality of Life:** Implementing climate solutions can create more liveable and sustainable communities, with benefits for overall quality of life.

This priority involves considering necessary resilience measures for future building designs and locations to adapt to climate change.

6.6 Summary of our housing strategy priorities.

We show in the next few pages the high-level key delivery actions which we consider will make the greatest impact to achieving the following five priorities:

- Achieve the right supply of new homes including maximising affordable housing.
- Drive investment in place-based regeneration for the Borough including continued regeneration of Skelmersdale.
- Make the best use of all existing homes while encouraging well-managed and maintained homes across all tenures.
- Attract investment for ending homelessness, addressing older persons housing needs and residents with specialist housing requirements, including the provision of housing-related support.
- Deliver the Residential Sector objectives of the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030

Priority 1 - Achieve the right supply of new homes including maximising affordable housing

Delivery Action - Develop a replacement West Lancashire Local Plan 2023-2030.

We will: develop a new plan, based upon the most current economic, housing, and population projections for the new planning period will support the development of a sustainable high-quality housing offer suitable for the housing and economic needs of the local population.

Delivery Action - Secure HE Affordable Housing Grant investment.

We will: Acting as an Investment Partner and in partnership with Registered Providers, secure inward investment from Homes England to develop affordable housing.

Delivery Action - Use Council assets to support the delivery of affordable housing.

We will: use Council land and / or other assets, where appropriate, to support the delivery of affordable housing. This will encourage investment in the Borough while also meeting affordable housing need.

Delivery Action - Develop 500 new affordable homes.

We will: encourage and enable the delivery of no less than 500 affordable homes during the life of this housing strategy which shall consist of a range of affordable housing tenures including, where appropriate, tenure suitable for First Time Buyers. This will be achieved by using planning policy requirements, development of 100% affordable housing schemes with Registered Providers and through the Councils new build programme through Tawd Valley Developments Ltd.

Priority 2 - Drive investment in place-based regeneration for the Borough including continued regeneration of Skelmersdale.

Delivery Action - Complete 5-year £32.15 million capital investment programme.

We will: Improve tenant comfort and day to day living experience by undertaking upgrades to Council homes, not limited to but including new kitchens, new bathrooms, new windows, doors, roofs, heating and electrical upgrades, external wall insulation, environmental improvement works to open spaces in various locations.

We aim to deliver the programme on time and in budget.

Delivery Action - Explore and if approved, complete a Digmaor revival scheme

We will: Fully engage with tenants and residents to explore delivery of a Digmaor revival scheme. If approved, develop a comprehensive scheme that is not only viable to deliver but will see existing homes improved along with some demolition and regeneration provided by new homes being built. There will also be wider environmental and street scene improvements.

Delivery Action - Seek funding for environmental works on Council estates.

We will: seek to secure any suitable funding opportunities to lever in investment to enable wider scale environmental improvements to our housing estates.

In contrast to our current capital investment in our Council housing stock, our ability to invest in the environment is significantly limited, yet we are aware of the benefits of doing so.

Delivery Action - Develop Skelmersdale Town Centre Masterplan.

We will: Complete development of a Masterplan which reflects Local Plan policy, that includes mixed-use and mixed-tenure housing, designed to further support the ongoing Skelmersdale town centre regeneration, which already includes a planned new, state-of-the-art Wellbeing and Leisure facility for the local community.

A project aimed at supporting the economic growth of Skelmersdale including the provision of both market and affordable housing.

Priority 3 - Make the best use of all existing homes while encouraging well-managed and maintained homes across all tenures.

Delivery Action - Achieve Regulator of Social Housing compliance.

We will: undertake the existing work programme to enable the Council to meet and /or exceed:

The Safety and Quality Standard / The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
The Neighbourhood and Community Standard / The Tenancy Standard

Delivery Action - Encourage safe and healthy private sector housing, using effective and proportionate enforcement tools where necessary.

We will: respond as required. A large proportion of private landlords do provide good quality accommodation and fulfil their legal obligations. However where this is not the case we will make use of the enforcement powers available.

We do often find that where there are problems, they can be remedied with the Council providing advice and support. In some instances the landlord may be inexperienced and so we provide them with guidance so that they can comply with their legal obligations.

Delivery Action - Provide open, honest and realistic advice and signposting

We will: offer clear housing advice for informed decision-making on housing options. Our aim is to set realistic expectations, empower choice, and assist individuals in finding their own housing solutions. Ensuring easy access to quality housing advice is crucial for those facing housing challenges. People want us to be honest about their chances of being rehoused.

Delivery Action - Encourage private sector empty homes back in to use.

We will: Provide owners with signposting and advice to encourage empty properties back into use.

Delivery Action - Renew the new private sector housing strategy.

We will: Review and renew the private sector housing strategy.

Delivery Action - Be innovative about Council owned housing stock without a future.

We will: undertake an options appraisal to consider alternative uses for buildings or the land when they have come to the end of their natural life and their future use needs to be considered.

This may be because they don't meet modern day family living or because they cannot support the changing needs of older people.

Priority 4 - Attract investment for ending homelessness, addressing older persons housing needs and residents with specialist housing requirements, including the provision of housing-related support.

Delivery Action - Explore and if viable, enable development of a new Women's Refuge.

We will: explore the development of a modern refuge facility that provides safe emergency accommodation for women fleeing domestic abuse, often with their children which will not only provide safe shelter but will provide support to enable survivors and their children to rebuild their lives

Delivery Action - Increase supply of accommodation with support for vulnerable housing groups.

We will: work in partnership with Commissioning Leads at Lancashire County Council to bring forward supported living schemes for vulnerable housing groups including people with learning and/or physical disabilities and/or mental health issues, in order to increase the existing provision.

Delivery Action - Increase the supply of housing suitable for older people.

We will: work towards increasing the supply of housing suitable for older people as it enhances accessibility and accommodates specific needs, fostering independent living and promoting a comfortable, age-friendly environment. It allows older persons to live more comfortably and safely in their homes, supporting their well-being and quality of life as they age.

Delivery Action - Deliver Homelessness Strategy 2024 - 2029

We will: upon publication of the Strategy, expected in 2024, aim for the provision of services, support, and accommodation options which will support Homeless Strategy vision, "To prevent homelessness in West Lancashire, helping residents to find and keep their home."

Priority 5 - Deliver Priority 4, the Residential Sector objectives of the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030.

Delivery Action - To reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of West Lancashire housing.

We will: work towards reducing energy demand and improving the energy efficiency of housing as it not only enhances the comfort and well-being of occupants by creating a more comfortable living environment but also aids in reducing utility bills, thereby easing financial burdens. Simultaneously, by curbing energy consumption, it contributes to mitigating climate change by lowering carbon emissions.

Delivery Action - To advocate high standards of design and environmental performance in new build housing developments.

We will: advocate for high standards of design and environmental performance in new housing developments as it enhances the occupants' quality of life by offering healthier, more functional living spaces while potentially reducing long-term maintenance costs. Moreover, it uplifts the neighborhood by creating aesthetically pleasing and sustainable communities, fostering a sense of pride and well-being among residents, all while contributing to the broader goal of mitigating climate change through reduced energy consumption and environmentally conscious practices.

Delivery Action - Deliver low carbon policy for new build housing developments.

We will: produce a low carbon policy for new build housing developments as its an important step to mitigate the environmental impact of construction activities, reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable building practices, thus contributing to global efforts to combat climate change. Additionally, it helps create energy-efficient homes, cutting long-term energy costs for occupants

Delivery Action - Require new residential developments to adopt low carbon and renewable technologies, and energy and resource efficient design.

We will: consider this action as part of replacement Local Plan and Design Code development.

This will benefit occupants by offering reduced utility bills, healthier living spaces. Additionally, these measures significantly contribute to mitigating climate change by curbing carbon emissions, fostering sustainable practices, and creating environmentally responsible communities for a better, greener future.

Resourcing and monitoring the Housing Strategy

7.0 Introduction

We are mindful that we are aiming to deliver this aspirational Housing Strategy at a time when resources are already stretched, with the cost of goods, energy and services generally putting pressure on our ability to deliver our priorities.

Delivering the Housing Strategy in such circumstances where funding in the public sector is reduced will mean that partnership working to deliver this Strategy may become more challenging as resources become more stretched. The Action Plan that accompanies this Housing Strategy will establish timelines for activity, but because of resource pressures there will need to be flexibility and an acknowledgement that timescales may need to change to respond to funding opportunities and / or funding issues.

It is important to note the distinction between the funding of Council housing and the funding of private sector housing stock in the Borough.

- Council housing and improvements to Council housing stock are funded through receipt of rents paid by Council tenants. Council housing operates a Housing Revenue Account and is not subsidised by any Council Tax revenue. Council housing, although operated and administered by the Council, has its own income stream, through the rent it receives, in which to operate, manage and maintain its service and housing stock. Rental income received from Council tenants cannot be used to improve private sector housing.
- Income received by the Council through collection of Council Tax is used to help pay for the local services such as refuse collection, policing, roads, and schools. It is collected on behalf of the Borough Council, Lancashire County Council (including Adult Social Care), Lancashire Police Authority, Lancashire Combined Fire Authority, and some parish councils. Any housing initiatives that help to improve private sector housing would need to come from this income stream unless other funding is available from the private sector and/or part of any government initiatives.

7.1 Resources

Significant resources would be required to deliver the priorities set out in this Housing Strategy. Staffing resources are key to this and span many teams, both internal and external to the Council. The Council holds land and property assets that could potentially support delivery.

It is anticipated that any Council funds or assets, made available to support this Housing Strategy will generally be framed around consideration of:

- financial planning based upon realistic and prudent assumptions about the resources available to the Council and its partners.
- capital and revenue resources used in such a manner as to extend and enhance finances under our direct control.
- priorities aligned to local, regional, and national funding streams to maximise capital income.
- service users, residents and partners also influence and participate in financial decision-making processes.
- pro-active approaches to new funding opportunities

Additionally, the Council will need to be satisfied that any projects derived from this Housing Strategy align with our corporate priorities and fully consider any governance arrangements related to partnership working along with wider stakeholder involvement and revenue implications upon the authority.

There are sources of funding to help support some aspects of delivery; however, we will also have to try and maximise external funding opportunities as they present themselves, work with partners, and think creatively about the use of any of our own funds and assets to support our Housing Strategy priorities. Paragraphs 7.2 to 7.6 refer to existing funding types / routes / opportunities.

7.2 Housing Revenue Account

Council housing - As a stock retained landlord the Council produces housing investment plans. The plans consider the capital investment needs of our housing stock to ensure that we keep our properties to a high standard. The plans also consider whether there are any particular investment needs to assist in regenerating parts of our Council housing estates and take account of the need to have appropriate staffing levels to manage the Council housing service.

7.3 Right to Buy Receipts

Legislation allows for most Council tenants to exercise their right to buy their Council home. Under existing rules, when a Council home is sold, the Council can keep a proportion of the sales receipt, also known as Retained Right to Buy receipts, which can then be used to fund new affordable housing homes. Only 40% of the cost of a new home can be sourced from retained Right to Buy receipts, meaning that 60% must be sourced from other budgets and/or use of borrowing. The Affordable Housing Programme 2021-2026 mentioned below, cannot be used to fund the 60%.

It is not possible to forecast how many homes will be sold in any financial year. However, receipts from such sales can be used to support affordable housing development.

7.4 National Affordable Housing Programme

Affordable housing – Homes England is a Government agency that aims to meet Government aspirations to develop affordable homes across the country. Homes England provides affordable housing grant to Registered Providers of Social Housing to develop affordable housing. Grant is awarded via a bidding cycle where bid applications are considered against specific criteria. The amount of grant provided does not cover the full build cost and so the Registered Provider will have to fund the gap between the development cost and the amount of grant received. As an Investment Partner with Homes England, the Council can bid for grant through the Affordable Housing Programme.

The current Affordable Housing Programme 2021-2026 consists of a larger, £11.5bn budget, including funding for social rent, supported housing, and a renewed commitment to delivering homes using modern methods of construction (MMC).

7.5 Affordable Housing Capital Fund

The Council has also committed capital resources of £256k to support affordable housing delivery. This resource has been committed for use by Tawd Valley Developments, the Councils development company. In using this fund there is an expectation that it will be used in a manner that:

- Supports development of affordable housing that may wish to test MMC approaches and / or maximise the energy efficiency of the new homes using a range of technologies (particularly considering increasing energy costs) and/or
- Enables the Council to secure grant over and above typical Homes England grant levels, by encouraging Homes England to increase the grant they would ordinarily provide in return for the Council also increasing its contribution out of this fund. This is particularly beneficial for sites with higher-than-usual development costs and
- Demonstrates that the housing developed could not ordinarily be developed without the financial contribution from this fund.

Overall, the fund's intended purpose is to leverage funding, enabling development under circumstances where financial constraints would otherwise hinder progress.

7.6 Integrated Care Board

Clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) were established under the Health and Social Care Act in 2012, replacing primary care trusts on April 1, 2013. On July 1, 2022, the Health and Care Act 2022 led to the official establishment of integrated care systems (ICSs), resulting in the closure of CCGs.

Integrated Care Systems are partnerships of organisations that come together to plan and pay for health and care services to improve the lives of people who live and work in their area. Each integrated care system has

two statutory elements, an integrated care partnership (ICP) and integrated care board (ICB). Covering West Lancashire is the NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board.

Although the availability of funding from NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board is not known at this stage, this new arrangement and operational focus may afford funding opportunities across mental health and learning disability and other vulnerable groups. The Council will therefore explore if the ICB will be able to support deliver positive outcomes for Priority 4 - Attract investment for ending homelessness, addressing older persons housing needs and residents with specialist housing requirements, including the provision of housing-related support.

7.7 Monitoring

The Council produces several strategies and plans directed at achieving our Corporate vision and priorities. These plans and strategies contain numerous tasks and targets which, when completed successfully, are the building blocks of our success.

To keep track of our progress we use a performance monitoring framework. This helps us monitor progress and take any remedial action to make sure that what is supposed to be done gets done. Each of our service areas produce Service Action Plans which reflect the key delivery actions we are working on as contained in our strategies and plans. These are monitored regularly through our monitoring framework with performance updates being provided to relevant service managers and service heads. Performance and achievement are also reported to our Elected Members in line with our constitution so that progress is fully understood.

The Housing Strategy Action Plan will be monitored as part of the process outlined above.