

Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund - 2013-14
Programme Costs (One-off and Ongoing)
(As at January 2014)

					£000's						
No.	Proposal	Responsible Officer		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		Cap. or Rev.	
				One-off	Ongoing	One-off	Ongoing	One-off	Ongoing		
Outstanding Projects from 2012/13											
12/13 A	Mains-Powered Smoke Detector Installation Programme	H. Thorpe	Latest	129						C	
			Original	129							
12/13 B	Conversion of communal toilets for disabled use	H. Thorpe	Latest	52						C	
			Original	52							
12/13 C	On-Line Rents System for Tenants	D. Clifton	Latest	0		15				R	
			Original	7		0					
12/13 D	Repairs Management Contract - Additional Key Deliverables	P. Pledger	Latest	10		31				R	
			Original	41		0					
12/13 E	Locata Hosting System	R. Wilson	Latest	8						R	
			Original	11							
TOTALS (Outstanding Projects from 2012/13)			Latest	199		46					
			Original	240		0					
Agreed New Projects for 2013/14 (with Marden Close & Faversham Hall 2013/14 capital costs carried forward to 2014/15)											
1	Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan	A. Hall	Latest	48	78	30	78	0	56	R	
			Original	81	78	43	79	22	79		
2	Senior Cleaner	R. Wilson	Latest		10		21		21	R	
			Original		17		17		17		
3	Sheltered housing schemes - Increase in furniture budget	D. Pegler	Latest		14		14		14	R	
			Original		14		14		14		
4	In-Year Housing Improvements and Enhancements Fund	A. Hall	Latest	50						C / R	
			Original	50							
5	Marden Close (Feasibility Estimate - inc. fees)	P. Pledger	Latest	104		388				C	
			Original	0		0					
6	Faversham Hall Conversion	P. Pledger	Latest			120				C	
			Original			0					
7	Other Schemes - Major Capital Project Reserve	A. Hall	Latest	0		200		0		C	
			Original	330		850		850			
	TOTALS (Agreed Projects for 2013/14)		Latest	202	102	738	113	0	91		
			Original	461	109	893	110	872	110		
	GRAND TOTALS (Outstanding & Agreed New Projects)		Latest	503		897		91			
			Original	810		1,003		982			
	Savings from 2012/13 Out-Turn					170					
	Anticipated savings/slippage from 2013/14					307					
	Amount expected to be available for HRA Budget for new Enhancements in year					850		850			
	Total amount of budget available to spend in year					1,327		850			
	Available to allocate to new enhancements in year (after previous year's commitments - i.e. Latest Grand Totals above)					430		759			

Proposed List of Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements

2014/15

(1) Front Door Fire Safety Replacement Programme for Leaseholders in Flat Blocks

One-off cost(s):	2014/15	£125,000
	2016/17 – 2018/19	£100,000 p/a (3 years)
	Total	£425,000
Annual cost:	Nil	
Form of expenditure:	Capital	

1. As part of its new Modern Home Standard, the Council has agreed to replace front doors to Council properties, as part of its ongoing Planned Maintenance Programme. However, front doors to individual flats in flat blocks with enclosed common parts are required to be fire-protected, to achieve at least ½ hour fire protection.

2. The replacement of fire-protected front doors in flat blocks was also the subject of a separate Cabinet decision in relation to when permission will be given to tenants to lay carpets in the common parts of flat blocks; the provision of replacement fire-protected front doors to all flats was one of the conditions when carpets would be allowed to be laid.

3. Within the leases of flats sold under the Right to Buy, responsibility for the *door frame* of is the Council's, but the leaseholder is responsible for the *actual door*. This split in responsibility therefore means that each party (the Council and leaseholder) needs to reach agreement on their replacement, since the frame cannot be replaced without interference with the door, and vice versa.

4. There are around 750 flats across the District that requires a fire-protected front door, where access to the property is off an internal common area. The cost of replacing such doors is around £750 each, which includes replacement of both the door and frame.

5. Since, under the terms of the lease, it is the leaseholder's responsibility to meet the cost of replacement front doors, and because the cost is quite high, most leaseholders are not prepared to meet this cost, when the Council replaces the doors of its own properties to provide the required fire protection. This causes a problem since, although the Council properties have adequate fire protection from the communal areas, and vice versa, the integrity of these fire protection measures is compromised by the inadequate fire-protected doors of the leasehold properties. This not only causes a risk to the leaseholder from fire and smoke entering their property from the communal areas, it also increases the risk for other residents, including the Council's tenants, if a fire starts within a leasehold property, since it can spread to the communal area much more easily.

6. This is a problem being experienced by many local authorities across the country. In response, and in order to safeguard the safety of their tenants and other leaseholders, many councils are meeting in full, or contributing to, the costs of providing fire-protection doors to leasehold properties.

7. Therefore, since it is in the Council's interest that all front doors in blocks are fire-protected, and in view of the low level of take-up from leaseholders to install fire-protected doors (due to their cost), we are recommending that a scheme is introduced whereby the

Council offers to contribute 75% of the cost of replacement doors where the door comes off of an enclosed common part (i.e around £565 per door), if leaseholders meet the remaining 25% cost (around £185).

7. This is the first year of the Front Door Replacement Programme (2013/14), and some leaseholders have agreed to meet the full cost of having fire-protected doors installed in their flats. Therefore, in order to treat all leaseholders equitably, we are also recommending that, in such cases, these leaseholders be given a refund of 75% of the cost; where they have already paid, we are recommending that the refund be applied to their 2014/15 annual maintenance charge. Those leaseholders who did not agree to have fire-protected doors installed, will be advised of the proposed scheme and offered to have a new door installed in 2014/15.

8. The cost to the Council of the proposed scheme, to fund the Council's 75% +contribution, would be around £425,000 in total (if all leaseholders accept the offer). This would be spread over the next four years, in line with the External Repairs and Redecorations Programme (although the cost next year will be £25,000 higher than the remaining three years, in order to meet the cost of refunds from the 2013/14 Programme).

Recommendations:

(a) That, in order to help ensure that all front doors in blocks of Council flats are fire-protected, a scheme be introduced whereby the Council offers to contribute 75% of the cost of replacing fire-protected front doors to leasehold properties, where the door comes off of an enclosed common part, if leaseholders meet the remaining 25% cost;

(b) That, in order to treat all leaseholders equitably, where leaseholders have already agreed to pay, or have paid, the full amount for the installation of a fire-protected front door, they be given a discount/refund of 75% of the cost, with refunds for installations already paid being applied as a credit to the leaseholder's 2014/15 annual maintenance charge;

(c) That those leaseholders who, to date, have not agreed to have new fire-protected doors installed, be advised of the proposed scheme and offered to have a new door installed in 2014/15; and

(d) That the scheme be funded through an allocation of funding from the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund of £125,000 in 2014/15 and £100,000 per annum for the following three years.

(2) Oakwood Hill Estate Enhancement Scheme, Loughton

One-off cost(s):	£200,000 (£100,000 p/a in 2014/15 and 2015/16)
Annual cost:	Nil
Form of expenditure:	Capital

1. The Oakwood Hill Estate, Loughton is a former Greater London Council (GLC) Estate, comprising a myriad of 133 houses, 144 flats and 136 maisonettes (in three-storey blocks), built in the early 1970s and serviced by a complex and extensive network of paths and roads. The Estate was transferred to Epping Forest District Council, along with all the GLC's other dwellings in our District, in 1980. Over recent years there has been a deterioration of the environment around the Oakwood Hill Estate, particularly the paths, roads, lighting, refuse facilities and landscaping.

2. We heard that the Housing Portfolio Holder had recently been approached by both the two District Council Ward Members and the County Council Divisional Member for the Estate, expressing their concerns about the deterioration of the Estate's environment; in response, the Housing Portfolio Holder advised us that he accepted that the Estate would benefit from an Estate Enhancement Scheme.

3. The main improvements required relate to the network of paths and roads (and their associated lighting), of which the majority are adopted by the Highways Authority and, therefore, maintainable at public expense by Essex County Council. Therefore, we were advised that the Housing Portfolio Holder had written to Cllr Rodney Bass, the County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation, requesting that he gave consideration to the County Council providing a sum of £200,000 to match-fund a similar contribution from the District Council over the next two years, making a total budget of £400,000.

4. We were pleased to note at our meeting that the Housing Portfolio Holder had just received a response from Cllr Bass, who had agreed in principle to the funding request - in full. Furthermore, we noted that he had said in his response that he would like to see this approach adopted as a template for the way the County Council and district councils work together in the future, across the County.

5. In addition, we noted that Loughton Town Council had also agreed in principle to making a financial contribution towards the improvement scheme.

6. The Housing Portfolio advised us that, if the Cabinet agrees to the Council's proposed allocation of funding, it is would be his intention to establish and chair a Member/Officer "Task Force", including senior housing officers, Ward and County Members and representatives from the Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association (OHERA), the Oakwood Senior Citizens Club and Essex CC Highways.

Recommendations:

(a) That £100,000 per annum be allocated in 2014/15 and 2015/16 (£200,000 in total) to fund an Estate Enhancement Scheme at the Oakwood Hill Estate, Loughton;

(b) That the County Council's agreement in principle, at the request of the Housing Portfolio Holder, to provide match funding of £200,000 for the Enhancement Scheme be noted; and

(c) That a Member/Officer "Task Force" be established, chaired by the Housing Portfolio Holder, and including senior housing officers, ward members, the ECC divisional member, and representatives from the Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association (OHERA), the Oakwood Senior Citizens Club and Essex CC Highways.

(3) Refurbishment of Communal Kitchens in Sheltered Housing Schemes

One-off cost(s):	£140,000 (£70,000 p/a in 2014/15 and 2015/16)
Annual cost:	Nil
Form of expenditure:	Capital

1. All of the Council's sheltered housing schemes benefit from communal facilities, including a laundry room, lounge and kitchen – which, we were advised, are all used regularly, although the communal kitchens tends to be used the most. With the exception of Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey, none of these kitchens have been refurbished since the schemes were first built, and we were told that they therefore now look very tired and dated,

with the cupboards and worktops having reached the end of their operational life and in need of replacement.

2. The sizes of kitchens vary from scheme to scheme, so it is difficult to properly estimate the cost of refurbishing each kitchen. However, based on the cost of the recently-refurbished kitchen at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey, we were advised that a total budget of £140,000 should be sufficient to fund the refurbishment of the remaining 12 kitchens. We are therefore proposing that the work be programmed over 2 years, with funding of £70,000 per annum allocated each year.

Recommendation:

That £70,000 per annum be allocated in 2014/15 and 2015/16 (£140,000 in total) to refurbish all 12 remaining communal kitchens at the sheltered housing schemes that now require renewal.

(4) Provision of Mobility Scooter Stores at Sheltered Housing Schemes

One-off cost(s): £50,000
Annual cost: Nil (funded from fees)
Form of expenditure: Capital

1. We are aware that increasing numbers of residents at the Council's sheltered housing schemes are purchasing electric mobility scooters, which has led to an increasing problem of where residents can store them. Some stand-alone scooter stores have been provided at a small number of sheltered schemes but, in many cases, residents have no option but to park/store them in communal lounges or corridors - which not only causes a nuisance for other residents, but also raises health and safety concerns.

2. There has therefore become a desperate need to provide additional scooter stores at a number of sheltered housing schemes. We were advised that the proposed budget of £50,000 would be sufficient to provide around 25 scooter stores across the District, with those schemes with the greatest demand and sufficient space to provide the stores given the greatest priority.

3. Users would pay a weekly charge for the rental and electricity charge usage, which is reviewed annually by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee as part of the Housing-Related Fees and Charges.

Recommendation:

That £50,000 be allocated in 2014/15 to fund the provision and installation of around 25 electric mobility scooter stores, with those schemes with the greatest demand and sufficient space to provide the stores given the greatest priority.

(5) Extension of Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Vulnerable Tenants (Mow and Grow Scheme)

One-off cost(s): £80,000 (£20,000 per annum from the main HRA budget and £20,000 per annum from the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund in 2014/15 and 2015/16)
Annual cost: Nil
Form of expenditure: Revenue

1. Earlier in our meeting, we received a full report on the Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Vulnerable Tenants, which has been operated by Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) since 2003, funded by the Housing Revenue Account.
2. Tenants are only included on the scheme if there is no-one physically able to carry out the work under the age of 70 years living at the property, with the service being provided regardless of whether they have younger relatives living in the District. Tenants in arrears of rent are ineligible to receive the service. Disabled tenants (regardless of their age) are included on the scheme, provided they meet the agreed criteria. All those applying are assessed by VAEF and are only included on the scheme if they genuinely cannot cope with their gardens and have no other means of maintaining them.
3. The service includes clearing and maintaining overgrown gardens - including lighter tasks, such as lawn cutting, hedge trimming and light weeding - with priority given to dealing with gardens that are unsafe and/or unusable and therefore hinder the tenant to enjoy the facility.
4. In April 2012, as part of the housing improvements and service enhancements for 2012/13, the Cabinet agreed that funding to the VAEF for the Scheme be increased from £20,000 per annum to £40,000 per annum for two years, in order to increase the number of vulnerable tenants benefitting from the service.
5. At our meeting, we received a report from VAEF on its activity for the period April to September 2013. We also received a presentation from the VAEF's Chief Officer on the success of the Scheme. As a result, we noted that the amount of work undertaken had substantially increased as a result of the additional funding provided and that VAEF had been able to not only better maintain its vehicles and equipment, but to also purchase a second van.

Recommendations:

That Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding of £40,000 per annum continues to be provided to VAEF for the Council's Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Disabled Council Tenants for a further two years from 2014/2015, with £20,000 funded from the existing budget within the HRA and the remaining £20,000 funded from the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund.

(6) Provision of Wi-fi at Norway House, North Weald

One-off cost(s): £8,000
Annual cost: £500 per annum
Form of expenditure: Capital/Revenue

1. The Chairman of our Scrutiny Panel, Cllr Stephen Murray, put forward this proposal for us to consider, which had been evaluated and was supported by officers.
2. Cllr Murray drew attention to the difficulties brought to his attention by residents of Norway House of them and, more importantly their children, being unable to access the internet from their personal PCs, laptops and tablets in their rooms to undertake school and college work, as well as for domestic, leisure and other uses.
3. Since Norway House only provides temporary accommodation for around 4-6 months, it is not worth residents paying to have a landline installed in their rooms for broadband, and it is understood that the use of dongles is unreliable in this location.

4. Cllr Murray therefore suggested that the Council provides Wi-Fi at Norway House that residents can use. We were advised that the Council's ICT Service had been consulted, which had confirmed that the installation of Wi-Fi at Norway House would be technically possible and that ICT has the capacity to arrange the installation in 2014/15 and support the system on an ongoing basis. We noted that an on-site Wi-Fi survey would be required to ensure that the expected coverage can be received, and network cabling and wireless access points would need to be purchased and installed in the areas identified by the survey. Configuration for the access points would be controlled by the Council's wireless system.

5. The ICT Service had advised that, subject to survey, the maximum cost of implementation would be around £8,000, with on-going costs no more than £500 per annum.

6. For a variety of reasons, not least the bureaucracy that would be involved, we are proposing that residents should not be charged for the Wi-Fi usage, and that the cost of access be included within their room charge. We understand that an appropriate level of regulation of internet access would be applied, through the use of filters, in a similar way to the Council's Wi-Fi system at the Civic Offices.

7. Having assessed the proposal, we are of the view that the installation would provide an essential service for the residents of Norway House and their children.

Recommendations:

(a) That a Wi-Fi system be provided and supported by the Council at Norway House, North Weald, funded by an allocation of one-off funding of £8,000 in 2014/15 and an ongoing support cost of £500 per annum;

(b) That an appropriate level of regulation of internet access be applied, through the use of filters; and

(c) That residents not be charged for the Wi-Fi usage, with the cost of access considered to be included within their room charge.

(7) Initial Feasibility Study for Chalet Replacement Scheme at Norway House, North Weald

One-off cost(s): £6,000 – 2014/15
Annual cost: Nil
Form of expenditure: Revenue

1. In 1992, 5 pairs of chalets (10 chalets in total) were erected in the grounds of Norway House, the Council's Homeless Person's Hostel in North Weald, in order to respond to an increasing demand for temporary accommodation at that time. Each chalet comprises a lounge and two bedrooms, with pairs of chalets sharing a kitchen and bathroom. The total cost of supplying and erecting the chalets in 1992 (including fees) was around £235,000 (£47,000 per pair of chalets).

2. At the time of erection, temporary planning permission was provided for a period of 10 years. Permanent planning permission was granted in 2003.

3. The chalets have provided essential supplementary accommodation to the temporary accommodation provided within the main building at Norway House over the past 21 years. Indeed, in recent years, the need for temporary homeless accommodation has increased, if the Council is to continue to comply with the statutory requirement to not use bed and breakfast accommodation for families in excess of 6 weeks.

4. However, we were advised that the chalets will soon be reaching the end of their usable life and are already experiencing maintenance and operational problems. The construction of the chalet comprises stud walls. We were told that the cavities under the floor of the chalets are accessible to small animals/rodents and, due to the construction of the floor, dampness has entered a number of chalets from the ground, causing the floors in some areas to rot and warp. Therefore, sections of the kitchen and lounge area floors in some chalets have had to be replaced. Dampness within the chalets is a common problem, and mould can often be found on walls, furniture and clothing belonging to the occupants.

5. We understand that the PVCu glazed windows are in need of replacing; many do not open properly or have broken locks and handles which are difficult to replace given the age and design of the windows. Problems have also arisen with drainage in some of the bathrooms.

6. Families share a small kitchen (around 3.3 square metres) with one sink and one cooker. A space is provided for each family to have a fridge freezer, and each family have two a wall cabinet and a base unit. There is very little worktop space for preparation of meals.

7. In each chalet, two families share a small bathroom (comprising a bath and toilet and communal cupboard); the size of the bathroom is just 3 square metres, so there is no space to install a shower, which is more appropriate to modern living. Families find the sharing of a bathroom particularly problematical, with cleanliness and hygiene cause sometime causing arguments between families. Even with two families sharing harmoniously, with, potentially, up to 9 people sharing a bathroom or all needing to use this facility within a short time frame (e.g. before school or work) problems occur, causing residents and their children to be late for work or school.

8. In addition, most of the rooms within the main building of Norway House now have the use of their own bathroom and only share a kitchen – following a programme of bathroom installations over a number of years - which provides a more appropriate and suitable living environment for residents. Residents still need to have some element of sharing, otherwise secure tenancies would be created instead of licences – which is the Council's preferred form of occupancy for Norway House. It would therefore be preferable if the chalets also had their own bathrooms, and only shared kitchens (but of a larger size than presently).

9. We therefore agreed with officers that there is therefore a need to start planning for the renewal of the existing chalets within the next five years or so. The first stage in such a process would be to undertake an initial feasibility study to assess the design, planning and other issues associated with the provision of replacement chalets. This could include an assessment of the potential to provide an increased number of chalets in the grounds of Norway House. The feasibility study would also assess the costs of supply, erection and fees for different numbers of chalets.

10. Officers had sought a quote from Keegans, one of the Council's Framework Consultants, to undertake the feasibility study, which is £6,000 – which we consider to be acceptable.

11. We are therefore proposing that the Fund initially meets the cost of the feasibility study in 2014/15, with a view to the cost of a Chalet Replacement Scheme being met from the Major Capital Projects Reserve at some time in the future, which would be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Panel and agreed by the Cabinet at the appropriate time.

Recommendations:

(a) That £6,000 be allocated in 2014/15 to fund an initial feasibility study to assess the design, planning and other issues – together with the costs - associated with the

provision of replacement chalets at Norway House, North Weald;

(b) That the feasibility study includes an assessment of the potential and costs to provide an increased number of chalets in the grounds of Norway House;

(c) That, in principle, the costs of the Chalet Replacement Scheme be met from the Major Capital Project Reserve held within the Fund, at an appropriate time in the future, subject to the approval of the Cabinet; and

(d) That a site visit be arranged for the Scrutiny Panel (and any other interested members) at the appropriate time, following completion of the feasibility study and prior to further consideration being given to the Chalet Replacement Project.

(8) In-Year Housing Improvements and Enhancements Fund

One-off cost(s): Nil
Annual cost: £50,000
Form of expenditure: Capital / Revenue

1. For the last two years, a small part of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund has been set aside as an In-Year Fund for small additional projects of benefit to tenants that may be identified during the course of the year by members and officers. This has enabled the projects to be undertaken quickly, rather than having to wait until the commencement of the following financial year. Individual one-off projects costing in excess of £10,000 have to be formally authorised by Housing Portfolio Holder.

2. Last year, the Cabinet agreed our recommendation to include an annual provision of £50,000 for the In-Year Fund, within the main Housing Improvement and Service Enhancements Fund – which has been included within the Fund Programme accordingly.

