

Copeland Borough Council
Strategic Housing Plan 2009/10 – 2010/11: for consultation

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Introduction & Purpose

Two years after the publication of the “fit for purpose” Cumbria Housing Strategy, 2006 – 2011, the Council restructured its strategic housing service and established a new team. Recruitment was completed between July and October 2008 and an improvement programme began. This also followed a critical housing inspection by the Audit Commission, published in April 2008, which found the Council’s service to be poor.

This document will describe how the progress and achievements of the improvement programme will impact on the housing needs of Copeland’s communities between 2009 and 2011. By the end of the period the Council will participate in the preparation of the next Cumbria Housing Strategy to take us from 2011 to the second half of the decade.

1. National Context

In summary, this is found in the following publications and legislation since 2005.

Sustainable Communities: Homes for All (2005, DCLG)
Sustainable Communities: People, Places & Prosperity (2005, DCLG)
2007 Green Paper: Homes for the Future; more affordable, more sustainable
Housing & Regeneration Act, 2008
Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A National Strategy for Housing an Ageing Society (2008)

During 2009 there has been a range of government initiatives to assist the housing market through the recession and help maintain house building, including the provision of new affordable homes. They have also included a mortgage rescue scheme; bringing forward funding for new affordable homes; new court protocols to limit repossessions; new freedoms for council house building.

2. Regional Context

In summary, this is found in the following.

NW Regional Spatial Strategy, 2008
NW Regional Economic Strategy, 2006
NW Regional Housing Strategy, 2009

3. **Sub-Regional Context**

Again, in summary, this is also found in the following.

Cumbria Housing Strategy, 2006/2011

Cumbria Community Strategy, 2008/2028

Future Generation: Strategy for Sustainable Communities in West Cumbria, 2007/2027

Cumbria Supporting People Strategy, 2008/2011

There is a Cumbria Housing Executive with professional and elected representation from all district councils and partner agencies in the county. This is a valuable facility which oversaw the production of the Cumbria Housing Strategy and will represent the affordable housing interest in the forthcoming Single Conversation with the Homes & Communities Agency. The Single conversation is referred to on page 9 of this document.

4. **Setting the Local Scene**

Most of Copeland's 284 sq. miles is rural, with two thirds in the Lake District National Park. But the majority of the just over 70,000 population live in the relatively narrow coastal strip. The four main population centres are Whitehaven, Egremont and Cleator Moor in the north of the Borough and Millom in the south. Depending on the definition preferred there are around 36 villages, including hamlets.

The Council has published a Corporate Plan/Best Value Improvement Plan for 2007 to 2012. Most recently, it has a Corporate Improvement Plan for 2009/2010.

Corporate Equality Scheme

This incorporates the Council's Disability Equality Scheme, Race Equality Scheme and Gender Equality Scheme and was revised in February 2008. The Council has attained level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and is working towards Level 3. Our Corporate Improvement Plan, 2009/10, includes targets for an Access to Services Strategy by October 2009 and to achieve a thorough understanding of the profile of all our customers by December 2010.

In Housing Services, a concern to promote equality and diversity must inform everything we do. In 2009/2010 we will:

Further develop and implement existing equality and diversity policies, including gaining an understanding of the housing needs of migrant workers;

Begin action on the findings of equality impact assessments undertaken in 2009 – by October 2009. See page 8 for reference to the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

5. Copeland's Housing Issues

The tenure mix in the Borough is around 72% owner occupation, 21% rented from Registered Social Landlords and 7% private rented. In no order of priority we have identified five inter-related issues:

- private & public sector housing renewal & regeneration
- need for new affordable homes
- making best use of stock
- reducing homelessness
- supporting vulnerable people

They are close to those identified in the Cumbria Housing Strategy, which were:

- shortage of affordable housing
- creating decent homes and environments
- housing homeless people
- regeneration
- homes with support or additional facilities.

Copeland's strategic housing programme is therefore a Borough-specific interpretation of the sub-regional strategy. It supports the aims of balancing housing markets and encouraging the development of sustainable communities.

At its simplest a balanced housing market is where local people can afford to find and pay for a decent home where they want to live. This is in a sustainable community which again, at its simplest, is where people can afford and want to live, work and enjoy their leisure both now and in future generations. This is the derivation of the title of the Council's Sustainable Communities Strategy, Future Generation.

6. Housing Renewal & Regeneration

Private Sector

The report of the Council's most recent private sector condition survey was completed in August 2007. Its main findings were:

- 67.2% of dwellings met the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard and were regarded as satisfactory
- the remaining 32.8% failed the Decent Homes Standard.
- 66.6% of vulnerable households lived in Decent Homes.
- almost 1 in 8 dwellings exhibited at least one Category 1 hazard under the Housing Health & Safety rating System
- around 1 in 5 households experienced fuel poverty.
- elderly households comprised 42% of all those living in non-decent housing.
- economically vulnerable households account for one third of all those occupying non-decent homes.

Despite the prevalence of Decent Homes the report estimated an investment requirement of £57M to deal with the non-decency. In 2008 the Council reviewed its grants policy for private sector housing renewal and in the second half of that year completed an extensive consultation. In December the Council adopted a new financial assistance policy. For full details see the published Home Renewal, Housing Assistance Policy, 2008 – 2013.

Owners wishing to invest in improvement, repair, adaptation or maintenance would normally use financial products available in the commercial market. However, following the findings of the survey 4 priorities were selected for the Council's assistance policy. The dwellings in question must fail to comply with the Decent Homes Standard at the point of application. The priorities are:

economically vulnerable households (in receipt of a wide range of state benefits);
elderly households;
families with dependent children;
first-time buyers of dwellings that have been vacant for at least six months.

The type of assistance available from the Council comprises:

- a grant or,
- an interest free loan secured against the dwelling in question or,
- a combination of both of the above
- any other assistance at the discretion of the Council subject to a report of the Housing Renewal Manager.

In 2009 we produced a draft anti-fuel poverty strategy which, when complete, will become part of the Council's approach to climate change.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

We have worked with our colleagues in the other Cumbria districts to:

- provide standard conditions and licensing fees throughout Cumbria
- promote safety in HMOs with Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service, Police and others
- licence HMOs which are required to be licensed under the Housing Act, 2004
- maintained an awareness and watching brief to identify further HMOs
- provide a consistent licensing procedure across the County.

Despite due diligence we have been unable to find more than two HMOs requiring a licence in the Borough to date. We will maintain a watching brief.

Summary of Achievements & Targets

In 2008/09 we achieved 55 housing renovation grants under the former policy. Our target for Home Renewal Assistance in 2009/10 is to approve 75 applications for financial assistance and, in 2010/11, 90. This will be an increase of 66% from the baseline number in 2008/09 and will move towards the government's target that the proportion of vulnerable households (receiving income related or disability benefit) occupying decent homes should be 70% by October 2011.

However, on 17 July 2009 the Housing & Planning Minister confirmed that the additional funding announced for new social housebuilding will in part be funded from switching resources from private sector housing renewal. We can therefore expect a lower allocation for Cumbria, including Copeland, in 2010/11 and we may have to revise our target accordingly.

By end March 2010 we will publish a regulatory and enforcement policy for private sector housing, including houses in multiple occupation.

By March 2010 we will complete our draft anti-fuel poverty strategy

By 2011 we will have investigated and reported on the provision of equity release schemes as a further option for housing renewal.

Public Sector

This comprises around 21% of the stock in the Borough and is owned and managed by Registered Social Landlords (also known as housing associations). The three main providers are the Home Housing Group (including Copeland Homes), Two Castles Housing Association and Impact Housing Association.

A fundamental issue for all social landlords is their progress towards the achievement and consolidation of the government's target of 100% compliance with the Decent Homes Standard by 2010. Two Castles Housing Association and Impact Housing Association are both reporting 100% compliance by 2010.

Home North West have been granted a waiver by their regulatory authority and an extension to achieve the Decent Homes Standard by 2013 in respect of 507 dwellings. These are dispersed around the Borough-wide settlements of Whitehaven, Egremont, Frizington, Distington, Cleator Moor and Millom.

In May 2009 the Council Strategic Housing Panel (of elected members) considered Home North West's annual report on this issue and resolved their satisfaction with progress being made up to that time. A site visit to the homes described in the report will also be arranged. In accordance with the detail of the Panel's resolution we will, throughout 2009/10 and on to 2013, monitor the Home Group's progress via reports at 6 monthly intervals.

Housing Market Renewal

The Furness & West Cumbria Housing Market Renewal Programme for 2008 - 2011 currently provides the major thrust of housing-led regeneration in the Borough. It is delivered in South Whitehaven by the Home Housing Group with funding from government via West Lakes Renaissance, a specialist regeneration company. The overall objective is, after extensive resident consultation, to move the housing market into a more sustainable balance by:

- selective demolition of redundant home types for which there is no demand
- their replacement with homes designed and built to current standards for which there is current need and demand which is likely to continue in future
- varying the tenure mix with social rented, conventional owner-occupation and equity sharing in order to re-balance the market
- secure improvements by design and create a more pleasing visual impact.

The programme's mission statement is "to create the right housing for sustainable communities to support the new economy in West Cumbria." In South Whitehaven it is being delivered in the Woodhouse area under the project title of Woodhouse Evolution.

In 2008/09 the first two phases of demolition were completed. Detailed planning consent has been obtained for the first phase of 37 new build homes to start on site in 2009 and the Council has supported Home Housing Group's bid for grant funding to the Homes & Communities Agency. In 2010/2011 there will be further new build phases, subject to programme planning at the time of writing (August 2009).

South Whitehaven HMR has obtained £1.95M for 2008/2011, for which the allocation for 2008/09 was fully utilised and plans are in progress to invest the remainder. It has proven more difficult in the recession, while confidence is low, to introduce a for-profit developer to vary the tenure mix and build homes for market sale at Woodhouse. However, at the time of writing there are clear signs that developers will now to participate in joint investment discussions for the intended transformation of this housing market renewal area.

7. New Affordable Homes

Affordable housing is comprehensively defined in the Department of Communities & Local Government's Planning Policy Statement 3 and will not be repeated here. Its key feature is that it remains affordable for people on lower incomes in the future or, if this restriction is lifted, for the subsidy to be recycled into alternative affordable housing provision. The aim of Chapter 16 of the Cumbria Housing Strategy to 2011 is:
"To tackle the shortage of affordable housing in areas of Cumbria where need and demand for additional housing is high, where this impacts adversely on social inclusion and balanced communities."

Copeland's target in the Cumbria Housing Strategy is for 80 additional affordable homes between 2006 and 2011. However, the Council reported zero affordable completions from 2001/2002 to 2007/2008. It is therefore imperative to replace past neglect with a programme that will take us to the target and beyond. This began in 2008/09 with 22 newly built or acquired homes, split between the Home Housing Group and Two Castles Housing Association in Egremont.

The programme of the Home Housing Group as at Autumn 2009 is as shown below Unless otherwise stated, they are for rent.

Number	Type	Location	Timescale
20	2 bedroom flats	Walkmill Court Whitehaven	Complete December 2009
11	2 bedroom bungalows	Walkmill Court	Complete spring 2011
8	2 bedroom bungalows	Rottington Road, Millom	Complete end 2009
34	28 x 2 bedroom bungalows 2 x 3 bedroom bungalows 4 x 4BR houses	Woodhouse Evolution, Whitehaven	Detailed planning consent gained. Application for HCA grant submitted. To start on site by October 2009
43	Mix of family houses	Grammerscroft, Millom	Two phases beginning 2010/11 and 2012/13
Total 116			

Other developments in the current pipeline include but are not limited to: Impact Housing Association have acquired the former YMCA building in Whitehaven, which will be secured for supported housing for young people. Barratt Homes have applied to the Homes & Communities Agency for "kickstart" funding for their formerly stalled site at Frizington.

The Council is marketing a site in Kells, Whitehaven, and the development brief includes 22 affordable homes.

We have strengthened our relationships with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) through 2008/09 and established a quarterly RSL Forum.

Cumbria Rural Housing Trust working with the Lake District National Park Authority has completed 9 parish housing needs surveys in Copeland since 2008 and we are pursuing development opportunities with the parishes, individually and in groups.

The government announced a challenge fund for local authority new build in the spring of 2009. The next bidding deadline is 31 October 2009. We shall decide whether to enter a bid for funding under the scheme, which must be built on local authority owned land.

Accommodation Needs of Gypsies & Travellers

There is currently no provision in Copeland. A sub-regional study was published in 2008, which identified a need for a minimum requirement of 5 transit pitches between 2007 and 2016 in Copeland outside of the Lake District National Park Authority's area. We, with our partner Cumbria authorities and the travelling community, will examine how to meet this need during 2009/10 and consider a funding bid for development when a suitable site has been found.

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

In 2008/09 we began a Cumbria-wide collaborative project on the current round of Strategic Housing Market Assessments. There are three markets in Copeland:

Whitehaven is the most diverse market and the most densely populated, including the towns of Whitehaven, Cleator Moor, Egremont and villages between Distington in the north and the settlements around the Sellafield sites to the south.

Millom is the smallest market area, to the south of the Borough, including the town itself and Haverigg, Holborn Hill and Newton wards.

West Lakes is geographically the largest, largely rural with a sparsely distributed population. It covers Bootle, Ennerdale, Gosforth, Millom Without and Seascale wards.

The Copeland SHMAs went to public consultation on 31 July 2009. The key issues identified at this stage are:

In Millom the median house price to median income ratio is 3.9 to 1.

In West Lakes the median house price to median income ratio is 7.3 to 1.

In Whitehaven the median house price to median income ratio is 3.5 to 1. However, at the lower quartile it is 4.2 to 1.

There is a significant affordability gap in all three markets and in urban as well as rural settlements. Even in Whitehaven, where the gap is least, the house price to income relationship is such that at the lower quartile it is most unlikely that first time buyers can purchase a property that meets the Decent Homes Standard (which is why our financial assistance policy provides for this group – see reference above to private sector renewal). The absence of affordable housing in some market areas is a barrier to sustainability of their settlements. This issue is linked to the ones above and below.

There is a substantial increase forecast in the older age groups, particularly 75+, and significant decrease in younger age groups. These trends are greater than the national average. They have huge implications for housing with care and support as well as for the available working age population and therefore on recruitment, retention and economic growth. Economic development is a big housing issue and vice versa, including housing and employment opportunities of young people of working age.

The response date for SHMA consultation was 11 September 2009. This will be followed by consideration and revision with a recommendation to the Council's committee cycle for approval by the end of December 2009 or January 2010. This will include a statement of the number of additional affordable homes required per annum for each market area.

Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) & Local Development Framework (LDF)

A SHLAA is proceeding in parallel with the SHMA. The two assessments will complement each other and inform the Council's approach to balancing housing markets. It is expected to complete by end November 2009 and become part of the evidence base of the Council's Local Development Framework, which is expected to be adopted in 2011/2012.

Cumbria Housing Needs Survey

Our first sub-regional housing needs survey was undertaken in 2006. The next will be in 2010/2011 and is planned to be completed in time to inform the Council's Local Development Framework before the latter is adopted.

The Single Conversation

In the spring of 2009 the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) launched their Single Conversation. This refers to a comprehensive coverage of investment in housing, infrastructure, regeneration and community activities in an area. For the purposes of the Single Conversation the defined area will be Cumbria.

The intention is to ensure that housing investment should complement economic development and spatial planning to provide a single integrated approach to meeting the needs of Cumbria. A Local Investment Plan will need to be agreed and this will lead to a local Investment Agreement.

The indicative first steps that have been taken include the formation of a Single Conversation Co-ordinating Group on which the Cumbria Housing Executive is represented. The HCA is keen to agree a local investment plan by April 2010 and we have agreed to Cumbria being a pilot area.

Summary of Targets

By October 2009 we will decide whether to bid for the challenge fund for local authority new build affordable housing.

By end 2009 we will complete our Strategic Housing Market Assessment, 2009, and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (the latter to include land in the Council's ownership).

By March 2010 we will ensure robust representation of our affordable housing interests in the Homes & Communities Agency's Single Conversation framework and the forthcoming local investment plan..

In 2009/2010 and the first quarter of 2010/2011 we will examine the scope for developing a transit site for Gypsies & Travellers, including a bid to the Homes & Communities Agency for development funding

By March 2012 we will have achieved 100 affordable completions or acquisitions from the baseline date of April 2008.

By end March 2011 we will complete the Copeland element of a Cumbria Housing Needs Survey.

In 2011/2012 we will adopt our Local Development Framework, to include planning and affordable housing policies and targets for the provision of additional affordable housing.

9 Making best use of stock

Private Sector & Empty Homes

In parallel with working towards the best use of existing stock we must also invest in its condition by eliminating non-decency in the public sector and reducing it in the private sector. This was described in chapter 7.

The most visible impact of best use lies in returning empty homes to occupation or, if this is unviable, demolition for redevelopment. Copeland has performed poorly in this regard, having restored no empty private sector homes to use in recent years. This is now being addressed.

Chapter 7 refers to our current home renewal policy which provides financial assistance to qualifying first time buyers of homes which have been empty for at least six months and fail the Decent Homes Standard at the time of application. This is currently hindered by mortgage lending practices which are limited to around 75%-85% of purchase price and leave a prohibitive gap for home seekers even though prices have fallen from their peak in 2007.

In the medium to longer term, when the market recovers, lenders will have the confidence to lend more and our policy will have greater effect. But since 1 January 2009 two cases of financial assistance were approved for first time buyers of homes which have been empty for at least six months.

This is a positive step but insufficient. We have recently acquired specialised software which can link with other data sources and enable us to track ownership, management or control of empty homes more effectively. In 2009/2010 and beyond we will pursue the opportunity it creates to address the future use of the 574 empty private sector homes in the Borough which have been vacant for at least 6 months.

We encouraged the purchase by an RSL of the former YMCA building in Whitehaven, which had been empty for many years and we will support a grant application to the Homes and Communities agency to bring it back to occupation.

We will promote best use in the private rented sector through our twice yearly private landlords' forums, the first of which was held in March 2009 and the second in October.

The Public Sector

The Council has not been a landlord since 2004 and it must therefore promote best use of the social housing stock through its enabling and strategic role with Registered Social Landlords in the Borough.

In 2009 we established Copeland's RSL Forum with a remit to meet quarterly. We have agreed:

- the Council's nomination rights
- need and demand information to be reported from their Housing Registers
- performance information including void rates.

They will be reported quarterly to the Council's Strategic Housing Panel. The Forum will consider all issues around making the best use of stock. The logic of the RSL Forum's remit will lead it into the development of a comprehensive Copeland Housing Partnership. Progress on this will begin in October 2009 and the subject matter will extend to include newbuild development.

In Chapter 11 (Supporting Vulnerable People) we will show how the provision of housing with support not only enables people to sustain their independence but also helps make best use of stock. For the present, best use will be promoted by ensuring a vigorous move-on policy for people living in accommodation-based supported housing and are able to transfer to a fully independent tenancy.

Without this, there is a danger of log-jamming supported housing to the detriment of those already living there and unable to move on. This would jeopardise the welfare of others who need accommodation-based support but for whom there are too few vacancies. The RSL Forum will consider this issue and determine how collaboration will overcome barriers to success.

In August 2009 the Council adopted our new Housing Allocations Scheme following consultation. With "in principle" Council approval we are also participating in the development of the emerging Cumbria Choice Based Lettings Scheme with the current involvement of all housing authorities and most RSLs in the County. This is grant aided by the Department for Communities & Local Government to the extent of a one off £100,000 and a Project Manager is now in post and working with the project development group.

Choice Based Lettings promote the best use of the stock by enabling all new tenants to occupy a home they freely bid for and chose themselves instead of depending on housing officers to select them. Tenants are likely to feel much more positive about the home they live in and about the landlord to whom they made their bid than under traditional lettings schemes. The project plan for the new scheme at present projects a "go live" date of October 2010 subject to final agreement of the participating organisations, including the Council.

Summary of Targets

In 2009/10 we will bring 3 empty homes to back to use and, in 2010/2011, 4 empty homes will be returned to occupation.

We will continue to hold twice yearly Private Landlords Forums and between October 2009 and March 2010 we will address the issue whether to introduce an incentivised Landlords Accreditation Scheme.

Throughout 2009/10 and 2010/2011 we will support action to return the former YMCA building in Whitehaven to social housing use.

Through the Copeland RSL Forum we will consider all aspects of making the best use of stock and work towards the adoption of a comprehensive Copeland Housing Partnership. This will include newbuild development. The target for adoption of a formal partnering agreement is end September 2010.

By March 2010 at the latest the Council will decide whether to join the emerging Cumbria Choice Based Lettings Scheme and, if so, make ready for the expected “go live” date in October 2010.

10 Reducing Homelessness

This is the subject of our separate, specific Homelessness Strategy, 2008 – 2013. Readers who wish to examine the issues in more depth are encouraged to refer to that document, which is on the Council’s website. In brief summary, the purpose of a homelessness strategy is to:

- prevent homelessness whenever possible
- enable the provision of suitable accommodation for people whose homelessness cannot be prevented
- ensure that sufficient support is provided to enable people to sustain independent living and prevent repeat homelessness.

Copeland’s Homelessness Strategy is accompanied by a detailed delivery plan to 2013, which is not reproduced in detail here but is a steep improvement curve for the Council’s service.

It is regrettable that the government’s mortgage rescue scheme arrived late in Cumbria because of a delay in appointment of the mortgage rescue agent, which has now been done with the Riverside Housing Group. However, in Copeland we have responded positively to the challenges arising from the recession, the increase in court possession orders and the threat of repossessions. We have:

- agreed with the Carlisle Law Centre the establishment of a court advice desk at Whitehaven County Court
- linked the above to the housing, debt and money advice services provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Council’s Housing Options Service and Shelter Cumbria to form an advice network
- developed a Preventing Repossessions Action Plan

- developed an enhanced service level agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau to assist people in the private rented and owner occupied sectors who are threatened with eviction or repossession

Summary of Achievements & Targets

In 2008/09 we:

- held two Homelessness Forums for public sector, private sector and voluntary agencies in the Borough
- we increased staffing and other resources to strengthen advice and homelessness prevention. In the six months ending 31 March 2009 our interventions prevented 85 cases of homelessness and enabled 83 households to find alternative accommodation for themselves
- developed a housing options and homelessness prevention toolkit and training for staff
- introduced a mediation service to reduce the incidence of homelessness caused by non-violent relationship breakdown
- introduced an early warning homelessness system to enable intervention
- used Discretionary Housing Payments to prevent homelessness
- introduced fast-track Housing Benefit payments where necessary
- developed a designated homelessness prevention fund
- published customer advice leaflets
- published a directory of housing advice services in the Borough
- established referral routes for specific debt advice
- developed service level agreements with key partner agencies
- developed a “spend to save” methodology
- reviewed the rent deposit scheme to increase its success
- agreed formal nominations with Registered Social Landlords
- adopted a new Housing Allocations Scheme
- improved the information provided on housing prospects for people on Housing Registers
- developed a customer consultation and feedback system to ensure involvement opportunities: reported outcomes to the Strategic Housing Panel.

In 2009/10 and 2010/2011 we will:

- introduce a “Sanctuary” type scheme for people experiencing domestic violence
- work with private landlords to extend the term of assured shorthold tenancies
- formally establish the access routes for floating support across all housing tenures
- establish a “tackling youth homelessness” package with partner agencies
- develop a suite of performance and financial data for benchmarking purposes
- set performance targets for key partner agencies
- research whether a “qualifying offer” scheme would be appropriate for discharging full homelessness duties into the private rented sector.

- explore how partner agencies can provide life skills training to help sustain tenancies
- improve access to health services, education, training and employment opportunities for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- develop systems to measure the cost of homelessness and the resources needed to reduce it
- put systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of outreach work
- find and use ways of feeding the homelessness agenda into internally and externally based forums groups and strategies: to bring exclusion to an end.
- work with Riverside Housing Group, Carlisle Law Centre, Shelter Cumbria and the Citizens Advice Bureau (through their debt and money advice service) to reduce the threat of repossession and, where appropriate, introduce the mortgage rescue scheme.

This is not a definitive list and for more information readers are again referred to the Homelessness Strategy & Delivery Plan, 2008 – 2013.

11 Supporting Vulnerable People

In 2008/09 we began a vigorous improvement programme for the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) for residents, in line with a Local Area Agreement target for Cumbria. In 2007/08 we took an average of 33 weeks from referral to approval of grants, which was a poor performance. In 2008 the housing service was restructured and the opportunity taken to increase staffing resources in this area. A full staffing complement has been in place from end October 2008 and by March 2009 we had reduced the time taken to approve grants to 22.68 weeks.

Approvals of grants will always exceed the numbers completed in the year because the householder, the contractor and the supplier have control over the timing of building works and services. The Council is the grant administering authority tasked with supporting the process with public funds.

Supporting People Programme

The Council has been a member of the Supporting People Commissioning Body for Cumbria since the programme's inception in 2003. This provides the revenue funding for personal support services that enable vulnerable people to live independently in the community and prevent crises like homelessness or unplanned hospital admission.

£776,357 of the Cumbria programme is allocated to support services contracts provided for Copeland residents. Of this the largest part is for older people, including those who are frail. Other substantially funded services are for people with learning disabilities, mental health needs and generic services.

In broad terms, accommodation based support services are provided in housing schemes into which people must move in order to receive the support there. Sheltered housing schemes for older people are the classic example of this type. Non accommodation based services refer to the opposite, where support is delivered to people where they live without the necessity of them having to move into specialised accommodation.

The supply of accommodation based services in Copeland is as follows.

- Older people with support needs (295)
- Frail elderly people (60)
- People with mental health needs (23)
- People with learning disabilities (19)
- Young people at risk (8)
- Offenders and others at risk (13).

The supply of non accommodation based services is:

- Older people with support needs (347)
- Single homeless with support needs (3)
- People with mental health needs (15)
- People with learning disabilities (1)
- People with physical or sensory disability (1)
- People living with drugs misuse (4)
- People living with alcohol misuse (3)
- People escaping domestic violence (8)
- Teenage parents(4)
- Young people at risk (19)
- Offenders and those at risk (7)
- Homeless families with support needs (1)

The inescapable conclusion is that the programme in Copeland is under-developed. There is currently no accommodation based refuge for people experiencing domestic violence and no provision for the following:

- older people with dementia/mental health needs
- rough sleepers
- people with HIV/AIDS
- refugees and asylum sleepers
- Gypsies & travellers
- young people leaving care
- mentally disordered offenders.

It is therefore a priority to establish a framework for, and complete, a needs analysis of Cumbria (including Copeland). This process is commonly called iteration. It will lead to a clearer understanding of unmet need for housing related support services. This, in turn, will enable us to identify relative priorities and programmes for delivering services.

It is important because a North West Regional Supported Housing Strategy is presently being developed by 4NW (the Regional Leaders Board for the north west of England) in partnership with the Homes & Communities Agency. The needs analysis for supported housing throughout Cumbria will inform that strategy and its action plan and will sit directly under the Regional Housing Strategy. It will therefore be influential in the allocation and distribution of capital as well as revenue investment in supported housing throughout the region.

In August 2009 the Cumbria Supporting People Commissioning Body decided to engage a consultancy to provide the framework and needs analysis and to ensure that it is completed in this calendar year.

The average age of Cumbria's population is increasing at a faster rate than for the UK as a whole and we are experiencing a net migration loss of young people. In 2009/10 we will complete a Copeland specific older persons housing with support strategy. We will also set a target for the development of a Copeland housing and related support strategy for young people, though this will be within a Cumbria-wide or West Cumbria context.

Summary of Achievements & Targets

In 2009/10 we will approve 90 Disabled Facilities Grants and 115 in 2010/2011.

In 2008/09 57 DFGs were completed. The target for 2009/10 is 68 and for 2010/11 it is 90.

The average number of weeks taken to approve DFGs in 2008/09 was 22.68. The target for 2009/10 is 17 weeks and for 2010/11 it is 14 weeks.

By the end of 2009 we will complete a framework for and needs analysis of housing related support services in Copeland.

In 2009/10 we will complete a housing strategy for older people and set a target for the development of a strategy for younger people in need of housing with support services.

12 Targets

Table1: Housing Renewal & Regeneration Targets (including new affordable homes

Number	Task	By When
1	Decide whether to bid for LA new build challenge fund	October 2009
2	Complete Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment following consultation	December 2009/January 2010
3	Ensure robust representation of affordable housing in Homes & Communities Agency's Single Conversation framework and Investment Plan for Cumbria	March 2010
4	Examine scope for developing a transit site for Gypsies & Travellers, including a capital funding bid	Examine scope by April 2010 and funding bid if any by June 2010
5	Achieve 100 affordable housing completions and acquisitions from the baseline date of April 2008 (including a rural housing element).	March 2012
6	Complete Copeland element of a Cumbria-wide Housing Needs Survey	March 2011
7	Adopt Local Development Framework to include planning & housing policies and targets for new affordable housing	Within 2011/2012
8	Approve 75 applications for private sector home renewal assistance in year one and 90 in year two, subject to the funding allocation from DCLG	Year one 2009/10 Year two 2010/11
9	Publish a regulatory and enforcement policy for private sector housing, including houses in multiple occupation	31 March 2010
10	Complete and publish our draft anti-fuel poverty strategy	31 March 2010
11	Re-investigate and report to Councillors on the issue of equity release schemes as a further option for private sector renewal	31 March 2011

Table 2: Making Best Use of Stock

Number	Task	By When
12	Return 3 empty homes to use in year 1 and 4 in year 2	2009/10 and 2010/2011
13	Continue to hold twice yearly Private Landlords Forums: address the issue whether to introduce a landlords accreditation scheme	Forums in October 2009 and March 2010: thereafter by arrangement
14	Support Impact Housing Association and partners in returning the derelict YMCA building in Whitehaven to use.	Between 2009/2011
15	Through the Copeland RSL Forum we will seek to make the best use of the social housing stock and work towards the adoption of a comprehensive Copeland Housing Partnership	Adopt Copeland Housing Partnership agreement by September 2010
16	Determine whether to join the emerging Cumbria Choice Based Lettings Scheme	Decide by March 2010 at latest and make ready for expected "go live" in October 2010

Table 3: Reducing Homelessness

(All tasks are in the Delivery Plan of the Homelessness Strategy 2008/2013)

Number	Task	By When
17	Introduce “Sanctuary” type scheme for people experiencing domestic violence	Between Sept – Dec 2009
18	Work with private landlords to extend the term of assured shorthold tenancies	Ongoing
19	Formally establish the access routes for floating support across all tenures	31 March 2010
20	Establish a “tackling youth homelessness” package with partner agencies	31 March 2010
21	Develop local performance & financial management information for benchmarking purposes	31 December 2009
22	Set performance targets for key partner agencies & undertake monitoring by the Council and the Homelessness Forum	31 October 2010
23	Determine whether a “qualifying offer” scheme would be appropriate to enable the Council to discharge a full homelessness duty into the private rented sector	31 October 2010
24	Improve access to health services, education, training and employment initiatives	31 March 2010
25	Explore how partner agencies can help provide life skills training to help sustain tenancies	31 March 2011
26	Develop mechanism to measure the cost of homelessness and the resources needed	31 March 2010
27	Ensure systems are in place to monitor the effectiveness of outreach work	31 March 2010
28	Develop ways of feeding the needs of homelessness clients into externally based forums, plans and strategies to help reduce exclusion	Ongoing
29	Develop plans to ensure “move on” facilities from supported housing to fully independent tenancies	Ongoing
30	Work with Riverside Housing, Carlisle Law Centre, Shelter Cumbria and the Citizens Advice Bureau to reduce the threat of mortgage repossession and, where appropriate, introduce mortgage rescue.	Ongoing
31	Further develop customer consultation and feedback systems. Report results to Councillors.	Ongoing.

The above is not a definitive list of the actions to reduce homelessness. For more detail

readers are referred to the Council's Homelessness Strategy delivery Plan, 2008/2013.

Table 4: Supporting Vulnerable People

Number	Task	By When
32	Approve 90 Disabled Facilities Grants in year one and 115 in year two, subject to funding to be announced by DCLG	Year one 2009/10 Year two 2010/11
33	Complete 68 Disabled Facilities Grants in year one and 90 in year two, subject to funding as above	Year one 2009/10 Year two 2010/11
34	Approve Disabled Facilities Grants in an average of 17 weeks from receipt of Occupational Therapy referral in year one and 14 weeks in year two	Year one 2009/10 Year two 2010/11
35	Complete a framework for, and needs analysis of, housing related support services in Copeland and Cumbria in partnership with the Cumbria Supporting People Commissioning Body	31 January 2010
36	Complete a housing and related support strategy for older people	31 March 2010
37	Set a target date for completion of a strategy for younger people in need of housing and related support services.	31 March 2010