Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 1st September 2020

LEAD OSC MEMBER: Cllr John Kane
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Cllr Andy Pratt
LEAD OFFICER: Amanda Starr, Strategic Housing and Inclusion Manager
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Why has this report come to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee?
The Housing Needs Survey has now been completed and the key findings are presented to OSC for information prior to launch on 17th September 2020 at the Copeland Housing Partnership, following which the report will be made available to Members.

1. BACKGROUND

The Council has a statutory duty to assess housing need under the Housing Act 1985. The Housing Needs Survey is commissioned by Strategic Housing to assess current and projected future housing need across all tenure types and demographics. This process complements the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), which supports the Local Plan, and the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey as well as informing Corporate Housing and Planning Policies. It is also used to inform planning application responses. The last survey was commissioned in 2011.

In 2019 Strategic Housing commissioned Cobweb Consulting through a competitive tendering process to undertake the Housing Needs Survey for Copeland. Officers from the Strategic Housing and Planning departments met with the consultants in November 2019 to agree the methodology and scope for the survey and subsequent report.

Whilst the survey looks at overall housing need (market housing, social housing, private rented etc.), one area of focus for the survey and report was affordability – what the need and aspiration was for affordable housing across the various tenure types; choice available; the impact of stock condition and opportunities around community led housing, self-build and other non-standard approaches to affordable housing.

The survey was required to draw out the needs of the older population – extra care housing, disabled adaptations and suitability of current housing – but also the housing needs of younger people and what they require to remain in the borough, which is important for overall growth.

We also wanted to understand the reasons people had for moving in and out of the borough and the needs of new households forming as well as the impact of Sellafield and its supply chain on the housing market.
Comprehensive postal surveys (with an option for online completion) were sent to a selected sample of households in January 2020 to gather information including their current housing situation, desire to move and future intentions, household composition, income, disabilities, housing condition and tenure. Further surveys were issued in March 2020.

A copy of the survey can be seen at Appendix A.

2. SURVEY SAMPLE

The survey was sent out via post to a random sample of households in the following areas:

**Whitehaven** – 1/3 of households

**Cleator Moor, Egremont and Millom** – 80% of households

**100% sample for:**
Arlecdon & Rowrah; Beckermest; Bigrigg; Calderbridge; Cleator; Distung; Drigg & Holmrook; Frizington; Haverigg; Keekle; Kirkland & Ennerdale Bridge; Low Moresby & Howgate; Lowca; Moor Row; Moresby Parks; Parton; Sandwith; Seascale; St Bees; The Hill, The Green & Hallthwaites and Thornhill.

Interviews were also conducted with stakeholders – Registered Providers, Health, Education, Lettings Agents, voluntary organisations and care home managers.

Response rates were closely monitored during the survey period and due to low returns from some areas it was decided that the survey would be re-issued in March 2020 to the remaining 1/3 of Whitehaven residents and 20% of Cleator Moor, Egremont and Millom as housing development is focused more around the main towns and sufficient data had been received from most of the smaller settlements. Due to COVID, returned surveys were quarantined by the consultants for 14 days which delayed provision of the final report.

In total 2652 responses were received from a mailing of 24,963 (10.6% response rate).

3. FINDINGS

Whilst the survey results can only represent the views of those who responded, Cobweb Consulting confirm a statistical reliability to the findings and are 95% confident that based on the sample of 2,652 received the results for the whole of Copeland would be within +/- 1.8%.

A summary of the main findings along with a walkthrough of a Parish summary will be presented to Members during OSC, but some headline findings were:
Of those that replied:

- 80% of properties are owned, and almost half of those owned outright.
- 75% of people aged 16-34 own their own homes, reflecting relatively low process and high earnings.
- Dominant household size was 2 people (42%) followed by 1 person (29%)
- There were low levels of dissatisfaction with the ability of the property to meet needs (3%) and condition (4%)
- Where conditions were considered poor the main reasons were damp/mould issues (42%) and general repair (33%)
- There are very few one bed homes – half of all properties had 3 bedrooms with 2 beds being the next popular.
- Most tenures were spread fairly evenly but there are higher proportions of Housing Association tenants in Cleator Moor and Egremont and lower proportions of private renters in the Whitehaven Rural Housing Market sub-area.
- 22% of respondents recorded a household member limited in their day to day activities by disability or long term illness (mostly in older groups)
- 6% of the sample expected to need adaptations to their property in the next 5 years
- 22% of respondents thought they would move in the next 5 years (highest amongst younger groups)
- 46% of newly forming households cannot afford to buy an averaged priced property without spending more than 33% of their gross income on a mortgage and a third cannot afford a lower quartile home – indicating an unmet need for affordable housing
- The older stock profile across Copeland (particularly in the private sector) means properties are difficult to adapt and do not lend themselves to wheelchair use.
- There is a clear need for additional bungalows to buy and rent across the whole market, sheltered and extra care housing as well as for new developments to be built to ‘lifetime standards’ – catering for buyers and renters.
- There is no strong indication of a drift away from rural areas to urban ones.
- The main market for Town Centre dwellings are young professionals, contractors and overseas students, who seek good quality rented accommodation.

The final report includes response figures, conclusions and recommendations for each Parish/Town surveyed, which will especially valuable for responding to planning applications and informing our strategic priorities.

4. CONCLUSION

It is clear from the report that though Copeland is one of the most affordable areas to live in the UK there is an unmet need for new modern affordable housing, especially for newly forming households, and the priority for the Council in addressing this should be
affordable rented housing in certain areas, but not across the whole district. The Housing Needs Survey aligns with the SHMA in terms of what the need is (around 77 per annum).

Whilst shared ownership is not an appropriate offer for some people due to the relatively low house prices, the report again aligns with the SHMA in suggesting that help with deposits for first time buyers would be a more beneficial offer for those wanting to enter home ownership.

In terms of older people’s housing needs there is again agreement between this survey, the stakeholders interviewed and the SHMA that a range of new, replacement accommodation is needed to meet the needs of Copeland’s ageing population, particularly bungalows and ground floor flats both for sale and rent. More extra care and sheltered accommodation is also needed, based on survey results (12% of respondents were interested in Extra Care Housing) and population and health forecasts.

The survey findings and stakeholder interviews indicate that there is a split between the ‘have’s and ‘have-not’s in Copeland, and the needs of both these markets need to be taken into account when considering housing provision in the borough. In addition, regeneration of the Town Centres and increasing job prospects to retain younger people is a key finding which complements the existing strategic direction.

5. **STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS (IF APPLICABLE)**

5.1 **Legal/Monitoring Officer Comments:** Legal issues are addressed in paragraph 1 of the report.

5.2 **Section 151 Officer Comments:** There are no financial implications for the Council arising from this report’

5.3 **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Comments:**

Strategic Housing is about addressing the needs of the whole population and ensuring excluded and vulnerable residents can access the type of housing of the right quality and in the right area, to suit their needs. Particular focus on older people has been taken due to ageing population in the District.

**Background Paper and Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Survey example