

Housing Strategy

2025-2030

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this Housing Strategy - the first for Westmorland and Furness Council.

As a Council, we have clearly articulated in both the Council Plan and the Delivery Framework that providing good quality housing is an absolute priority for us. We are passionately committed to ensuring that people can live in a place they can call home, one which is affordable, clean, safe, warm and suitable for their needs.

We recognise in delivering that mission we do face many opportunities and challenges. The supply, availability and affordability of houses in both our rural communities and in the Furness area, with the unprecedented demand caused by the significant expansion of BAE, is something that is at the forefront of our thinking and drive to succeed working with our communities, town and parish councils, community land trusts, developers and registered providers.

Like many other areas, our residents are facing increases in the cost of living and the challenges of heating their homes and keeping a roof over their heads. The cost of providing temporary accommodation for people who find themselves homeless is rising, and although the housing stock of the Council meets Decent Homes Standards, there are large numbers of houses in the private rented sector that require improvements.

We have already begun some trail-blazing work in developing new approaches and have agreed an Affordable Housing Grants Policy and in the last six months awarded £570k to create 20 affordable new homes, as well as making additional funding available for feasibility studies into delivering additional affordable housing.

As a Council, we have developed an approach to prevent and tackle damp and mould in our own housing stock and for the private rented sector. We have invested over £460k over the next three years for additional staff to tackle empty homes and bring them back into use and invested £3m in Disabled Facility Grants.

Putting people at the heart of what we do and being a community-powered Council has really brought to life how we can rise to the challenges and maximise opportunities. This Housing Strategy sets out a bold and ambitious vision and objectives under the three key themes of People, Place and Homes and a set of Action Plans will sit beneath this Strategy which will provide measurable actions. By working with partners and communities we will meet our priorities by 2030.

This Housing Strategy has been co-produced with a whole range of partners and the Council are hugely appreciative of all of the voices that have informed this Strategy and enabled a meaningful document to be produced which has a strong sense of ownership.

And personally, I am very grateful to all the Westmorland and Furness Council staff who have worked so hard to pull this Strategy together, as well as continuing to do their increasingly pressured jobs with commitment and passion helping those struggling to find suitable homes.

Judith Derbyshire

Cabinet Member for Housing & Homelessness

Introduction

This is the first housing strategy for Westmorland and Furness Council. It outlines our vision for housing across Westmorland and Furness, our priorities, and the actions we will take. It provides a framework for the housing policies and projects we will deliver over the next five years.

Westmorland and Furness contains diverse housing markets, with varying housing needs and many challenges. Local Government Reorganisation has given us a once in a generation opportunity; to transform services, drive innovation and improve outcomes for our communities and the people who need it most.

We will take a proactive approach to housing delivery, and we will develop a bold plan to deliver more homes, including more affordable homes, working with partners, across Westmorland and Furness over the next five years.

Our strategy demonstrates how we will use the new combined strength of the unitary authority and the advantage of being a stock holding Council to unlock greater resources, access funding opportunities and accelerate housing growth and regeneration, ensuring that we deliver sustainably, and develop inclusive places.

We are an ambitious Council, keen to deliver excellent housing services and to be an exemplar social landlord. We are committed to ensuring all our residents can live in a place they can call home, one which is affordable, clean, safe, warm and suitable for their needs.

We will lead by example, driving up standards across our Council housing stock and taking enforcement action where we find landlords who are failing to meet safety requirements, ensuring decent and safe homes for all residents.

What does Westmorland and Furness Council look like?

Westmorland and Furness is the third largest local authority in England and Wales by land area, covering an area of 3,760 square km, with a population of 227,592 persons. The area has an average population density of 61 people per square km, much more sparsely population than the national average (England & Wales 399 per square km). However, population density varies greatly across the wards in the authority ranging from 14 people per square km in the Greystoke and Ullswater Ward to 3,641 people per square km in the Kendal Highgate Ward.

When compared to England and Wales, Westmorland and Furness has an older age profile, with a lower proportion of residents aged 0-15 years and 16-64 years and a higher proportion of residents aged 65 years and over. The 2018 Based Subnational Population Projections, published by the Office for National Statistics, suggest that by 2043 the population of Westmorland and Furness aged 65 and over is expected to increase by 28.4%, whilst the working age population (population aged 16-64 years) is expected to decrease by 10.0%. An older population will create a greater demand for personal health and social care at a time when there are less people of working age to provide it.

Housing – what does the Council do?

As a housing authority, we:

- Provide, manage and maintain c.2,600 council houses, mainly in the Furness area
- Work with housing associations, community land trusts and housing developers to deliver new affordable housing and housing to meet specific needs such as supported housing
- Set the policies by which affordable housing is allocated to people
- Support community-led and self-build housing
- Support homeless people and people at risk of homelessness and provide and source emergency accommodation
- Work in collaboration with private landlords to maximise the availability of affordable housing
- Support people to stay in their own homes through disabled facilities grants and the handy person scheme
- Work with property owners to bring empty homes back into use
- Support Veterans and have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant
- Support our cared for children and care experienced (care leavers), to give them the same opportunities as other children and promote the best possible outcomes, in line with our responsibilities as a corporate parent.

As a corporate parent we are dedicated to offering the highest quality care and support to our cared for children and care-experienced young people/adults.

As a Planning Authority (outside National Parks), we:

- Prepare a Local Plan which:
 - sets out how much housing and other development will be needed over the next 15 years,
 - allocates sites to meet those needs,
 - ensures that supporting infrastructure is delivered
 - sets policy requirements and quality standards for housing development including how much affordable housing developers are expected to provide
- Support communities preparing neighbourhood plans

- Determine planning applications, guided by the Local Plan

As a Promoter of growth and economic development, we:

- Support the housebuilding, and sustainable construction industry as an important benefactor of wealth and jobs within our local economy
- Support the delivery of housing necessary to support the wider economy including housing to support workforce growth and sustain our existing workforce

As an Asset owner, we:

- Make land and buildings within our ownership available for the development of affordable and special needs housing

As Corporate Parents of Care Leavers, we

- Support care leavers to find appropriate accommodation
- Provide supported accommodation for eligible 16–24-year-olds, which includes training and personalised help to assist people learn life skills to enable them to live independently
- Facilitate Homestays which provide a home environment with tailored support
- Facilitate Staying Put with a foster family
- Facilitate access to setting-up-home allowances, rent deposits and emergency payments
- Support care leavers into education and training
- Provide health and wellbeing support for care leavers

As a Provider of Social Care, we

- Provide and source care, which may include residential care, to people with care needs, including the elderly, people with disabilities and vulnerable adults and children
- Provide support for people with care needs to remain in their own homes

As a Public Health Authority, we

- Ensure that existing housing is of an acceptable standard
- License houses in multiple occupation
- Take action against sub-standard housing and improving energy efficiency
- Take action to improve health and reduce health inequalities, by delivering our healthy homes project and improving access to quality, affordable housing

As a Community Leader, we

- Listen to communities and champion their concerns
- Lobby Government over issues of community concern such as the need for additional powers to manage the impact of second homes and holiday homes

Housing – who else is involved in housing in Westmorland and Furness?

- **The Secretary of State for Housing, Local Government and Communities** – who sets national policies on planning and housing
- **Homes England** – a government-funded agency who support the delivery of affordable and market housing
- **Housing associations** – who deliver and manage most affordable and social housing outside the Barrow area
- **Housing developers** – who build market housing and also deliver some affordable housing
- **National Park authorities** who prepare Local Plans and determine planning applications in parts of the district within the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.
- **Land and property owners** who make land available for housing development, usually through the Local Plan process
- **Banks and building societies** who fund the purchase of homes and also fund housing development

Key housing facts

- Area: 3,754 Km²
- Area within National Parks: 1,900 Km²
- Population: 226,592 (Census 2021) and is expected to grow to 228,201 by 2043
- Living in rural areas: 55%
- Largest town: Barrow - population 55,000
- Ageing population (65 plus): 58,500 (Census 2021) / 26.0% of Westmorland & Furness Population (Mid-Year 2022 Estimates)
- Ageing population (65 plus) projected 2043: 75,118 (equating to a 28.4% increase) (2018 sub-national population estimates)
- Working age population (aged 16-64 years): 133,863 (Census 2021) / 59.0% of Westmorland & Furness Population (Mid-Year 2022 Estimates)
- Working age population (aged 16-64 years) projected 2043: 120,422 (equating to a -10.0% decrease) (2018 sub national population estimates)
- Primary schools: 122
- Secondary schools: 20
- Special schools: 3
- Businesses and jobs: 11,815 businesses providing 114,000 jobs
- Number of households: 103,529 (Census 2021)
- Average Household Size: 2.2 residents per household, lower than the national average of 2.4 residents per household (Census 2021)
- 17.1% of households rent privately (Census 2021)
- Average house price: £298,050 (© Experian 2023 - All rights reserved)
- Average household income: £41,045 (© Experian 2023 - All rights reserved)
- Average rent: £698 per calendar month (ONS, Private rental and House prices UK)
- Over 11,000 residents (5.2%) report their general health to be 'bad' or 'very bad' (Census 2021)
- Over 42,000 residents (18.7%) state that a disability means their day-to-day activities are limited (Census 2021)

Council Plan Priorities

Our strategic priorities are set out in our Council Plan they focus on:

- Our people
- The economy and culture
- The climate
- Our communities
- Our customers
- Our workforce

We have **ten delivery themes** supporting our priorities. They are:

- Care
- Learning
- Health and wellbeing
- Homes
- Growth
- Culture
- Connections
- Environment
- Communities
- Service

Strategic vision, aims and objectives

We have a vision for Westmorland and Furness as ‘A great place to live, work and thrive’.

This means a place in which everyone has access to good quality affordable housing that meets their needs and is fit for the future. Housing and access to good quality affordable housing is critical to individual and community wellbeing. In strategic terms for the Council, housing is also:

- a driver for sustainable and inclusive economic growth
- central to ensuring that our communities are sustainable and inclusive
- vital to delivering our climate change ambitions and our net zero targets

Within the Westmorland and Furness Council Plan (2023-2028), delivering affordable, quality housing so that local families can build a life here and new people will be attracted to relocate is a key ambition of the new Council. The Housing Strategy aligns with other key strategies within Westmorland and Furness including:

- Climate Change Strategy
- Economic Development Strategy
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Current Local Plans and emerging Westmorland and Furness Local Plan
- Homelessness Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Private Sector Housing Assistance Renewal Policy (RRO)
- Empty Homes Strategy

How we link with our strategic partners and work together is crucial to the Council meeting its housing objectives. We have a wide range of key partners including Homes England, Registered Providers (RPs), alongside our local voluntary and community sector, delivery partners, and communities.

Homes England has published its Strategic Plan (2023-2028) which puts a strong emphasis on levelling up, regeneration and on building a ‘housing and regeneration sector that works for everyone, driving diversification, partnership working, and innovation’. We will work alongside Homes England to develop action plans that deliver for our communities.

Our key objectives

Our people:

- Preventing and tackling homelessness
- Meeting the needs of our ageing population
- Meeting supported housing needs and the needs of specific groups

Our places:

- Growing the supply of affordable and available housing
- Addressing the rural housing crisis
- Supporting communities through neighbourhood renewal and regeneration

Our homes

- Decarbonising the housing stock, including our Council homes, making them more energy efficient and affordable to live in, reducing fuel poverty
- Ensuring that new housing supply of all tenures contributes to our net zero ambitions
- Addressing stock condition issues, improving poor quality housing in all tenures
- Ensuring our council housing stock remains at decent homes standard and continues to improve

Our Operating Model helps us provide consistent, effective services which are community-focused, easily accessible and promote digital ways of working to allow more flexibility to our customers.

Community focus: We will focus on early intervention and prevention, working with individuals, community groups, parish and town councils, the voluntary sector and partners to reduce need for our services and improve health and wellbeing.

Easy access: Services will be user friendly, caring and accessible through multiple channels. Wherever possible services will be available and delivered digitally, reducing demand for phone and in-person interaction so those resources can be focused on those most in need.

Effective services: Services are outcome focused and maximise use of technology to drive efficiency and effectiveness. Service delivery is citizen-centred and seamless between services and partner organisations

Enabling processes: Internal processes and functions are supported by key enabling functions including Human Resources, Project Management Office, Legal, Commissioning and Procurement working closely with service delivery teams.

Supporting technology: 'Fit for purpose' technology across the council that supports the delivery of services, promotes digital ways of working, and enables organisational efficiency.

Current context

Challenges

There are some big challenges in Westmorland and Furness that affect our residents and communities, and impact on housing:

- an ageing population
- significant inequalities in health and social outcomes
- sparsely populated rural communities and pockets of deprivation, a low wage economy
- housing affordability and access to good quality homes
- improving the energy efficiency of our housing stock and reducing fuel poverty
- the impacts of Climate Change on our population and communities
- Local areas facing differing issues and therefore having different needs

Additionally, the Covid pandemic harmed our housing markets, exacerbating housing availability and affordability challenges.

In November 2020 (the second national lockdown) the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) found that 2.5 million UK households were worried about paying rent over winter, with 700,000 already in rental arrears and 350,000 at risk of eviction. The study identified that a high proportion of renters were having to reduce their spending (such as cutting back on food and heating) to cover their housing costs.

The JRF also carried out a survey of British mortgage holders during the same year and found that 20% of all British mortgage holders were worried about paying their mortgage and like in the rental sector, one in three mortgage holders were spending less on food and heating.

It also highlighted long-term pressures linked to entrenched deprivation, the erosion of support infrastructure and the lack of supported housing.

We now face a 'cost of living' crisis, which is impacting on our communities.

Opportunities and Aspirations

Despite the challenges, there are some great opportunities available to us. We have an opportunity to deliver housing growth both through working in partnership and by expanding our council housing stock. Working alongside partners we will look to develop a Housing Growth Plan and shared housing pipeline for the partnership area that links in with the housing aspirations of Westmorland and Furness Council.

Team Barrow has created opportunities to deliver housing at pace and meet our wider economic growth ambitions

Our aspirations for housing over the next five years, include:

- Consolidating the Housing Revenue Account - bringing together council owned homes, sites and landlord services; putting high management standards, safety, and involving our tenants at the heart of what we do in line with the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM).
- Developing a Housing Growth Plan, which will include growing our own Council housing stock.
- Exploring the housing development potential of publicly owned land, including council owned sites.
- Working with Partners to deliver the right homes in the right place, retrofit our homes, and invest in employment opportunities, including green skills.
- Delivering on our commitment to Climate Change to be net zero by 2037 and the economic opportunities that brings.
- Realising the potential efficiencies of being one council; in particular, working with Health and Social Care colleagues to meet the needs of vulnerable residents, enable capacity and reduce pressure.
- Using our capacity as a landlord and housing enabler to tackle inequalities, especially around health, social and digital exclusion, by coordinating and targeting resources, intervention and support to best effect.

Whilst acknowledging that there are risks, we are confident by working together with our partners we can realise these aspirations. We have:

- A combined reputation for developing and delivering quality affordable homes.
- A strong track record of partnership working with Registered Providers to deliver affordable homes that meet a variety of needs.
- Demonstrable success in attracting Government funding to deliver homelessness prevention, private sector housing improvements, enable rural housing, and rough sleeping reduction.
- Experience in working closely, through our locality structures, with communities and community led organisations to provide housing to meet local needs.

Consider a range of 'affordable housing tenure and products' on new build developments.

Our Vision is to be:

‘A great place to live, work and thrive.’

To do this we will work across three themes:

- **Our People**
- **Our Places**
- **Our Homes**

These themes represent what housing is all about; it's not just about the bricks and mortar. It is about our people and places, and how we can as a Council, with our partners, use our resources to support them.

Theme 1: Our People

Our People' is about meeting the housing needs of our population and particularly our older households, homeless households, those threatened with homelessness, and households with support needs.

It also includes specific groups such as care experienced young people, veterans, gypsies and travellers, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Our key priorities for this theme are:

- Preventing and tackling homelessness
- Meeting the needs of our ageing population
- Meeting the needs of veterans and their families
- Meeting the needs of our care experienced young people in line with our responsibilities as a corporate parent
- Meeting supported housing needs and the needs of specific groups

Preventing and tackling homelessness

Homelessness is a growing problem across Westmorland and Furness, exacerbated by the pandemic, and the on-going cost of living crisis. In addition, the supply of affordable housing in both the private rented and social rented sectors has significantly declined in the last three years. Despite these challenges we have achieved some successes in preventing homelessness, by taking proactive approaches to prevention and seeking innovative accommodation solutions.

As significant pressure remains, there have been sharp rises in the number of homeless assessments as detailed below:

Total owed a prevention or relief duty

District	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Barrow	328	280	304	284
Eden	150	117	139	189
South Lakeland	335	396	506	531
Westmorland & Furness	813	793	949	1004

The following table details the total number of Homelessness Applications where it has been determined a Prevention Duty is owed as a rate per 1,000 population. This shows a steady inclining trend since 2019 and instances where rates have exceeded the national figure.

Threatened with homelessness (prevention duty owed) – rate per 1,000 population (Data source: MHCLG Homelessness Data Returns)

District	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024 (first 3 Qs only)
Westmorland & Furness	1.5	1.6	3.0	2.4	1.4
England	2.6	2.1	2.4	2.5	1.8

Homeless (relief duty owed) – rate per 1,000 population

(Data source: MHCLG Homelessness Data Returns)

District	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024 (first 3 Qs only)
Westmorland & Furness	2.2	2.0	1.9	2.0	1.9
England	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.2

Total (prevention and relief) rate per 1,000 population

(Data source: MHCLG Homelessness Data Returns)

District	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024 (first 3 Qs only)
Westmorland & Furness	3.7	3.6	4.9	4.4	3.4
England	5.1	4.8	4.9	5.2	4.0

By far the biggest impact has been on the increased use of temporary accommodation (see below table) for homeless households and the consequent increase in spending.

Total households in temporary accommodation in Westmorland and Furness (per quarter since 2021) (Data source: MHCLG Homelessness Data Returns)

Q1 2021	Q2 2021	Q3 2021	Q4 2021	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q3 2022	Q4 2022	Q1 2023	Q2 2023	Q3 2023	Q4 2023
31	32	33	32	33	39	40	41	45	43	48	60

The use and cost of temporary accommodation is likely to continue to rise, as more households are threatened with homelessness and a reduced supply of “move-on” accommodation in both the private and social rented sectors.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Bringing together homelessness prevention and support services across Westmorland and Furness to tackle homelessness, using a range of prevention tools, best practice, and interventions to prevent homelessness.
- Delivering new, innovative and existing accommodation solutions, including new temporary housing, and improving support and access to services.
- Working with partners to improve person-centred support offered to households to maintain existing tenancies.
- Working with partners to reduce rough sleeping in Westmorland and Furness helping people live independent lives off the street, while supporting individuals who remain street homeless.
- Implementing our new Homelessness Strategy 2024 to 2029.
- Developing a Temporary Accommodation Strategy for Westmorland and Furness Council.
- Developing a Trauma Informed approach with Homelessness Services, in line with the Homelessness Strategy and Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Working with partners to increase the supply of high quality, affordable accommodation

Case Study | Refugee Family leaving dispersed accommodation

The family were referred to the Homelessness Service Team by the Resettlement Team when they received confirmation of their successful application for refugee status. This meant they could access housing, benefits and employment, however it also meant they had to leave the accommodation they were staying in which had been arranged by the Home Office via Serco.

Notice to leave this accommodation usually provides a 21-day period to find alternative housing. This is shorter than the 56 days defined as the 'Prevention duty' period under Homeless Legislation. In this instance, notice had not been served at the same time as the positive decision was granted so the family only had 16 days in which to find accommodation.

The family were deemed to be in Priority Need which meant the Council had to provide temporary accommodation. As the family were already embedded in the community, with the child in the local school and the parents undertaking voluntary work, the family needed to stay in the Barrow area.

The Homelessness Advice Officer advised the family to remain in the property provided by Serco until they had official documentation to vacate, to enable preparation for temporary accommodation to be provided under the Council's 'Relief duty'.

During this time the officer supported the family to apply for Social Housing through Cumbria Choice (the social housing allocation scheme) and arranged for the Homelessness Service Triage Officer to place bids for them to ensure that they bid on all available properties.

In addition, the officer contacted landlords in the private sector and assisted the family with applications. Support to access benefits was also provided together with information regarding accessing white goods and furnishings for the family's future home.

The family is currently awaiting the allocation of a property in either the social or private rented sector. The Relief Duty will continue until 56 days has elapsed and, if no positive Relief Duty outcome can be recorded, a Full Homeless Duty will be owed to the family until this is discharged by the offer of a secure local authority property or a 12-month Assured Shorthold Tenancy.

The Homelessness Team will continue to support the family until such time as they are in settled, secure accommodation.

Meeting the needs of our ageing population

Currently one in four of our residents is aged 65 and over. The proportion of over 65s is predicted to increase further, with one in three of our residents expected to be 65 and over by 2043. Crucially, the number of over 85-year-olds, who are more likely to use our services, is expected to grow by over 50% during the same period. We will need to develop our housing offer to ensure that it meets the needs of our growing older population.

It is estimated that the proportion of the population residing within the Westmorland and Furness area aged 65 and over who need help with at least one self-care activity is anticipated to increase by 27.4% between 2023 and 2040 (POPPI - Projecting Older People Population Information system).

We have had a successful Extra Care programme over the last 20 years, which has seen the provision of new Extra Care schemes in virtually all of our main settlements.

We need to continue to develop similar services and also look at new models of Extra Care and other specialised housing for older people.

We recognise that we cannot meet all needs through the provision of new specialist accommodation and many older households will choose to remain living in their own home.

Our Healthy Homes Project (<https://healthyhomes.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/>) and our Home Improvement Agency (HIA) will be essential to ensure as many older residents as possible are supported to live independently.

We will focus on our Council housing stock, which was developed specifically for older people. We will update this stock as part of our Asset Management Strategy to ensure that it meets the needs of our older households.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Updating our Extra Care Housing and Supported Living offer to meet changing needs, including developing new models of extra care to accommodate smaller schemes in rural areas, supporting those with complex needs, including working age people with learning and physical disabilities, as well as people with dementia.
- Working with Health and Social Care colleagues to ensure a holistic approach to meeting the needs of people with adult social care needs.
- Updating our own homes to provide improved specialist and adaptable housing, embedding assistive and digital technology for people with adult social care needs.

- Working with housing providers and residents to ensure that housing supports health and wellbeing, such as facilitating active travel and implementing smoke free homes.
- Working with housing providers to ensure that the housing environment maximizes opportunities for social inclusion.
- Developing a Technical Research paper on ageing well to support the development of Council housing stock.

Case Study | Holistic, person-centred approach

Margaret a 78 year old lady was living alone; she had mild dementia and arthritis which made mobility difficult. She had a close circle of friends and neighbours.

Margaret expressed a strong desire to remain independent and continue living in her own home, but her condition had raised concerns about her safety and ability to manage daily activities.

A holistic, person-centred approach was developed to ensure that Margaret could remain safely at home while maintaining as much independence as possible:

- A fall prevention assessment was conducted, leading to the installation of grab rails in the bathroom and an adaptation of a stair lift was installed.
- Margaret's GP arranged regular check-ups and a community nurse provided at home visits to monitor her health.
- A medication reminder system was set up to help her stay on track with prescriptions.
- A physiotherapist worked with Margaret to develop a personalised exercise routine designed to improve her mobility and help maintain her independence.
- A trained home care assistant was assigned to help Margaret with daily tasks like dressing, cleaning and meals on wheels service was put in place.

With the support of her carers, health professions and home adaptations, Margaret was able to perform more daily tasks on her own and maintain her independence.

This case highlights the importance of combining health care, social care and housing adaptations to enable an adult with social care needs to live independently and with dignity.

Meeting the needs of our veterans and armed forces families

In drafting this strategy, the Council has given consideration to the Armed Forces Covenant which has been enshrined in law through the enactment of the Armed Forces Act 2021.

The Armed Forces Act 2021 amends the Armed Forces Act 2006 to create a legal obligation on relevant bodies, when exercising relevant statutory functions, to have “due regard” to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Statutory guidance has been produced (the Armed Forces (Covenant) Regulations 2022).

It applies to specific functions including housing services. When the Council exercises its housing function (Allocations Policy for social housing, tenancy strategies, Homelessness, Disabled Facilities Grants) it must have due regard to:

- the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by the, the Armed Forces
- the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising from service people from membership of, or former membership, of the Armed Forces
- the principle that special provision for service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership of, or former membership of the Armed Forces

The Council signed the Armed Forces covenant in July 2023. The Covenant provides that “those who serve must not be disadvantaged by what they do” and it seeks to “redress the disadvantages that the armed forces community faces compared to others and recognise sacrifices made.”

- The Council will ensure that no veteran of the regular armed forces will need to meet a local connection test for social housing regardless of when they last served.
- Consideration is given to medical needs related to service in the assessment of priority housing need
- The Council will be developing a housing needs assessment for veterans.
- The Council through the Westmorland and Furness Armed Forces Board is developing collaborative relationships with Armed Forces Charities, the voluntary sector and other partners with a focus on housing and to ensure that we have “due regard” as required under the Act.
- The Council will collect data on our Armed Forces Community by asking specific questions regarding serving personnel, veterans, war widows/ widowers so that we can better understand our Armed Forces Communities. This will allow us to properly assess the housing, tenancy and DFG needs of our veterans.
- The Council will provide information through its website and by other means regarding housing across the Borough, the Council is developing a veterans voice to shape its service delivery and develop improved pathways.

We know we have a higher than national average of veterans across Westmorland and Furness. Our Strategy will seek to identify and better support our Armed Forces families by continuing to work collaboratively with key partners through the Westmorland and Furness Armed Forces Board.

Latest Government announcements regarding local connection will be reflected in the Cumbria Choice Based Lettings policy in due course.

Geography	% of population aged 16+ who have previously served in the armed forces
Westmorland & Furness	4.7%
Barrow	4.8%
Eden	4.6%
South Lakeland	4.5%
England & Wales	3.8%

Support needs of households owed a prevention or relief duty: Served in HM Forces

District	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Barrow	4	5	10	13
Eden	6	5	6	3
South Lakeland	6	4	2	6
Westmorland & Furness	16	14	18	22

We will meet these challenges by:

- Ensuring that we identify Veterans and Armed Forces Families when they approach our housing services so that we are better able to identify their needs and appropriate sources of support.
- Reviewing and updating our housing-related policies in line with legislation.
- Working closely with the Armed Forces Partnership Board to identify and develop closer working relationships with specialist agencies.

- Considering partnership opportunities with Stolls' Veteran Nomination Scheme and/or other housing providers.

Case Study | Male Rough Sleeper (veteran)

A number of reports were received from the public who were concerned about a gentleman bedding down in shop doorways.

Staff made several visits to offer assistance and check the welfare of the man. It was established that he was a Veteran who insisted that he did not want an intervention from the statutory services provided by the Council. He described himself as "fine" and this is "just what I do". He wasn't local to the area but had been living in supported accommodation relating to substance misuse. He was getting hot drinks and food items from members of the public and was in good spirits.

The following week further reports were received which fitted the same description. Staff went out again to speak to the man and check his welfare. He was still unwilling to access our services. He was offered alternative assistance in the form of advice around local organisations providing warm spaces, food and companionship. He was also given the information leaflets on how to contact us and where to come for assistance and access accommodation during periods of severe weather (SWEP)

The actions to try and engage this gentleman to date have not been successful.

The Council is committed to improving engagement with hard to reach clients to encourage positive changes and is in the process of implementing a pilot project which will proactively engage with vulnerable individuals.

Meeting the needs of our care experienced young people

Our approach is that it is imperative for every child to have the best. Our goal is for them to grow up in a happy, loving, and caring home.

We will always seek to keep children and young people within their family networks, doing all that we can to enable families to stay together.

In some situations, we take the difficult decision to place a child in our care. When that does happen, we take a strengths-based approach focussing on identifying the strengths, or assets, as well as the needs and difficulties of children, young people, and families.

Whilst in our care, we prioritise maintaining relationships with their families and friends, working towards safe and timely reunification.

Our child-centred practice helps us to assemble the evidence base about the child's lived experiences, especially the impact on the child of any adverse childhood experiences.

We take a strengths-based, solution-focused approach to our work, and support the family and network to come up with their own solutions. Collaboration with statutory and other partners is integral to our approach.

Through working closely with others, we can create an effective supportive system for children and families.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Ensuring appropriate care leaver protocols are in place to facilitate access to housing in line with our corporate parent responsibilities.
- Working with Children's Services and housing providers across all tenures to identify and access appropriate housing.
- Working with Children's Services and partner agencies to improve access to information which enables care leavers to prepare for and maintain tenancies .
- Working with Children's Services and partner agencies to improve ongoing support for care leavers to enable them to maintain social networks, connect with the communities they live in and maintain tenancies.

Case Study | Care Leaver - Single female aged 20, sofa surfing in South Lakeland

The Care leaver moved into the area having experienced domestic abuse. She approached the homelessness team in South Lakeland having left her most recent accommodation due to friends no longer being willing to accommodate her.

The team were able to access private rented accommodation in Eden through the Rough Sleeper Initiative funded Property Links scheme, which matches homeless people with private landlords. The team provided her rent in advance and worked with her Corporate Parent's Social Care team (out of area) to access a setting up home grant, which enabled her to buy essential items to establish her new home. The team provided additional support to access a food parcel, set up utility bills and update her Universal Credit Claim.

Since being housed she has received advice on managing her tenancy and she has recently attended job interviews.

Meeting supported housing needs and the needs of specific groups

Supported housing needs vary across Westmorland and Furness and include the needs of those with physical and learning disabilities, and residents with mental health issues.

18.7% of residents in Westmorland and Furness were limited in some way by a health or disability (Census 2021). Whilst some residents with support needs will

seek some form of specialist accommodation, many will want to remain living in their own homes.

For those with physical disabilities the Council's Home Improvement Agencies (HIA) in conjunction with Health and Social Care are well placed to support people living independently, including through the use of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).

Better integration with Health and Social Care is key to ensuring that we meet other supported housing needs, including learning difficulties and mental health needs, as well as families with children with disabilities.

The Council now has an opportunity to align its resources to meet all supported housing needs. The retention of a structured housing pathway for care leavers through a joint partnership with Children and Young Peoples Services is a priority; ensuring that this is resourced effectively going forward.

We will continue to meet the housing needs of our Gypsy and Traveller communities, through the provision of both high quality and easily accessible sites and support services.

A more recent challenge has been the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers across Westmorland and Furness. In parts of Westmorland and Furness, refugees and asylum seekers have been located in hotels and other temporary accommodation. As these communities begin to settle in local neighbourhoods, there is a need to support them to secure more permanent accommodation and provide on-going support services.

Many of our residents are also exposed to harm from County Lines and we will continue to work with other agencies to identify and protect our vulnerable residents.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Ensuring new homes meet accessible and adaptable design standards
- Ensuring better integration of health and social care.
- Working with Planning colleagues, through the Local Plan process, to ensure that an adequate supply of new homes are compliant with optional Building Regulations M4(2) – Accessible and adaptable dwellings and M4(3) Wheelchair user dwellings. These standards have superseded 'Lifetime Homes'.
- Working together to deliver a more efficient and effective Young People's Housing Pathway.
- Helping residents to live independently with the aid of assistive technology, including undertaking an options appraisal of all available service delivery models.

- Supporting refugee resettlement pathways and support services via a dedicated refugee resettlement team.
- Ensuring that the housing needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities are met.
- Strengthening links with health services to ensure access to preventative healthcare is maximized.
- Working with residents to implement Smoke Free Homes.

Case Study | Man fleeing county lines drug gang

John, a 23-year-old man, had a difficult upbringing, marked by childhood neglect, limited family support, and a history of mental health challenges, including depression and anxiety.

As a teenager, John fell into the wrong crowd and became involved in petty crime and was introduced to a county lines drugs gang, which exploited vulnerable young people to transport and sell drugs in the Westmorland and Furness area.

Over the course of three years John became heavily involved in the gang. However, his involvement came at a cost - he was physically and psychologically abused by the gang.

John eventually fled the gang's violence and walked into the housing office. The officer interviewing John could not help but notice he had two tea towels covering his hands and was clearly very distressed. The officer advised John she would get him a cup of tea then have a chat about his problems. On returning to the interview room John had removed the tea towels, and revealed he had been held in a flat for three days. Each day the gang returned to the flat and tortured John by removing his fingernails. Along with the physical injuries John had experienced significant emotional trauma from his prolonged abuse. John was terrified of retaliation and was understandably very distressed.

A multi-agency trauma-informed approach was taken to support John in his recovery and ensure his safety. The intervention involved a range of professionals including: the housing and homelessness team; police, support workers; mental health professionals and our third sector charity partners.

John was provided with emergency housing in a safe confidential location to protect him from the gang's reach; a risk assessment was conducted and this helped inform his care plan. John was taken to the crisis team for support with his mental health and a referral for ongoing access to a specialised support group.

This case illustrates the complex multifaceted needs of vulnerable people, who have been exploited by county lines gangs. Through a co-ordinated, trauma-informed

approach the integrated safety, mental health care and specialised support, John was able to escape the cycle of violence and begin a path to healing and stability.

The case emphasises the importance of a collaborative response between the police, housing, mental health professionals and community organisations in supporting vulnerable individuals.

Theme 2: Our Places

‘Our Places’ is about our towns, villages and neighbourhoods and the housing market challenges they face and what we can do to tackle them.

Our key priorities for this theme are:

- Growing the supply of affordable and available housing
- Addressing the rural housing crisis
- Supporting communities through neighbourhood renewal and regeneration
- Addressing the high number of properties with Category 1 HHSRS Hazards and suffering from excess cold

Growing the supply of affordable and available housing

Parts of Westmorland and Furness have some of the least affordable housing outside the South East of England, with average property prices in Westmorland and Furness being 6.4 times the average household income (© Experian 2024 - All rights reserved).

Information published by the Office of National Statistics shows that the mean property price in Westmorland and Furness had risen by 4.2% in 2024 compared to the previous year (August 2024, compared to August 2023).

Affordability is exacerbated by Westmorland and Furness’s low wage economy; approximately 34.9% of Westmorland and Furness’ residents have gross household incomes below £30,000 per annum (© Experian 2024 - All rights reserved). This means that fewer local households can afford to purchase a home on the open market and are reliant on other forms of tenure.

We understand that a lack of access to affordable housing acts as a barrier to economic growth, as well as putting pressure on the delivery of essential services as those on lower income struggle to access housing within our high value constrained housing market and we are committed to increasing the availability of affordable housing.

The approximate incomes required to access various tenures across the Westmorland and Furness area are shown in the following image (the information used to carry out this analysis is © Experian 2024 - All rights reserved):

Approximate incomes required to access various tenures across the Westmorland and Furness area

Type of tenure	% of households with income required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="209 456 596 488">• Market Sale – Average An income is required of £71,011 to purchase a property of average property value on the open market <li data-bbox="209 678 580 710">• Market Sale – Median An income is required of £60,569 to purchase a property of median property value on the open market <li data-bbox="209 900 507 931">• Discounted Sale An approximate income is required of £42,607 to purchase a Discounted Sale property <li data-bbox="209 1077 635 1108">• Shared Ownership - 50% An approximate income is required of £36,771 to purchase a Shared Ownership property (based on 50% ownership) <li data-bbox="209 1299 443 1330">• Market Rent An approximate income is required of £33,504 to rent a property on an average rental rate <li data-bbox="209 1476 501 1507">• Affordable Rent An approximate income is required of £26,803 to access an affordable rented property <li data-bbox="209 1653 432 1684">• Social Rent An approximate income is required of £19,916 to access a social rented property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="951 456 1422 577">• 13% of households have an annual income in excess of £70k <li data-bbox="951 629 1410 701">• 8% of households have an income between £60k-£70k <li data-bbox="951 752 1422 824">• 11% of households have an income between £50k-£60k <li data-bbox="951 875 1422 947">• 16% of households have an income between £40k-£50k <li data-bbox="951 999 1422 1070">• 17% of households have an income between £30k - £40k <li data-bbox="951 1122 1422 1193">• 18% of households have an income between £20k - £30k <li data-bbox="951 1245 1422 1317">• 17% of households have an income under £20k

Data Source: Experian Data - © Experian 2024 - All rights reserved

Home ownership levels are high in Westmorland and Furness with 71.6% of households owning their own home (compared to England: 63.75%).

By contrast social rented housing accounts for less than 11% of our households (England: 16.6%). In some localities (such as the Bowness and Lyth Ward or Dalton North) it is less than 10%. As a result, we have a chronic lack of affordable housing, particularly in some of our most expensive places to live.

“Our Places” are also affected by growing shortages of affordable private rented housing. The attractive nature of Westmorland and Furness makes it a popular holiday destination.

Since the Covid pandemic the demand for ‘staycations’ has risen, which has resulted in an increase in the levels of short-term holiday lets.

Decreasing numbers of private rentals result in higher demand and rising rents, making private rented homes less affordable to would be renters on low incomes.

It is also severely affecting the overall supply of residential housing in much of our Lake District National Parks. As a result, we urgently need to increase the supply of affordable housing.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Delivering new homes across all tenures, including a minimum of 200 new affordable homes each year. We will also look at how we can work with our partners across Westmorland and Furness to deliver the affordable homes that we need.
- Developing an ambitious Council Housing (Housing Revenue Account) Business Plan, which will include growing the Council’s housing stock.
- Maximising all sources of funding to support affordable housing viability and boost delivery.
- Reviewing our land and building assets to identify land that could be used for new housing (affordable and market homes).
- Developing our affordable housing delivery model, ensuring that we capture the best delivery models and develop them further to enhance affordable housing supply.
- Working with partners, to better understand the need for key worker accommodation across Westmorland and Furness.

Addressing the rural housing crisis

Westmorland and Furness covers 3,760 square kilometers of predominantly rural terrain, where 55% of our population live.

There are only three towns in Westmorland and Furness with a population in excess of 10,000 people and these are: Barrow, Penrith and Kendal.

Sparsely and super-sparsely populated communities present a challenge in terms of inclusion and community sustainability, as well as service delivery. In sparsely populated rural areas people can experience physical and digital isolation with difficulty accessing services, jobs and transport links.

Housing is more expensive within these areas, both to rent and to buy and affordable housing supply is limited. We know that rural poverty is often hidden and the financially vulnerable are dealing with higher cost of living increases, fuel poverty and insecure employment. A lack of digital connectivity and the persistence of 'not spots' (spots with coverage from at least one but not all mobile operators) exacerbates exclusion and disadvantage in our rural areas.

More rural affordable housing with better connectivity is essential to ensuring inclusion and the sustainability of our rural communities.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Supporting the rural housing partner-led housing groups – to ensure a supply of housing is maintained, of the right quality, type and tenure in rural areas.
- Keeping sufficient focus on affordable housing supply in our rural communities affordable housing supply is limited.
- Working with key partners to ensure that rural affordable homes are digitally enabled.
- Bringing empty homes back into use.
- Targeting rural properties with Category 1 hazards

Supporting communities through neighbourhood renewal

Whilst some areas of Westmorland and Furness are relatively affluent with low levels of deprivation, there are some very high concentrations of deprivation.

The 2019 Indices of Deprivation (IoD) published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), classified 12 of Westmorland and Furness's 144 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) being within the 10% most deprived areas of England. These localities were all located within the Furness Locality area.

Additionally, 17.9% of children in Westmorland and Furness live in relative low-income families, however the levels of child poverty fluctuate across the unitary area. For example, the figure for the Old Barrow and Hindpool Ward is 40.7% - twice the national average (19.8%).

A significant part of Barrow-in-Furness is within the most 10% deprived neighbourhoods in the country and 85% of Westmorland and Furness's most deprived residents reside in Barrow-in-Furness. However, it is important to note that not all socially and economically disadvantaged people will be living in the most deprived areas of Westmorland and Furness and that they may reside in more affluent areas, therefore consideration still needs to be given to all.

Contributing to the levels of deprivation are:

- A low wage economy.
- High levels of households reliant on benefits.
- Low educational and skill levels.
- A poorer physical environment.
- Significantly high concentrations of private rented properties

There is a need to develop a holistic neighbourhood renewal approach to address these issues in partnership with other key service areas (Planning, Economic Development, Environmental Services, Health) and external partners.

There is significant investment already committed for Westmorland and Furness, creating the conditions for further investment and supporting our plans for growth in housing and employment.

Government, BAE Systems and Westmorland and Furness Council are now working together as Team Barrow, a dynamic partnership to deliver the Defence Nuclear Enterprise efficiently and securely and ensure Barrow can meet the resultant demands placed on it.

In March 2024, the Barrow Transformation Fund was announced by Government to make Barrow an even more attractive place to live, work, and build a career. This investment of potentially £200 million over the next 10 years will include projects to support people towards work, improve health outcomes, build more homes, develop the transport network and support local schools.

A further £5 million was secured from April 2024 to set up the Barrow Delivery Board and enable Homes England to create a masterplan for Barrow and its surrounding areas. This masterplan will be essential to identify opportunities for growth and regeneration, both in the short and long terms.

These investments and opportunities create a compelling offer that will help to tackle deprivation, transform the town and the wider area for future generations.

Barrow was also one of the first towns in the country to secure investment of £25 million from the Government's Towns Fund for seven exciting projects that will help the area to thrive for generations. These include a new Learning Quarter and University of Cumbria campus, improved active travel infrastructure, housing market renewal and a network of community hubs including a £6 million Outdoor Learning Centre.

This investment has the potential to unlock significant future housing sites including four sites in and around Ulverston and Swarthmoor which will deliver 1,000 new homes. Marina Village, a 25-hectare brownfield site in Barrow owned by the Council, has £30 million from Homes England's Brownfield Infrastructure and Land Fund and the Getting Building Fund to allow the development of 800 new homes.

A further £16.5 million Levelling Up Fund regeneration scheme will reinvigorate Barrow town centre through enhancement of the Market Hall and improvements to the public realm and transport infrastructure.

Kendal and Penrith will also benefit from over £20 million from the Levelling Up Fund for projects to regenerate Kendal town centre and create a new enterprise hub.

Ten million UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funding will be used to support our local businesses and improving skills and employment opportunities for our residents.

Dalton, Ulverston and Penrith will each benefit from £3 million from the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, which provides investment to improve places, support business innovation and skills, enable infrastructure and encourage green growth.

These projects are catalysts, not just for the delivery of housing but generating economic growth and key infrastructure improvements that will benefit the whole of Westmorland and Furness.

Tackling empty homes will also support regeneration in local neighbourhoods and will provide more homes for local households, including more affordable homes.

A new Local Plan is being prepared for Westmorland and Furness, with government proposals to radically increase housing targets; we will be looking for development sites across the area to enable this growth and updating evidence such as our housing need assessment.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Developing an approach to neighbourhood renewal for our most deprived neighbourhoods.
- Working with key partners to support communities through projects that will improve their local environment.
- Working in partnership with Homes England to drive strategic regeneration projects across Westmorland and Furness.
- Developing a new Empty Homes Strategy to bring long term empty properties back into use.
- Implementing renewal projects that consider active travel, access to healthcare and other services such as education, sports and leisure.
- Exploring the scope of planning policy to develop healthier food environments.

Theme 3: Our Homes

Our Homes is about the challenges with our housing stock and how we can improve housing to ensure it is decent and affordable.

We face huge challenges in ensuring that existing homes are decent, energy efficient, and can contribute to meeting our wider Climate Change aspirations.

We also need to ensure that all new build housing meets the highest standards, (we will work with Planning colleagues to support the delivery of Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) through the Local Plan process), and actively contributes to meeting our Climate Change aspirations.

Our key priorities for this theme are:

- Decarbonising the housing stock, including our Council homes, making them more energy efficient and affordable to live in, reducing fuel poverty
- Ensuring that new housing supply of all tenures contributes to our net zero ambitions
- Addressing stock condition issues, improving poor quality housing in all tenures
- Ensuring that our Council housing stock remains at decent homes standard and continues to improve

Decarbonising the housing stock (both council-owned and non-council owned)

In Westmorland and Furness over 38.0% of the housing stock was built before 1930 (England: 25.7%). Older housing stock is often less well insulated and less energy efficient due to its construction, making it more difficult to improve.

This in turn is a contributory factor to fuel poverty - over 15% of our households were recorded as being in fuel poverty in 2020. With rising energy costs and wider costs of living increases, the proportion of households experiencing fuel poverty is likely to rise.

In Westmorland and Furness, approximately 17.1% of households privately rent their home, which is just below the national average of around 20.3%. Privately rented stock tends to be older, has a higher rate of non-decent homes, and a higher proportion of lower income households. There will also be higher rates of less energy efficient privately rented stock and, consequently, higher proportions of households in fuel poverty. Of all EPC assessments conducted between Jan 23 and Jan 2024 in Westmorland and Furness, where an E, F or G rating was given 14.4% were for properties cited as privately rented.

Work has already started to retrofit the council's housing stock, with work underway in the Barrow-in-Furness locality to retrofit homes with an EPC E or F rating to bring them up to an EPC C. However, a comprehensive plan for all our council homes needs to be developed to ensure all properties meet EPC "C".

We will meet these challenges by:

- Developing a social housing decarbonisation plan, with the aim of getting all our council homes to achieve EPC C .
- All of our Council Housing Stock meets Decent Homes Standard but we must continue to invest to maintain this.
- Working with our Registered Provider partners to implement investment plans to make their homes warmer and more affordable to live in.
- Attracting Government funding to improve and decarbonise our private sector housing homes

Ensure that new housing supply of all tenures contributes to our net zero ambitions

Ensuring that all new homes are built to high energy efficiency standards and contribute to our net zero ambitions is also crucial to achieving our Climate Change aspirations.

Whilst progress has been made in recent years in uplifting the energy efficiency of new homes built, the recent introduction of Part L (conservation of fuel and power) of the Building Regulations, which came into force in 2022, and the proposed implementation of the Future Homes Standard in 2025, should contribute positively to these aspirations.

Ensuring new homes are built to high energy efficiency standards will help ease energy costs during the current cost of living crisis.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Implementing new Design Codes to ensure an increase in the quality of new housing, working towards the Future Homes Standard.
- Ensuring that all new Council homes are built to Future Homes Standard and meet EPC C as a minimum with a net zero carbon aim.
- Supporting our Registered Provider partners to meet net zero carbon ambitions in the delivery of new affordable homes.
- Explore options to embed the Healthy Homes Principles within the development of the local plan and design code.

- Develop a Technical Research paper on ageing well to support the development of the Local Plan

Address stock condition issues, improving poor quality housing in all tenures

The English Housing Survey (2021-22) shows 14% of all homes were deemed non-decent. Within the private rented sector the proportion is higher at 23%.

Westmorland and Furness Council carried out a stock condition survey of our Council owned housing stock in 2024, all of our Housing Stock meets Decent Homes Standard.

The level of resources needed to tackle the issue is challenging, especially in the private rented sector. We have successfully bid for Government funding to set up a Pathfinder project to increase resources in our Private Sector Housing Renewal teams, with special focus on locations where resources have been scarce previously.

Investment from our Growth budget will assist in resourcing our Private Sector enforcement and empty homes team.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Tackling stock condition issues, improving poor quality housing across all tenures.
- Housing Market Renewal Projects
- Using our legal powers to enforce and raise standards in the private rented sector - taking a consistent and firm approach to raising housing standards, including the further development of selective licensing schemes.
- Updating homes to provide disabled adaptations through the use of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to meet those with physical disabilities, linking in with the Council's Home Improvement Agency in conjunction with Health and Social Care to support people to live independently.

Ensuring the Council housing stock remains decent and continues to improve

Managing c.2,600 council homes, we are a major social housing landlord. We want to ensure that all of our residents live in a decent home. Whilst our stock meets the Decent Homes Standard, we know we must continue to invest to continue to improve and ensure all of our stock achieves EPC C.

As well as bringing the properties that are not at EPC C up to this level we will invest in an improvement programme to ensure that our homes are the highest standard possible.

Awaab's Law requires social housing landlords to adhere to strict time limits to address dangerous hazards such as damp and mould in their properties and forms part of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act. We will tackle any damp and mould issues in our properties effectively and have developed a new 'damp and mould standard' approved by Cabinet to respond to all complaints of damp and mould within set timescales.

We aim to become an exemplar landlord, providing high quality tenancy services. We will meet the expectations of the Charter for Social Housing Residents and look to develop our key policies in line with this and the new Social Housing Regulations 2022/23.

We will meet these challenges by:

- Implementing a new Asset Management Strategy for housing stock including a five-year Investment Plan for all Council housing stock.
- Putting tenant safety first and fully meeting our regulatory responsibilities, including the eradication of mould and damp issues within set timescales.
- Appraising our Council housing stock and re-purposing where required.
- Working with residents to implement smoke free homes

Addressing our equality objectives

Our simple ambition is to reduce inequalities and discrimination within Westmorland and Furness.

We want to be a council that understands and takes account of the varying needs and experiences of the different groups among our community, working hard to ensure all our residents, staff and members are included, supported and celebrated for who they are.

In March 2024, Westmorland and Furness Cabinet agreed the first set of equality objectives for the council. Our objectives reflect the position that, as a new organisation still working to bring together the systems and processes of four legacy councils, we need to focus on putting in place key foundations (for example, structures, data collection, policies etc) that will enhance our focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the years to come.

In addition to embedding practices which support the Public Sector Equality duty we are:

- actively engaged in addressing access to housing in rural areas and continue to monitor affordability ratios which we know are affected by high house prices/low wages economies across our footprint.
- actively involved in the work of the Poverty Truth Commission to enable us to identify those residents who are economically disadvantaged in relation to accessing housing and meeting the associated costs through the delivery of initiative which reduce fuel poverty e.g. property retrofitting.
- developing relationships with the Armed Forces community and specialist agencies via the Armed Forces Partnership Board which has already led to positive results for some Veterans experiencing homelessness
- working with our Children's services teams to improve the pathways into housing and the support available to enable care leavers people maintain tenancies in the future

Our objectives are to:

- Establish and embed structures and processes that help to ensure an EDI focused approach at all levels of the organization.
- Enhance our understanding of our customers and communities, and provide services that reflect the needs of, and are accessible to all.
- Strengthen knowledge of our workforce and their experiences in the organisation in order to enable a diverse workforce in which everyone can progress.

Our objectives are set out in our EDI Position Statement and are supported by our EDI Action Plan

We will meet these challenges by:

- We will ensure equality of service to all our tenants, residents, customers and partners, including improving our equality monitoring arrangements.
- We will identify and address the needs of any specific groups including ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ community, Gypsy and Traveller community
- We will identify and address the needs of vulnerable households and groups such as older people, people with physical disabilities, care leavers, people with learning difficulties and all other people with supported housing needs
- We will ensure that our policies are fair and non-discriminatory and equally accessible to all residents
- We shall meet the requirements of the Armed Forces Covenant and new due-regard duty, with respect to all our housing services and ensure that it is reflected within all of our housing policies, with specific regards to the Allocations Policy, Disabled Facilities Grant Policy and Homelessness Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Strategy review

Each of the key themes within the strategy will be underpinned by a detailed Action Plan. These are in the process of being developed. The Actions Plan will detail how we intend to meet the key priorities, who we need to involve and by when. These will be subject to regular monitoring and review throughout the five years of the strategy

Progress on the delivery of this strategy will be monitored by the Assistant Director for Housing on a quarterly basis and reported to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness and updated in quarterly performance monitoring reports.