

Draft Strategic Housing Programme, 2009/2011

The attached document is the draft as written at 4 August 2009 and is not yet the finished product. It will be completed before the Strategic Housing Panel meets and copies will be provided to members then.

The finished document will be reformatted to enable easier reading, consultation and reply. The consultation period will last until mid-September 2009, in time for final revision by the end of that month.

It is not intended to be Copeland's alternative to the Cumbria Housing Strategy. It is instead a Copeland-specific interpretation of that strategy with targets for 2009/10 and 2010/11.

The Cumbria Housing Strategy lasts from 2006 – 2011 and will be replaced in two years with another for the period to 2016. The Copeland interpretation therefore takes us to 2011 and in that year will be replaced with another.

There was no consultation in Copeland on the current Cumbria Housing Strategy, which was produced in 2006. It is therefore thought right and proper that the attached document should be the subject of consultation now.

Laurie Priebe

Draft Strategic Housing Programme 2009 – 2011

1. 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 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.

2. Setting the 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.

3. 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.

4. 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 backlog of 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

5. 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

Number	Type	Location	Timescale
20	2 bedroom flats	Walkmill Court Whitehaven	Complete spring 2010
11	2 bedroom bungalows	Walkmill Court	Complete spring 2011
8	2 bedroom bungalows	Rottington Road, Millom	Complete end 2009
37	13 x 2BR bungalows for shared ownership 15 x 2 BR bungalows 5 x 3BR bungalows for disabled people 4 x 4BR houses	Woodhouse Evolution, Whitehaven	Detailed planning consent gained. Application for HCA grant submitted. To start on site autumn 2009
43	Mix of family houses	Grammerscroft, Millom	Two phases beginning 2010/11 and 2012/13
Total 119			

Other developments in the current pipeline are:

Impact Housing Association have acquired the former YMCA building in Whitehaven, which will be secured for supported housing, most likely 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 by March 2010 we will have held our first inclusive RSL Forum from which no housing association, however small, will be excluded.

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:

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 is on 11 September 2009. This will be followed by consideration and revision by end October with a recommendation to the Council's committee cycle for approval by the end of December 2009.

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 at this stage is expected to be adopted in the summer of 2011.

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.

Homes & Communities Agency & the Single Conversation

Summary of Targets

By end 2009 we will complete our Strategic Housing Market Assessment, 2009, and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

By March 2011 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.

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

6 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 4.

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

7 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 to follow..

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

8 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.

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

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 21.75. The target for 2009/10 is 17 weeks and for 2010 it is 14 weeks.

The rest of this chapter to include text on the need and supply of housing with support for vulnerable people, and the position of Copeland as a member of the Supporting People Commissioning Body for Cumbria. It will describe the research that will be done to determine needs and priorities for development, in particular for older people and younger people in the Borough but also including other vulnerable and “at risk” groups.