



## **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Tuesday 5th March 2024**

You are invited to attend the next meeting of **Communities Scrutiny Committee**, which will be held at:

**Council Chamber - Civic Offices**  
on **Tuesday 5th March 2024 at 7.00 pm**

**Georgina Blakemore**  
**Chief Executive**

**Democratic Services Officer:** Laura Kirman  
lkirman@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

**Members:** Councillors A Patel (Chairman), J Lucas (Vice-Chairman), M Markham, C McCann, S Murray, R Brookes, J Jogia, Caroline Pond, R Sharif, S Yerrell, J Lea and W Marshall

**SUBSTITUTE NOMINATION DEADLINE: 6.00PM**

**This meeting will be recorded for repeated viewing.**

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#### **1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman will read the following announcement:

“I would like to remind everyone present that this meeting will be recorded live and will be capable of repeated viewing (or another use by such third parties).

Therefore, by entering the Council Chamber and using the seating area, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes.”

#### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

To be announced at the meeting.

To report non-attendance before the meeting, please use the [Members Portal webpage](#) to ensure your query is properly logged.

Alternatively, you can access the Members portal from the front page of the [Council's website](#), at the bottom under 'Contact Us'.

**3. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To declare interests in any item on this agenda.

**5. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Pages 3 - 7)**

To agree the notes of the meeting of the Select Committee held on 16 January 2024.

**6. WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 8 - 10)**

To consider, comment and propose any amendments to the Work Programme, for consideration and approval by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee,

**7. HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE (Pages 11 - 29)**

To consider and comment on the draft Cabinet paper providing an update on the housing asset management strategy.

**8. EPPING FOREST HEALTH & WELLBEING STRATEGY (Pages 30 - 46)**

To note the progress made on the priorities and objectives of the Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026.

**9. CUSTOMER SERVICES UPDATE (Pages 47 - 55)**

To consider the Customer Services update.

**10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

To note that the next meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee will be held at 7.00pm on 19 March 2024.

## EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday 16 January 2024, 7.00 pm – 9:10pm  
Council Chamber - Civic Offices

<b>Members Present:</b>	Councillors A Patel (Chairman) M Markham, S Murray, R Brookes, R Sharif, C Nweke, P Bolton and A Lion
<b>Other Councillors:</b>	Councillors R Balcombe, J Philip, K Williamson and J H Whitehouse
<b>Other Councillors (Virtually):</b>	Councillors D Wixley
<b>Apologies:</b>	Councillor(s) J Lucas, C McCann, J Jogia, Caroline Pond, S Yerrell and J Lea
<b>Officers In Attendance:</b>	Surjit Balu (Interim Housing and Property Director), Laura Kirman (Democratic Services Officer), John Taphouse (Interim Service Manager (Assets Strategy)), Gill Wallis (Service Director Customer & Community), Steven Mitchell (PR Website Editor) and Christopher Walsh (Service Manager (Housing Needs and Management))
<b>Officers In Attendance (Virtually):</b>	Vivienne Messenger (Democratic Services Officer) and Jennifer Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer)
<b>Co-opted Members:</b>	Mr W Marshall
<b>Contractor:</b>	Ben Johnson and Stuart Thomson (Qualis Property Solutions)
<b>Contractor (Virtually):</b>	Angie Marshall-Smith 9 (Abovo-Consult)

### [A RECORDING OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE FOR REPEATED VIEWING](#)

#### 19 WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that this meeting would be recorded and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

#### 20 SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that:

- Councillor Lion had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Lea,
- Councillor Bolton had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Yerrell, and
- Councillor Nweke had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Pond.

**21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Council's Members Code of Conduct.

**22 NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING****Action:**

The detailed response as item 17 in the minutes of the previous meeting be circulated to members of the Committee.

**Resolved:**

That the notes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 26 September 2024 be taken as read and were agreed as a correct record.

**23 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Communities Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made and agreed the work programme.

**24 QUALIS PROPERTY SOLUTIONS PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Ben Johnson, Qualis, outlined the 2023/4 end of year performance and business update for Qualis Property Solutions. Details of the key achievements, key challenges, year-end performance, complaints and compliments, the business plan and next 12 months were provided.

The Committee welcomed the report were advised in response to the queries raised that:

- Housemark had carried out the independent benchmarking of the service which was median performance and cost.
- That approximately 200 customers per month had responded to the customer satisfaction survey.
- The total community investment pot would be increased to £30,000/annum.
- The voids service had been brought in-house, this had given more control over time and quality of works.
- There had been proactive work for boiler service prior to the cold spell which had reduced complaints.
- Liaison with Londonn Quadrant would be considered.
- 'My Qualis' was a customer based app, other forms of contact including telephone lines would remain.

**Resolved:**

The Committee considered and commented on the report.

**25 DRAFT CONDENSATION, DAMP AND MOULD POLICY**

John Taphouse presented an overview of the Draft Condensation, Damp and Mould Policy (attached) and the causes, impacts and effects of damp and mould. The key points of the policy and feedback from the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel consultation were outlined. Proposed timescales for response to cases of damp and mould were outlined as per the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

The Committee acknowledged the importance and value of this policy and raised several queries.

The Committee were advised that:

- This work would be carried out within current resources, there would be better management of the serve and liaison with Qualis for initial reports and feedback from customers to identify problems.
- In the regeneration of estates programme trickle vents in doors and windows should ensure enough airflow to mitigate mould due to lack of airflow.
- Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) could be used when no other resolution could be found.

The Committee suggested that 'Housing Needs' could be used to raise awareness of managing condensation and ventilation, and requested that the consultation on Awaab's Law be circulated.

### **Resolved**

The Committee considered, commented, and commended the report to Cabinet.

#### *Post meeting update*

Link to consultation on Awaab's law: [Awaab's Law: Consultation on timescales for repairs in the social rented sector](#)

## **26 HOME OWNERSHIP STRATEGY 2023/24 TO 2028/29**

Chris Walsh introduced the report and advised the Committee that it was good practice within the social housing sector to have a Home Ownership Strategy. The Strategy covered:

- The sale of council residential properties
- The calculation of and collection of service charges from our leaseholders
- The provision information to solicitors
- Supporting Section 20 consultation for planned works where needed.

The Council received 12,314 applications to purchase council stock under the Right to Buy legislation, between 1 April 1977 and 1 April 2023, from which 6,492 properties were sold.

The Strategy had been formulated in consultation with representatives of the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders' Panel and set out how the Home Ownership process will be delivered over the next five years. The Home Ownership Team managed service charge accounts for 1089 leasehold properties.

The Committee were advised that difference between the number of applications for right to buy and those sold was due to a variety of factors, including specific requirements and timescales associated with the process and failure to secure a mortgage.

W Marshall advised the Committee that the question of right to buy had been raised at by the tenant's representatives at national level.

### **Resolved:**

The Committee considered, commented, and commended the report to Cabinet.

## **27 INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR OLDER PEOPLE STRATEGY, 2023 TO 2028**

Chris Walsh introduced the Independent Living for Older People in Epping Forest Strategy 2023/28 and highlighted that the Council was the largest social landlord in the district providing homes for 11% of households and managed 12 Independent Living schemes.

The Strategy contained a high-level delivery Annual Delivery Plan which would be further developed in 2024. The key aims were summarised as:

1. Work towards providing aspirational accommodation for older people
2. Make best use of assistive technology to help older people remain independent for as long as possible.
3. To keep the delivery model under review
4. Engage with residents to improve the quality, suitability and desirability of our Independent Living schemes.
5. Carry out options appraisals for poorly performing stock in the Asset Management Strategy
6. Future housing provision for older people to be reflected in the Asset Management Strategy and stock condition survey.

In response to resident's feedback members of staff are now on site at the schemes 2 days/week

The Committee

- Welcomed the Strategy
- Were advised that WIFI was not currently available in communal areas,
- Suggested that preparation for the implications of the move to digital and BT PSTN switch off for individual residents telephone lines should be considered, and that a wider older person strategy could be revisited.

**Resolved:**

The Committee considered, commented and commended the report to Cabinet.

## 28 HRA BUSINESS PLAN

Surjit Balu provided an overview of the HRA business plan and advised the Committee that the Housing Stock Condition survey had been an essential component in developing the plan, and 550 properties do not meet the decent home standards. Standards continue to increase and all works to properties would be addressed through the planned capital works programme as the business plan proceeds.

Angie Marshall, Abovo-Consult provided details of financial aspects of the report and the bespoke HRA model which allowed cashflow projections to be made over the next 30 years. This was based on data from the Council's current systems, a new independent stock condition survey carried over the last 12- 18 months and projections for economic assumptions in the social housing sector.

The plan provided the ability to stress test, for key dynamic risks such as the borrowing rate and changes in Government legislation regarding Social Housing. Officers had taken a safe and prudent approach when developing the business plan, with a balance between borrowing, developing, and improving the housing stock. The agreed minimum £2m revenue working capital balance would be maintained throughout the plan. All costs had been included in the plan, however some potential income had not been included because it could not be quantified. The Plan could be amended and updated year on year and during the year, to respond to changes, therefore maintaining a safe and prudent approach.

The Committee commented that this was a safe and prudent HRA business plan.

The Committee received clarity that:

- The potential income that hadn't been accounted for was in relation to small strips and pockets of land, any receipts from sales would need to be spent on capital
- The 30 year cashflow projection were based on a variety of assumptions, inflation used the Governments' Autumn Statement figures and there had be a prudent approach to rent increases of CPI plus 1%

- The rents were an essential component of the plan, and if these were not raised this would impact and there would be less to spend on services. If capital was removed properties would not be kept up to standard, there would be an increase in void losses and increased cost of responsive repairs.
- The plan aims for 180 units to be built across the District. Demand for housing outstrips supply and this is a national position.
- Flats above a Council owned commercial property could fall under the HRA but this was dependant on the tenancy agreement
- The Asset Management Strategy was being developed and this would include garage sites.
- Borrowing for the HRA was from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB)

**Resolved:**

That Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

- Commented and recommended the HRA Business Plan for approval to Cabinet,
- Requested that an annual performance update, including stringent stress testing, be proposed for the work programme for scrutiny in the next municipal year, and
- Noted the opportunity to improve the Council's estates, which would improve the life span of our assets and feed into our ongoing work to 'create great places where people want to live'.

**29 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS****Resolved:**

The committee noted the date of the next meeting was on 5 March 2024 at 7:00pm.

**Communities Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023/24**  
**Chairman: Councillor A Patel**

	Item	Date	Progress/Comments	Lead Officer
<b>27 June 2023</b>				
1	Resident Involvement Strategy	27 June 2023	Introduction and approval to progress to Cabinet C/F from Stronger Communities Select Committee Work Programme: Recommended to Cabinet	Surjit Balu
2	Housing Repairs Value for Money	27 June 2023	Value for Money (Exempt Report)	Andrew Small
		26 Sept 2023	Update from Strategic Director	
<b>26 September 2023</b>				
3	Housing Allocation Scheme	26 Sept 2023	12-month review of the Housing Allocation Scheme	Surjit Balu
4	Annual Lettings Report	26 Sept 2023	To scrutinise allocations and lettings performance for 22/23 C/F from Stronger Communities Select Committee Work Programme 2022/23	Surjit Balu
5	Safer Streets	19 March 2024	<i>C/F from Stronger Communities Select Committee Work Programme.</i> <b>MOVED- to align with the dedicated police and community safety meeting.</b>	Caroline Wiggins
6	Landlord Compliance Policies Fire Safety Policy Gas and Heating Policy Lift Safety Policy Water Safety Policy Electrical Safety Policy	26 Sept 2023	To review compliance policies that are a regulatory requirement and form part of the Council's wider organisational commitment to driving a health and safety culture amongst staff Status and contractors.	Surjit Balu



	Item	Date	Progress/Comments	Lead Officer
7	Asset Based Community Development – Community Champions	26 Sept 2023		G Wallis
<b>16 January 2024</b>				
8	Qualis Property Solutions Performance Reporting	16 Jan 2024	Presentation on Housing Repair Performance (Qualis)	Surjit Balu / Ben Johnson (Qualis)
9	<b>New item</b> Home Ownership	16 Jan 2024	Pre- Cabinet scrutiny	Surjit Balu
10	<b>New item</b> Older Person Strategy	16 Jan 2024	Pre – Cabinet Scrutiny	Surjit Balu
11	<b>New item</b> damp and mould policy on the forward plan	16 Jan 2024	Pre- Cabinet Scrutiny	John Taphouse
12	HRA Business Plan	16 Jan 2024	Pre- Cabinet Scrutiny	Surjit Balu
<b>5 March 2024</b>				
13	Housing Asset Management Strategy	5 March 2024	<b>NEW ITEM</b> Pre cabinet scrutiny	Surjit Balu John Taphouse
14	Customer Services (Overall satisfaction)	5 March 2024	To receive an update on improvements to this Key Performance Indicator. Deferred to 5 March	Susan Lewis
15	Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy	5 March 2024	Annual Report Deferred to 5 March	Gill Wallis Fabrizio Ferrari
16	Annual Housing performance report	Next Municipal Year	Report on annual housing KPI's including compliance around the Building Safety Act <b>POSTPONED</b> to align with end of year data collection	Surjit Balu
17	Tenant Satisfaction Measures	Next Municipal Year	<b>POSTPONED</b> Survey commissioned postponed to align with reporting period.	Surjit Balu
<b>19 March 2024</b>				
18	Presentation from the District Commander for Epping Forest and Brentwood		Annual Report	Caroline Wiggins

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Progress/Comments</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>
19	Community Safety Partnership		Annual report and review of the district Strategic Intelligence Assessment	Caroline Wiggins
<b>To be consider in the next municipal Year 2024/25</b>				
	Housing Repair Value for money	tbc	Recommendation item 8 minutes 27 June 2023 Further work to be undertaken/ annual benchmarking commissioned and reported to this scrutiny.	

## Report to Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of meeting: 5 March 2023**

**Portfolio:**

Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships (Cllr Holly Whitbread)

**Subject:** Update on the Housing Asset Management Strategy

**Officer contact for further information:**

John Taphouse, Interim Head of Asset Management (jtaphouse@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

**Democratic Services Officer:**

L Kirman: email: [DemocraticServices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:DemocraticServices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk) tel:01992 564243

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**Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

To consider and comment on the draft Cabinet paper providing an update on the housing asset management strategy.

**Report:**

Cabinet will be provided with an update on the housing asset management strategy. The Communities Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider and comment on the draft paper ahead of presentation to Cabinet.

**Reason for decision:**

To agree any amendments to the draft Cabinet paper prior to presentation to Cabinet.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not applicable.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The following consultation was undertaken during the development of the housing asset management strategy:

- A survey of tenants on their priorities
- Focus group sessions with staff in the Asset Management team, internal customers within EFDC (Peers) and staff at Qualis Property Services
- One-to-one interviews with EFDC officers on their specialist areas

**Resource implications:**

Strategy development - Stakeholders attended workshops, completed surveys and other activities to develop a co-created strategy. This was provided within existing resources.

The final draft of the strategy will recommend the resource requirements for its implementation and for maintaining services to the levels required.

**Legal and Governance Implications, Relevant Statutory Powers:**

It is good practice to have a strategy, and the Regulator of Social Housing is likely to view favourably housing providers with a sound asset management strategy. However, there are no legal or governance requirements for EFDC to have a housing asset management strategy.

**Corporate Plan Implications:**

The housing asset management strategy will support the following key objective of the Corporate Plan:

- Stronger place – The housing asset mgt strategy will enable us to invest more effectively in our housing stock so the homes we provide are places where people want to live and want to stay.

**Background Papers:**

The draft Cabinet paper and draft outline housing asset management strategy.

**Risk Management:**

The major risk is that the strategy is ineffective in enabling us to make the changes needed to ensure EFDC's housing stock performs at the best possible level. This has been mitigated through detailed briefing, thorough section process to appoint a consultant with a meticulous approach and excellent track record and project management of the strategy development process. The co-creative approach to the strategy development has enabled ownership by staff, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation.

**Equality:**

An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out prior to the adoption of the Housing Asset Management Strategy.

**Key Decision:** (if required):

# **Draft Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference:** C-00?-2023/24

**Date of meeting:**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio:** Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships (Cllr Holly Whitbread)

**Subject:** Update on the Housing Asset Management Strategy

**Responsible Officer:** Surjit Balu, Interim Director for Housing  
(sbalu@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

**Democratic Services Officer:** V Messenger ([democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk))

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

To note the following update on the housing asset management strategy.

## **Executive Summary:**

In October 2023 the Council appointed Ark Consultancy to assist us with the development of our housing asset management strategy.

The deliverables of the project are:

- A **Position Statement** setting out the strengths, weaknesses and areas of focus for the management of EFDC's housing assets
- A **Strategy Document** that sets out the position we aim to achieve by the end of the five-year strategy period and what we need to do to get from our current position to our target position.
- An **Action Plan** with timescales to deliver the asset management strategy.
- **12 Monthly Reviews** of our progress for the duration of the asset management strategy and updates to the action planned as required.

The Position Statement is based on research including:

- A stock tour to provide Ark with a general understanding of the characteristics and issues of EFDC's housing stock
- A survey of tenants on their priorities
- Focus group sessions with staff in the Asset Management team, internal customers within EFDC (Peers) and staff at Qualis Property Services
- Benchmarking of EFDC's asset management data
- One-to-one interviews with EFDC officers on their specialist areas

Ark Consultancy have drafted a draft outline asset management strategy which is attached to this paper. They are still to complete the detailed asset management strategy and action plan.

**Report:**

The draft outline asset management strategy is attached to this report. The strategy is aligned to the Corporate Plan and the Housing Strategy. The proposed priorities for the housing asset management strategy are:

- Stronger voices.
- Better data and decision-making.
- Better repair and maintenance.
- Better homes.
- Better places.
- Better value for money.
- Stronger teams, partnerships, and resources.

Each priority is described in more detail in the attached outline strategy.

### **Scrutiny Comments**

*\*\*\*\*Add comments from Communities Scrutiny Committee\*\*\*\**

### **Resource Implications:**

Strategy development - Stakeholders attended workshops, completed surveys and other activities to develop a co-created strategy. This was provided within existing resources.

The final draft of the strategy will recommend the resource requirements for its implementation and for maintaining services to the levels required.

### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

It is good practice to have a strategy, and the Regulator of Social Housing is likely to view favourably housing providers with a sound asset management strategy. However, there are no legal or governance requirements for EFDC to have a housing asset management strategy.

### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

Safe and clean environments, together with energy efficient homes, will be key objectives in ensuring the homes we provide are places where people want to live and want to stay.

### **Consultation / Scrutiny Undertaken:**

There has been consultation of tenants and staff in the development of the strategy so far.

The final draft of the housing asset management strategy will be reviewed by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Communities Scrutiny Committee prior to its presentation to Cabinet for approval.

### **Background Papers:**

None.

### **Risk Management:**

The major risk is that the strategy is ineffective in enabling us to make the changes needed to ensure EFDC's housing stock performs at the best possible level. This has been mitigated through detailed briefing, thorough section process to appoint a consultant with a meticulous approach and excellent track record and project management of the strategy development process. The co-

creative approach to the strategy development has enabled ownership by staff, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation.

**Equality:**

An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out prior to the adoption of the Housing Asset Management Strategy.

DRAFT



# *Better homes, stronger services*

Asset Management Strategy

2024 - 2028





# Contents

Introducing our Strategy

Key facts about our homes

The challenges we face

Our asset management strategy priorities

1. Stronger voices
2. Better data and decision making
3. Better repair and maintenance
4. Better homes
5. Stronger places
6. Better value for money
7. Stronger teams, partnerships, and resources

Delivering our strategy

Page 17



# Introducing our strategy

Our Asset Management Strategy sets out seven main interrelated priorities and sets of actions for the effective management of the Council's housing assets. The document provides an over-arching framework for how we will carry out all aspects of our work, from day-to-day repairs, to works required to keep our homes safe, to planned programmes of component replacement, through to estate management and regeneration.

In developing the strategy we have sought out, listened to, and acted on customers' views. People's priorities are that they want their homes to be kept in good repair, wind and watertight, to be safe and have up-to-date facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms. We now need to build on this consultation and engagement to grow and increase the contribution of residents across all our activities.

Our arrangements with Qualis Group - a wholly owned multidisciplinary company of the Council - are fundamental to us being able to deliver the range of well designed, expertly informed, high-quality services our residents need and that we want to provide. To be succeed, we will be reconfiguring the services we receive so they are based on a set of shared business objectives that optimise value for money for the Housing Revenue Account, whilst also delivering a sustainable operating model for Qualis.

To build a **better and stronger** approach to asset management, we need to have reference to a set of drivers for change for social housing providers:

- Building safety & compliance – addressing new rules through new roles and new relationships and meeting the requirements of enhanced levels of regulation.
- Zero carbon 2050 – putting in place retrofit programmes that incorporate energy efficiency and renewable technology, supported by new skills & supply chains.

- Increased focus on existing stock quality & desirability – tackling damp & mould, other hazards, disrepair & meeting a set of fit for the future standards.
- Customer excellence – developing a culture of openness and respect, reflecting the tenant 'voice' with genuine involvement and input and effective management of complaints and redress.
- New homes delivery – supporting the delivery of additional homes for affordable/social rent through our asset management work.
- Placemaking – taking a broader view of home & neighbourhood to deliver better opportunity and address physical & mental health (green spaces, walkability, crime & ASB)
- Asset performance - understanding stock condition, using data-driven active asset management practices to evolve the housing portfolio.

## Our approach to asset management

'Asset Management' is the term used to describe the range of activities we need in place to make best use of resources to maintain & improve our asset portfolio, support our corporate ambitions & reflect residents' future needs & aspirations.

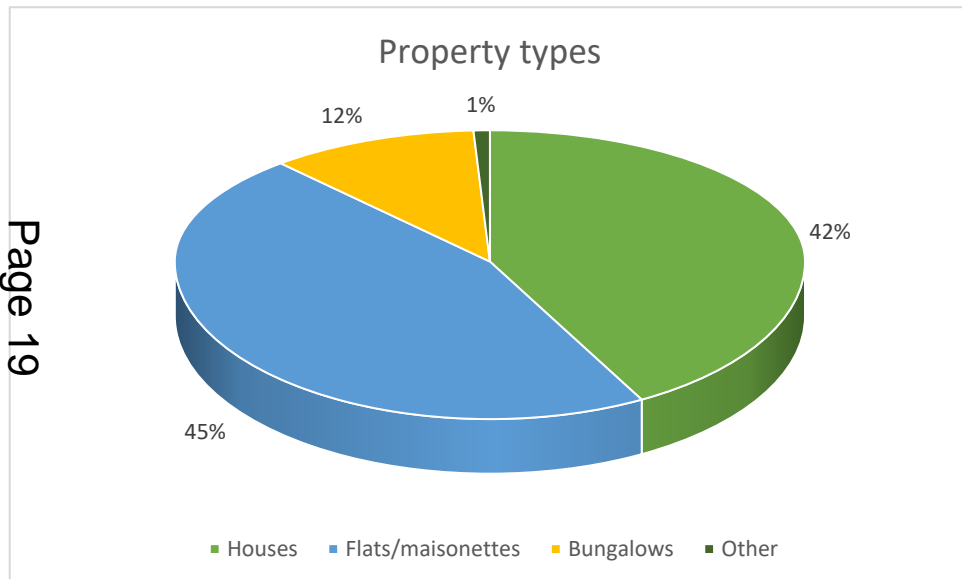
Whilst asset management includes repairs and maintenance, it is about much more than this. It includes updating, improving, and investing in properties and estates so they provide good quality homes in places people want to live.

Our Asset Management Strategy therefore includes a wide range of work and activities including maintaining safe and healthy homes that are in good repair, carrying out energy efficiency works, and modernising and regenerating our properties and estates, all with a focus on the needs of residents.

# Key facts about our homes

Our housing portfolio contains around 6,380 social rented homes and we also manage leasehold homes. All homes are within the Epping Forest District Council boundary, and we are the largest landlord in our area.

42% of our homes are houses, 45% are flats or maisonettes, and 12% are bungalows.



We spend around £4.75m each year carrying out day to day responsive repairs and minor works and around a further £2.2m carrying out servicing and checks of heating, electrical, fire safety systems, lifts and other installations.

Every year, we relet around 390 of our properties, equating to a turnover of tenancies of around 6%. We spend around £2.8m a year on revenue works in preparing properties for reletting. This equates to around £7,350 per home.

We have an active development programme that is designed to provide more additional homes. Ideally, this will more than replace the number of homes we lose through Right to Buy so the overall number of homes should increase over time.

# The challenges we face

## 1. Designing a whole organisation approach where Qualis and the Council work together to meet shared objectives

- Developing a shared vision and delivery plan with the Council that maximises the role, benefits, and potential of Qualis as our principal contractor.
- Maximising partnership working within and across all teams to ensure everyone works collaboratively to a set of shared goals.

## 2. Providing safe homes that meet regulatory requirements

- Meeting the wide range of new and pre-existing legislation, regulation, and practice to ensure residents are safe in their homes, including meeting the current and future Decent Homes Standard.

## Repairs and investment

- Carrying out repairs more quickly and at lower cost, improving levels of satisfaction with the repairs service, so we meet the needs and expectations of our customers.
- Having better planned and managed, better value programmes of investment work, stretching resources to maximise impact.

## 4. Improving the quality and suitability of the homes and services we provide

- Maximising the benefits of works on empty properties and improving void standards, reducing expenditure levels so we let homes at a standard that supports sustainable tenancies at a cost we can afford.
- Modernising homes and services, so they better meet the current and future needs and aspirations of residents, including carrying out disabled adaptations.

## 5. Improving the quality and success of the places and neighbourhoods we manage

- Delivering joined up estate management services so people can live in well managed places about which they feel proud to call home.

- Putting in place effective partnership working with organisations and agencies where together we can secure greater combined outcomes.

## 6. Effective use of data

- Gathering and optimising the use of the best information and data through property surveys, inspections, and routine activities to develop a 'golden thread' to make properly informed decisions about how, when and where we spend money investing in homes.

## 7. Energy efficiency

- Fully understanding the range and cost of carrying out works to bring our homes up to Energy Performance Band (EPC) C by 2030.
- Upscaling plans and works programmes for retrofitting homes to raise levels of thermal insulation and to use renewable energy.

## 8. Dynamic portfolio management

- Understand property performance, effectively using the outputs of ARK ASAP - ensuring a proactive approach to the regeneration and disposal of properties so over time the stock of properties evolves to best meet the needs of residents and the Council.
- Regenerating properties and estates to unlock their potential, including an approach to the future of garage sites and re-acquiring right to buy homes and facilitating the development of new homes.

## 9. Improving the Customer Experience

- Meeting the needs and expectations of residents for excellent standards of modern service delivery when repairs and investment work is carried out.
- Improving how residents are involved and engaged so views help shape and inform all asset management works and services.

## 10. Effectively resourcing our work

- Ensuring the optimum team structure with clear roles and responsibilities and the right skills, capabilities, and capacity to deliver all repairs, maintenance, and investment works.
- Having in place or accessing sufficient financial resources to fund all asset management activities.

# Our asset management strategy priorities

Our Asset Management Strategy is built around seven priorities. These have been designed to directly address the key challenges we face whilst also addressing the range of wider drivers for change for social housing providers.

By addressing these priorities, it will ensure we meet existing and emerging legislation around providing safe homes, take a solid approach to asset management over the next six years, as well as providing a strong foundation for the years beyond. Our Strategy will help us sustain a portfolio of homes that is **stronger and better**, homes that are *'safe, fit for purpose and fit for the future'*.

The detail within each priority has been designed to ensure we have the right blend of approaches and actions in place, so we target our financial resources and energies where they are most needed and to best effect.

We recognise how our seven priorities are all inter-linked and cannot be seen in isolation. For example, delivering better repair and maintenance programmes should also help drive the delivery of an improved customer experience. Likewise, delivering the best approach to planned investment relies on having an intelligent, data-led approach to asset management, whilst also raising the quality of our homes, places, and neighbourhoods.

Through the delivery of our seven priorities, we will strengthen the role and purpose of the Council in providing much needed, good quality affordable housing in our area, in places that people want to live and support successful lives. We will also ensure we meet the asset-related elements of the five new Consumer Regulatory Standards.

## Our asset management strategy priorities

1. Stronger voices.
2. Better data and decision-making.
3. Better repair and maintenance.
4. Better homes.
5. Better places.
6. Better value for money.
7. Stronger teams, partnerships, and resources.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 received Royal Assent on 20 July 2023. This Act carries through many of the themes identified in Government's 2020 White Paper - The Charter for Social Housing Residents. This will see a strengthening of the Regulator of Social Housing's powers to enforce standards on all housing providers. This will involve a new proactive consumer regulatory regime including powers to inspect.

There will be five new Consumer Standards and a Code of Practice.

# 1. Stronger voices

## Listening, then acting on what our residents say

We will listen to our communities and work with them when making decisions, developing policies, and designing services. We will coordinate our consultation and engagement to ensure residents' views shape the services we provide.

It is important that we:

- Communicate effectively with residents about works and plans for their home, listening to what residents tell us about their needs and priorities and acting on what they say.
- Use the Resident and Involvement Strategy to engage with residents on decisions around the design and delivery of our repair service, maintenance and improvement works.
- Have suitable approaches in place to perform well against the 22 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) within the new Regulatory Consumer Standards.
- Develop and enhance our repair and investment activities by inviting and incorporating inputs from key stakeholders, including Qualis, elected members, and other key partners.

In developing the Asset Management Strategy, we have sought the views and opinions of residents on their priorities for repair and investment over the next five years. The message is clear, that we need to focus on the basics of getting repairs done, keeping people safe in their home, the importance of key facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms, improving the energy efficiency of homes so they are more comfortable and less expensive to run, and improving external areas. We now need to act on people's priorities and deliver against them.



### Our actions for delivering stronger voices in asset management:

1. Build on the work carried out with residents to help shape and inform the Asset Management Strategy, developing and refining our understanding of customers' needs and expectations for repairing, maintaining, and improving their home.
2. Take an active role in working with the resident engagement team to devise and coordinate our consultation and engagement to ensure residents' views shape the services we provide, including working with the Tenant & Leaseholders Panel, Community Champions and block and court ambassadors.
3. Measure and monitor performance and progress against the 22 TSMs, with a target of securing upper quartile performance.
4. Use the Asset Management Strategy to put in place improved structures and arrangements for Qualis, elected members and key partners to help inform and influence our repair service and investment planning work.



## 2. Better data and decision-making

### Improving the quality and use of data

We will continue to improve the quality of our data & use data to produce 'business intelligence' to inform how we design and deliver services. We will use our systems and data to capture and share learning across the Council to drive continuous improvement in what & how we do things.

It is important that we:

- Improve how we go about collecting and using data from our day-to-day operational activities to inform our performance management information and asset investment planning.
- Develop our knowledge and understanding on the condition of properties, including reference to the scope and cost of meeting future requirements and standards.
- Develop and embed a governance culture where data-led intelligence helps shape and inform both our day-to-day and longer-term decisions, ensuring data integrity and visibility in areas of activity.

Page 23

### Our actions for delivering better data and decision making:

1. Ensure we have suitable systems and processes in place for recording and analysing data and on our performance in carrying out day-to-day repairs and on void works/expenditure, so we can inform decisions on service improvements and asset planning.
2. Build on our Scorecard and Dashboard to implement our new Compliance 365 system for recording, monitoring, and reporting on our performance in meeting our statutory compliance work.
3. Continue to build up a full picture of our stock condition survey data through the carrying out of further surveys in 2024.
4. Work with our specialist consultants to develop and put in place a Strategic Asset Performance Tool (ASAP) to allow us to make informed decisions on future investment through robust option appraisals.
5. Use the analysis and reporting on energy performance and prospects from Parity Projects to help inform our strategic decisions around energy efficiency and wider retrofit works.
6. Establish a multi-disciplinary Strategic Asset Management Group who can support the delivery of the Asset Management Strategy, with membership drawn from across the Council, including elected members.

### 3. Better repair and maintenance

#### Repairs as a critical component of asset management

The delivery of well designed, reliable, customer focussed services must underpin all our asset management work.

It is important that we:

- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the repair service with an emphasis on meeting the needs and expectations of residents.
- Keep homes safe and free from significant hazards by ensuring we meet all statutory obligations and regulatory requirements.
- Let properties at a suitable standard to help sustain successful tenancies, containing costs to around the benchmark median.
- Have suitable processes and funding in place for carrying out adaptations in homes to meet people's needs.
- Have in place well designed programmes of planned investment that optimise the life and durability of building components.

Page 24

#### Our actions for delivering better repair and maintenance:

1. Put in place a new Repairs & Maintenance Policy covering all key aspects of the repairs and maintenance service, including day to day works, statutory compliance areas, and undertaking disabled adaptations.
2. Develop a suite of standard specifications for works that optimises quality and durability of work outcomes whilst minimising costs.
3. Agree and put in place a revised suite of key performance indicators (KPIs) focused on the outcomes we want to achieve, with a range of secondary indicators also monitored.
4. Have in place robust and regular reporting of landlord compliance performance (target 100%).
5. Embed the new Void Standard, process, and pricing to minimise the time homes are empty, contain the scope and cost of works to that required to meet agreed quality standards and let a sustainable tenancy.
6. Put in place a rolling 1 and 5 year programme of planned component replacement works to provide surety for budget profiling, whilst maintaining flexibility for extending component life where appropriate.
7. Commission planned programmes through for 2024/25 onwards through an appropriate combination of Qualis managed works and independently procured contracts.



## 4. Better homes

### Meeting current standards and future expectations

We must make sure all homes meet all current standards and requirements. In addition, the quality of properties must improve over time to meet and respond to the range of future facing issues and priorities.

It is important that we:

- Ensure all homes meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard, the Regulatory Home Standard, are free from significant hazards, with a clear and transparent approach to tackling damp and mould.
- Improve the energy efficiency of the poorest insulated homes to at least Energy Performance Band C by 2030.
- Work with customers to continually develop our understanding of residents' needs and requirements for homes that are modern and 'fit for the future', with reference to fixtures, fittings, and facilities.

### Our actions for delivering better homes:

1. Have in place robust survey records and management information on how our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard and the Home Standard, including clear and transparent processes for proactively remedying non-decency and for dealing effectively with significant hazards, most notably on damp and disrepair issues.
2. Develop and put in place a Retrofit Energy Efficiency Strategy designed to meet our EPC and other related targets, prioritising a combination of 'easy wins' and the worst performing properties so all homes meet EPC C by 2030, with a plan for meeting 'net zero' by 2050.
3. Set up a 'Future Homes' group to consider and devise future-facing property/home standards for the EFDC portfolio, comprising officers, residents, Qualis, other contractors, and elected members.

## 5. Stronger places

### Improving the quality and success of our estates

We know that health and other inequalities are focussed on our estates. We will therefore help drive stronger shared collaboration between Council services and other stakeholders to deliver a range of asset focussed initiatives.

It is important that we:

- Provide estates and neighbourhoods where people feel proud to live and that help support healthy lifestyles and wellbeing, so we meet the regulatory Neighbourhood and Community Standard and people can lead successful lives where they thrive and prosper.
- Regenerate properties and estates that suffer from poorer quality design, property conditions and neighbourhood management issues.
- Use our existing asset based to help support the delivery of new and additional good quality social and affordable rented homes across our area.
- Work effectively with teams from across the Council and with external stakeholders to improve existing spaces and create new places for people to live, play, gain skills and do business.

### Our actions for delivering stronger places:

1. Use our place on the Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership with Essex Police, County Council, Fire and Rescue, and community groups, to deal with emerging local threats and issues.
2. Work actively with colleagues in the development team and external partners to provide new affordable homes by increasing density within sustainable developments, served by transport, leisure, health, and other infrastructure to meet our residents' needs.
3. Put in place agreed neighbourhood standards, including well-specified and managed grounds maintenance arrangements, incorporating landscaping and environmental improvement works where we can, to help protect and enhance our green spaces for future generations while providing decent, safe homes to meet all our needs.

## 6. Better value for money

### Optimising the impact our of expenditure

To maximise the contribution and impact of our work it is crucial we extract as much value as we can from all our expenditure.

It is important that we:

- Use our scarce resources well to help reduce costs and make our expenditure go further.
- Make the best use possible of data and insight about the performance of our properties and services to help identify and drive the optimum outcomes for the money we spend.
- Leverage in as much external funding as we can to help support delivery of our retrofit and energy efficiency works programmes.

Benchmarking is important in demonstrating that our services represent good value for money. Our most recent benchmarking data shows that in many areas, services are not performing sufficiently well with some high 'outlier' benchmark costs that we need to understand further and reduce.

How we work with Qualis and other contractor partners will be important in delivering value for money services. We will work in partnership with them to procure effective delivery arrangements and to continuously improve performance through best practice contract management – based on a 'right first time' approach.

### Our actions for delivering better value for money:

1. Restructure the Service Level Agreement between the Council and Qualis so it is designed to deliver top quartile performance across all work streams at costs that are no higher than the benchmark average.
2. Put in place an option appraisal process for 'high cost' and 'high value' voids to evaluate the relative merits of ongoing investment versus market sale with recycling of the capital receipt.
3. Act on the outputs from our Strategic Asset Performance Tool by actively bring forward poorly performing or unsustainable properties for option appraisal.
4. Ensure we have plans and programmes drawn up and in place for our retrofit energy efficiency works so we are 'funding and finance ready' for securing external resources to supplement our own monies, supported by having long term delivery partners in place.
5. Develop and put in place an HRA Procurement Strategy that looks holistically at obtaining best value, leveraging efficiencies to secure the optimum blend of price/quality, supported by effective contract management.

## 7. Stronger teams, partnerships, and resources

### Working better together to pool our resources

The quality of our people, the organisations we work with, and our access to finance and funding must all be channelled into tackling the challenges we face and seizing the opportunities for maximising the impact of our work.

It is important that we:

- Page 28
- Are a strong, efficient, and effective organisation with a culture that supports continuous learning and development and where our leaders motivate and support staff to be accountable for their decisions.
  - Are a partner and employer of choice, where we can attract, retain, and develop people with the skills and knowledge we need for the future, working as One Council to deliver better shared outcomes.
  - Maximise the potential and opportunities of Qualis as our principal contractor partner through the delivery of shared business objectives, supported by a range of complementary and supplementary contractor arrangements.
  - Ensure our Asset Management Strategy supports - and is supported by - a strong Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan so we have the funding and capacity to deliver our objectives and priorities.

We will strive to be a 'strategic client', meaning that we are forward thinking and proactive in fulfilling our commissioning role and responsibilities for all our repair and investment work.

### Our actions for delivering stronger teams, partnerships, and resources:

1. Put in place a new team, appropriately sized structure for the Council's Assets Team that maximises the contribution and value of individuals to meeting the wide range of shared objectives involved in delivering our repairs, maintenance, and asset management service.
2. Develop the role of the Council as a strategic client to Qualis and our pool of other contractors, with a new style of partnership working designed to support mature relationships where we provide mutual support, share successes, manage risks & learn from problems.
3. Ensure effective communication and co-ordination and sharing of knowledge between teams and with our key partners so there are no 'blurred areas' of responsibility.



# Agenda Item 8

## Report to Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of meeting: 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

**Portfolio:** Community Health & Wellbeing – Cllr Smruti Patel  
Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Board Chair – Cllr Aniket Patel

**Subject:** Progress of the partnership Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Strategy

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### Recommendations:

That the Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee notes the progress made on the priorities and objectives of the Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026.

### Report:

#### 1. Background

##### 1.1. Structure and governance

The Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022-26 sets out the aims and aspirations of the multi-agency Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Board to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone living in the district. The partnership Board is made up of representatives from Epping Forest District Council, Essex County Council, the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (Hets & West Essex ICB), the NHS and a wide range of local health and voluntary sector organisations.

##### 1.2. Vision and principles

The strategy's vision is;

*"Working together to improve the health and wellbeing of Epping Forest residents by promoting a culture and environment that encourages health equity."*

##### 1.3. Principles

The strategies delivery is underpinned by six key principles which are:

- A Whole system approach, in recognition that health and wellbeing is impacted on by more than just the food we eat or how active we are. Our health is affected by the numerous factors including employment, education housing and more. These factors are known as the 'social determinants of health'.
- Prevention and early intervention, by improving the social determinates of health collectively we will prevent problems occurring. However, should problems arise, working in partnership will enable us to deal with them at the earliest possible stage through improved signposting and access to support services so that they don't get worse.
- Self-Care and management of own wellbeing, wherever possible we want to support individuals and communities to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. Partners will actively help to build knowledge, skills

and confidence so that people can make healthy lifestyle choices. We will work to champion peer support and foster a culture of care.

- Place based approach, We recognise that there are areas of our district that have a higher level of need than others. By targeting our collective efforts and resources on tackling the needs in specific geographic areas, and by working with our communities using an asset-based community development approach (ABCD), we aim to reduce the inequalities that exist in our district.
- A life course approach, we acknowledge that health and wellbeing needs change as we move through the various stages of our lives. The following whole life course themes show how we will adopt and reference “Live Well” domains as part of our Strategy:
  - Start Well – Children and young people have the best start in life
  - Feel Well – People enjoy mental wellbeing throughout their lives
  - Be Well – Adults are empowered to make healthy choices
  - Age Well – People live safely and independently as they age
  - Stay Well - Adults with health or care concerns are supported to maintain healthy productive and fulfilling lives

#### 1.4. Strategic priorities

The five strategic priorities which have been identified within the strategy are:

- Improve mental health and wellbeing.
- Reduce loneliness and social isolation.
- Increase physical activity.
- Support residents in relation to the rising cost of living.
- Tackle alcohol and substance misuse issues.

For each of the five priorities, key objectives have been identified within the strategy. There is a shared commitment that partners will work together to develop and deliver projects, initiatives, and interventions in line with the detailed objectives.

#### 1.5. Delivery and governance

The strategies objectives are delivered via themed Multi Agency Action Groups. The groups are aligned to the themes of the Robert Wood Johnson Wider Determinants of Health Model (2020) as shown below.



Figure 1 Robert Wood Johnson Wider Determinants of Health Model (2020)

The Clinical Action Groups which form part of the governance structure are delivered

by the Herts and West Essex ICB but also report to the Health & Wellbeing Board. Each Action Group is chaired by a lead officer from a key partner organisation, supported by Epping Forest District Council's Public Health Officer. In addition, Health and Wellbeing Board members are also represented on the Community Safety Partnership to ensure partnership working across shared priorities.

Each year partners on the multi-agency Action Groups conduct analysis into the emerging health and wellbeing needs of the district. The analysis identifies where further intervention is needed in order to add value to the plethora of work being delivered across the system and meet the priorities of the Strategy. Action Group partners then collectively develop projects and activities in collaboration with the wider system to address the identified needs.

#### 1.6. Progress reporting

To monitor the annual progress of the Strategy, the Board approved the development of a data dashboard. (See Appendix 1). The dashboard was developed following extensive analysis of open-source data portals and consultation with system partners. The process highlighted a number of indicators that best matched the desired outcomes of each of the Strategy's objectives and that are updated annually. The dashboard allows the Board to measure annual progress as well as identify long term trends in respect of residents health and wellbeing.

Whilst data can provide a level of insight into the progress of the Strategy, the Board does acknowledge that many indicators can also be influenced by factors that the Board cannot impact on such as; economic recession, pandemics, the core demographics of the district's population etc... Therefore, the indicators and the data contained in the dashboard are considered by the Board alongside wider system service mapping, Action Groups Action Plans and case studies, to ensure all evidence is used to show the extent to which the system is engaging and impacting on the health and wellbeing of local residents.

### 2. Action Group Plans – 2023 - 2024

#### 2.1. Needs analysis.

In April 2023, following detailed analysis of baseline data and a comprehensive mapping exercise which captured all of the projects, interventions and activities taking place against each of the Strategy's priorities, the Board and Action Groups identified gaps where there was little or no intervention happening in support of key objectives. The Groups then developed a series of refreshed partnership projects and interventions for the year to address these gaps.

A total of twenty-seven different partnership projects were identified across the four thematic Action Groups, addressing twelve different priority objectives.

To monitor progress and impact each Action Group plotted their projects using a simple Plan on a Page format and reported progress quarterly to the board via a RAG rating system as shown at Appendix 2.

#### 2.2. Action Group Interventions

Overall, as shown by RAG rating monitoring, the majority of projects have been successfully delivered. A small proportion of partnership projects have either not been initiated or have been slow to deliver the desired impact. It is important to acknowledge that the landscape of partnership working is complex, with partners and key stakeholders having to have the ability to consistently align time and resources against a backdrop of challenging economies. Nonetheless the new governance structure has been effective ensuring engagement with a wide range of partners who



have collectively developed some incredibly impactful projects. In fact, the governance structure developed in the district is seen as a model of best practice and is being replicated in other areas of Essex.

At the time of writing, Action Groups had just updated the Board on Quarter 3 progress. Many projects will not achieve their full potential until the end of Quarter 4, however, already many of the projects have been delivered and have had a significant positive impact for residents.

### 2.3. Healthy Behaviours Action Group

The past year has seen the Healthy Behaviours Action Group face challenges in terms of partnership engagement; however, it has still delivered value-added projects that have engaged hundreds of residents in physical activity.

#### 2.3.1. Places Leisure Free Swimming

One of the best examples of a whole system-approach has been the free-swimming project developed by Places Leisure. As a key partner on this group, Places Leisure used the Health & Wellbeing Strategy to form the basis of a business case in order to offer free swimming for families receiving free school meals. This has been in recognition of the fact that the cost-of-living crisis is having a detrimental effect on local children and their families ability to take part in certain leisure activities. 105 families applied for membership over the summer holidays resulting in 236 free swim places being taken up.

#### 2.3.2. Find Your Active Funding

A collaboration between Active Essex and Epping Forest District Council in supporting local clubs and groups to access Find Your Active Funding, and then sustain activity through additional funding and support, has been hugely successful. In total over £50K has been invested in Epping Forest to start and sustain local clubs and activities, with funding supporting the development of 30 different sports and physical activity clubs or programmes.

#### 2.3.3. Specialist Activity for Neurodiverse Adults

Thanks to a partnership between Places Leisure and the Buddy Up Project, regular physical activity and gym sessions are being delivered at Loughton Leisure Centre to support neurodiverse adults to become more physically active. This initiative, which was funded via Public Health Community Funding, saw Places Leisure instructors and EFDC's Adult Inclusion Officer work in collaboration to support neurodiverse adults to attend the Centre. Over 30 neurodiverse adults have been supported to become physically active.

### 2.4. Socio Economic Action Group

The Socio-Economic Action Group has performed strongly this year with all of the projects on the Action Plan now underway.

#### 2.4.1. Community Hubs

The Community Hub established on the Ninefields Estate in Waltham Abbey by Epping Forest Citizens Advice forms part of the Council's place-based approach and continues to support the most vulnerable residents. It has been recognised as a model of best practice and is being replicated across Essex. A new Community Hub is being set up on the Oakwood Hill Estate in Loughton in partnership with Restore, a local third sector organisation. The new Hub will see six different partner organisations deliver drop-in services from the Community Building on the estate. In Chigwell a Hub of services is being established across two locations; in The Limes Farm Community Centre Epping Forest Citizens Advice offer drop-in sessions in partnership with the Council's Revenues and

Benefits Team, and at Victory Hall a Community Supermarket has been developed by the Council's Community Champions. The supermarket has received funding from Essex County Council, and a range of services such as Social Spaces, Counselling and Mental Health support drop-ins are being delivered as part of this work.

#### 2.4.2. Warm Places & Social Spaces

As the financial crisis developed in the winter months of 2022 and prices of domestic gas and electricity supplies increased significantly, putting pressure on the finances of local residents. The Council's Community Development & Wellbeing Team worked with local community groups, churches and volunteers to set up Warm Places. These are venues in the community where all residents can come together, share a hot drink or meal and socialise, while not having to spend time in potential cold homes. Fourteen Warm Places have been established with the support of Public Health Community Funding. This initiative has highlighted a very real need for these informal spaces to continue so, Council staff worked with the "Warm Places" providers to keep the spaces open in the spring and summer and re-badged "Social Spaces".

#### 2.5. Clinical Action Group

Rather than develop new Clinical Action Groups, the Herts & West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) agreed that, as part of the new Health & Wellbeing Strategy, there should be Epping Forest District Council representation on the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and Primary Care Locality Groups. This is to ensure that both partners could work together across the clinical system on shared priorities. The groups have performed well in this year delivering a range of district wide and placed-based projects.

##### 2.5.1. West Essex Falls Car Pilot

A new Falls Response Car Service was launched in June 2023. The aim was to reach people who have fallen in a domestic setting within two hours. The specially equipped ambulance vehicle is staffed by an ambulance clinician from the East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST) and either an Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist or Nurse from the Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT). This new pilot service benefits patients as it reduces waiting times preventing the further deterioration of the patient's conditions. It also provides specialist care in domestic setting avoiding the need for hospital admission. In the first quarter of operation the service had a non-conveyance rate of 76%.

##### 2.5.2. Health checks in area of health inequality

The Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Chigwell (LBC) Primary Care Group's health inequality priority for 2023/24 was to conduct health checks on the over five hundred residents aged 55 years or above who had not had a health check in the past five years and who live in an area of deprivation. The Council supported this particular Primary Care Group to develop a 'Health MOT session'. The session delivered at New City Collage in Loughton saw over 300 residents attend a health check delivered by volunteers with clinician oversight. The 'MOT' was also attended by 7 different system partners who supported residents with mental health, finance, and general lifestyle support.

#### 2.6. Built & Natural Environment Action Group

The nature of planning policy and legislation means that it is challenging to deliver projects in this Action Groups area, however, the Group has been able to take forward a number of projects.

#### 2.6.1. Health Impact Assessments (HIA`s)

Health Impact Assessments are intended to establish how a planned development both residential or commercial, can promote healthier lifestyles, support preventing poor health, and encourage inclusivity and accessibility whilst reducing health inequalities. The Group has been able to develop and implement Health Impact Assessment (HIA) quality assurance guidance for the district. This guidance is vital as it sets a standard that HIA must achieve in order to pass the quality assurance assessment. This ensures that all developers must consider the impact of their developments on existing and future populations and mitigate any issues identified with robust tangible solutions at the planning pre-application stage.

#### 2.6.2. Improvements to Abbots Wood Nature Reserve Waltham Abbey

Thanks to Safer Streets Funding improved signage was installed at the entrance of Abbots Wood Nature Reserve in Waltham Abbey. The signage has helped improve wayfinding and knowledge of the nature reserves biodiversity. Furthermore, thanks to Public Health Community Funding, Epping Forest District Museum and Country Care were able to develop and deliver a series of wellbeing walks for children in Waltham Abbey to promote this previously under-used public space. The project engaged 200 children and young people from 5 schools in Waltham Abbey and also involved teenagers who attend the Ninefields Youth Group.

### 3. Next Steps

#### 3.1. Expansion of place-based approach

Following the success of the place-based approach in Ninefields Waltham Abbey, Epping Forest District Council, with the support of system partners, will be replicating the approach in Limes Farm (Chigwell) and Oakwood Hill (Loughton) to tackle the inequalities that effect the areas. To support this approach a funding bid has been submitted to Essex County Council for Public Health Accelerator Funding. If successful, the funding will enable Epping Forest District Council to recruit additional Community Development Officers to coordinate an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) partnership approach in both areas.

#### 3.2. Alignment of strategic priorities

In support of the whole system approach to health and wellbeing, Epping Forest District Council is aligning the priorities of the strategy across the Economic Development portfolio. This will ensure optimal use of the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Funding to boost employment, skills and training opportunities for residents in our areas of greatest deprivation. It will also ensure that economic growth in our district supports improved wellbeing of our residents.

#### 3.3. Fit for the Future

In respect of the councils Fit for the Future transformation programme, enhanced partnership working will be further maximised moving forward, to further support joint priorities in our District.

#### 3.4. Planning for 2024/25

With an ever-growing system of partners working collaboratively across the four multi-agency Action Groups, the groups have begun the process of mapping interventions and projects in order to identify and refresh priorities accordingly. The priorities and the proposed interventions to address key objectives will be presented for approval to the Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Board in April.

#### 3.5. Impact reporting

To ensure transparency in impact reporting, the Strategy's data dashboard will be updated and published early in the 2024/25 financial year. Alongside this, a full impact report of the 2023/24 Action Plans will also be published. The data and reports will show the system's progress in achieving the health and wellbeing priorities identified in the Strategy.

**Reason for decision:** To note the progress made on the priorities and objectives of the Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026

**Options considered and rejected:** NA

**Consultation undertaken:** System partners are consulted annually on the emerging health and wellbeing priorities for the Epping Forest District as outlined in 2.1 of this report.

**Resource implications:** There have been no increases in budget required from the Council.

**Legal and Governance Implications, Relevant Statutory Powers:** N/A

**Corporate Plan Implications:** None

**Background Papers:**  
[Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026](#)

**Risk Management:** N/A

**Equality:**

An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out and there was no significant impact.  
(Please amend as required - Note the EIA must be carried out and retained but is not required to be submitted)

**Key Decision:** (if required):N/A



A photograph of a family walking away from the camera on a dirt path in a forest. The path is shaded with dappled sunlight. There are several trees, including a large tree trunk on the left and a birch tree on the right. The family consists of two adults and three children. One child is riding a small bicycle.

# Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022-26

Baseline data dashboard  
2022/23



# We will improve mental health and wellbeing of residents.

<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Measure</u>	<u>Trend</u>	<u>Source/Year</u>
Estimated prevalence of common mental health disorders – ages 16+	14.8%	—	Essex JSNA/2017
Estimated prevalence of common mental health disorders – ages 65+	9.3%	—	Essex JSNA/2017
Depression QOF incidence (18+) new diagnosis (% of patients 18+ recorded with depression for first time on practice registers)	2.2%	↑	Essex JSNA/2022
Mental health QOF prevalence (% of patients with psychoses as recorded on practice registers)	1.68%	→	Essex JSNA/2022
ESA claimants for mental health and behavioural disorders (per 1,000 working age population)	16.8	→	Essex JSNA/2018
Suicide rate (per 100,000)	8.7	↑	Essex JSNA/2022
Overall how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	Low 8% Very high 17%	—	Essex Residents Survey/2022



# We will reduce loneliness & social isolation.



<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Measure</u>	<u>Trend</u>	<u>Source/Year</u>
Combined loneliness score	Lest lonely 52% Most lonely 4%	—	Essex residents survey/2022
Strong sense of community in your local area	Agree 56% Disagree 18%	—	Essex residents survey/2022
How often in the last year have you given unpaid help to any groups/clubs or organisations?	Not given help 65% At least 1 a week 15%	—	Essex residents survey/2022
How safe or unsafe do you feel outside in your local area during the day?	Safe 93% Unsafe 1%	—	Essex Residents Survey/2022
How safe or unsafe do you feel outside in your local area at night?	Safe 66% Unsafe 1%	—	Essex Residents Survey/2022
All recorded crime (excluding action (NFIB) fraud)	10,394	↓	Essex Police/2023
All recorded Sexual offences	252	↓	Essex Police/2023
All recorded domestic abuse	1804	↓	Essex Police/2023



# We will support residents in relation to the rising cost of living.



<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Measure</u>	<u>Trend</u>	<u>Source/Year</u>
Economically Active: Proportion of working age (16-64) residents who are economically active	79.9%	➔	Essex JSNA/2022
Unemployed: Number & Proportion of working age residents who are unemployed	3.0%	➔	Essex JSNA/2022
Older people living in poverty	11.2%	—	Office for Health Improvement & Disparities/2019
Children in relative low-income families	12%	➔	Essex JSNA/2021
Average attainment eight score	52.4	⬆	Office for Health Improvement & Disparities/2021
Model estimates % households in fuel poverty	11.1%	—	Office for Health Improvement & Disparities/2020



We will support residents to increase their physical activity levels.

<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Measure</u>	<u>Trend</u>	<u>Source/Year</u>
% Adults who are physically active	67.8%	➔	Essex JSNA/2022
% Children & young people who are physically Active	55.3%	⬆	Essex JSNA/2022
% Adults who are physically inactive	21.0%	⬆	Essex JSNA/2022
% overweight and obese adults	57.5%	⬇	Essex JSNA/2022
% overweight and obese children	Reception 20.8% Year 6 34.6%	➔	Office for Health Improvement & Disparities/2022
% adults who eat recommended 5 a day	61.7%	⬆	Essex JSNA/2022



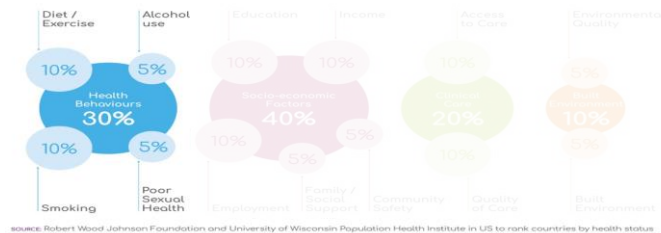


Page 42

## We will tackle alcohol and substance misuse issues.

<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Measure</u>	<u>Trend</u>	<u>Source/Year</u>
State based crime (trafficking of drugs/possession of drugs)	308		Essex Police 2022
Admission episodes for alcohol specific conditions	325.8		Essex JSNA/2022
Admission episodes for alcohol specific conditions under 18	17.9		Essex JSNA/2022
Deaths from drug misuse	2.85		Essex JSNA/2022

# Healthy Behaviours Action Group Progress reporting



## Main outcome:

*Empower residents to make healthier choices to improve health outcomes*

## Work programme narrative:

Group is progressing actions and looking to engage further partners to boost groups impact.

## H&W Board support request:

Bord support is required to increase commitment to group from partner organisations as attendance and participation has dropped.

Page 43

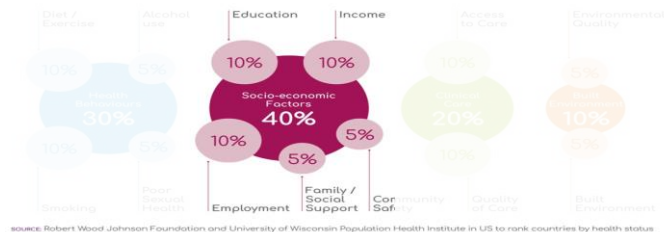
## Gaps Identified:

Priority	Objective
Improve Mental Health & Wellbeing	Ensuring early intervention through supporting our communities with more training and awareness to encourage signposting to services.
Increase Physical Activity Levels	Supporting residents of all ages to be more physically active as part of their daily lives.
Tackle Alcohol and Substance Misuse Issues	Improving access to advice and support for residents experiencing alcohol or substance use issues and co-existing conditions within the community.
	Addressing the challenges of County Lines, drugs related criminality and the exploitation of vulnerable people.
	Educating children, young people, adults and families on the risks associated with alcohol and substance misuse.
Reduce Loneliness and Social Isolation	Supporting communities to care for one another and encouraging volunteering.

Objective	Action/Project/Activity	Lead Partner	RAG
Supporting residents of all ages to be more physically active as part of their daily lives.	Support 6 primary schools and 1 secondary school per year to develop & implement active travel plans.	EFDC/EC C	School take up for travel plans has been poor. No school have yet signed up.
Supporting residents of all ages to be more physically active as part of their daily lives.	Places Leisure expanded their support for families struggling with the cost of living crises by offering free swimming in the school holidays	EFDC/Active Essex/PI aces Leisure	Loughton – 65 memberships sold – 146 free swims Waltham Abbey – 40 memberships sold – 90 free swims.
Supporting residents of all ages to be more physically active as part of daily lives	Work with clubs/organisations who have received find your active funding to sustain activity and engagement	Active Essex/EF DC	Club network being developed to further support clubs new local grant for clubs developed
Helping residents with long-term conditions and disabilities have the same equitable access to services as other residents	Develop a range of specialist PA programmes for people with; - LD Autism - Parkinson's - Dementia	PL/Active Essex/EF DC	LD session developed in Loughton Leisure Centre Supporting 30 regular participants Dementia support in EF centres launched PL applied for funding to run specialist Parkinson session.
Support our education settings to offer more services that can enable positive mental health	Support Red Balloon to expand Embers the dragon programme to preschool and primary schools in the district	EFDC/Red Balloon	No Update Received
Educating children young people, adults and their families on the risks associated with alcohol and substance misuse	- Pilot Crucial Crew programme for Year six primary schools - Pilot programme on drugs education in secondary school.	EFDC	Six schools took part = 199 children. High feedback ratings from children, schools and providers . Full report available on request
Support weight loss by increasing access to services, increasing nutritional awareness, improving access to healthier food options	Design and deliver a series of cooking programmes aimed at residents with long term conditions/young people from areas of deprivation; - Pilot 1 – Ninefields Youth Club - Pilot 2 – Residents with Diabetes/Pre Diabetes.	EFDC/EC FWS/PC N	Lets cook training delivered to over 10 different organisations. Development of long term conditions courses has been started.



# Socio-economic Action Group Progress reporting



## Main outcome:

*Support vulnerable residents to improve live chances for themselves and their families*

## Work programme narrative:

The Action Group is progressing well and has identified two new projects to add to the action plan.

## H&W Board support request:

No current support needed

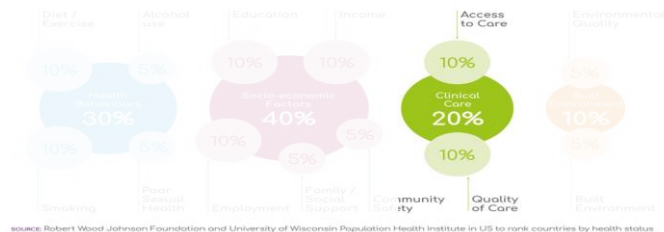
Page 44

## Gaps Identified:

Priority	Objective
Reduce Loneliness and Social Isolation	Supporting communities to care for one another and encouraging volunteering.
	Improving knowledge, training and awareness of loneliness and social isolation to increase recognition and signposting to support services.
Support Residents in Relation to the Rising Cost of Living	helping residents of all ages access education, training, skills development and volunteering opportunities to enable them to fulfil their potential.
	Increasing knowledge and awareness of financial skills and support amongst children, young people and adults.
	Working with employers and anchor institutions to enhance employment opportunities for residents.
Improve Mental Health & Wellbeing	Increasing access to services that can enable positive mental health in the community and workplace.

Objective	Action/Project/Activity	Lead Partner	RAG
Improving knowledge, training and awareness of loneliness and social isolation to increase recognition and signposting to support services.	Support the sustainability of Warm Spaces into social spaces to offer residents an informal place to meet and connect	EFDC/VAEF/ community organisations	20 Active Warm Places in the district supporting over 200 residents.
Helping residents with long-term conditions and disabilities have the same equitable access to services as other residents	Develop 'financial health check' for residents with long term health conditions and their families; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- COPD (pilot)</li> <li>- Other conditions to be confirmed</li> </ul>	CA/EFDC/Ep ping North PCN	Project plan being finalised with PCN colleagues
Working with employers and anchor institutions to enhance employment opportunities for residents.	Develop a series of recruitment fairs highlighting the opportunities within the public and private sector locally. The fairs will focus on particular themes; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adults with LD/Autism (report available on request)</li> <li>- Areas of Deprivation</li> <li>- General population</li> </ul>	EFDC/CA/ICB	Ninefields Event in Autum engaged 20 residents. Meet the buyer event being planned for 14 <sup>th</sup> March to link local suppliers with big developers.
helping residents of all ages access education, training, skills development and volunteering opportunities to enable them to fulfil their potential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a pilot series of outreach training programmes in areas of deprivation to boost skills development (including access to Essex Multiply Programme); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1<sup>st</sup> Pilot Ninefields</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Work with training providers and ECC to enhance childcare provision through training of local residents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1<sup>st</sup> Pilot Ninefields</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	EFDC/ECC/C ollage/CA	Training survey completed (400 responses) highlighted need for digital skills and maths skills and lack of training. Working with NCC to develop training programme in priority areas
Increasing knowledge and awareness of financial skills and support amongst children, young people and adults.	Work with local partners to replicate financial hub in other areas of need; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loughton</li> <li>- Ongar</li> <li>- Chigwell</li> </ul>	EFDC/ICB/CA	CA delivering new outreach session at Limes farm in partnership with EFDC benefits team. Working with Restore to develop Hub Thursdays 9am – 1pm
Increasing access to available resources which will support residents with the rising cost of fuel and food.	Project to promote uptake of unclaimed pension credits. Initially targeting areas of higher deprivation amongst older adults	EFDC	Marketing developed and distributed to hubs and partners. Further distribution to target areas to take place

# Clinical Action Groups Progress Reporting



## Main outcome:

*Integration of Clinical and Community service to enable better health outcomes for residents particularly those in the core 20+5*

## Work programme narrative:

Groups are now progressing with various projects and work streams

Page 45

## H&W Board support request:

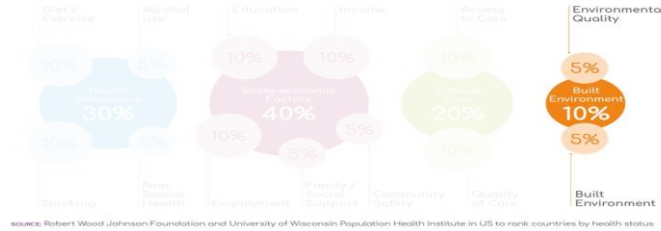
Support in raising awareness of certain projects – Falls Car

## Gaps Identified:

Priority	Objective
Increase Physical Activity Levels	Helping residents with long-term conditions and disabilities have the same equitable access to services as other residents
	Supporting residents of all ages to be more physically active as part of their daily lives.
Reduce Loneliness and Social Isolation	Helping residents feel safer in their communities through effective partnership working to meet emerging threats and needs.

Objective	Action/Project/Activity	Lead Partner	RAG
Helping residents with long-term conditions and disabilities have the same equitable access to services as other residents	Care Coordination Centre – supporting residents with long term condition accessing referral and support.	ICB/EPUT	CCC developed and lunched with clear referral pathways. Supporting papers available on request.
Supporting residents of all ages to be more physically active as part of their daily lives.	Social Active Strong – Falls Prevention programme	EFDC/HC/UDC/ICB	Service commissioned for a further 2 years plus optional additional year. 22/23 data available on request
Helping residents with long-term conditions and disabilities have the same equitable access to services as other residents	Blood Pressure Check for residents with long term conditions in areas of deprivation who have not had a health check in last 5 years.	LBC/ICB	First cohort of residents have been invited for checks via text message inviting them to local pharmacy. Second stage to engage with residents who have not come forward completed 320 patients engaged at Health MOT at New City Collage.
Helping residents feel safer in their communities through effective partnership working to meet emerging threats and needs.	Falls Car for West Essex – To reduce hospital conveyances – reduce response times to residents who have fallen	ICB/EPUT	Falls Car launched and performing extremely well. Targets met for calls diverted from ambulance stack.
Helping residents with long-term conditions and disabilities have the same equitable access to services as other residents	Health Checks/Support Offer for adults with LD and high BMI.  Phase 1 – identification and onward referral completed Phase 2 – understanding why patients refused support and trends.	Epping North PCN/ICB/EFDC	Project Completed
Helping residents feel safer in their communities through effective partnership working to meet emerging threats and needs.	Whzan – Care home project - allows care homes to easily measure patient vital signs and to share this information with the GP practice. Leading to early identification of any issues for patients resident in care homes meaning more proactive rather than reactive care for these patients.	Epping North PCN/ICB	

# Built & Natural Environment Action Group



## Main outcome:

TBA - To influence change in planning policy to improve health outcomes of Epping Forest residents and reduce health inequalities

## Work programme narrative:

The group has now met for second time and conducted mapping exercise to identify gaps. The mapping analysis has show there is lots of work taking place in planning to ensure new developments promote health and wellbeing.

## H&W Board support request:

No specific request other than greater support from ECC with Active Travel withing EF

## Gaps Identified:

Priority	Objective
Increase Physical Activity	Supporting residents of all ages to be more physically active as part of their daily lives
Increase Physical Activity	Healthier Designed Places that promote better lifestyles and improved access to green spaces
Increase Physical Activity	Supporting weight loss by increasing access to services, increasing nutritional awareness and improving access to healthier food options

Objective	Action/Project/Activity	Lead Partner	RAG
Healthier Designed Places that promote better lifestyles and improved access to green spaces	Environmental Improvement to Abby Wood Ninefields so that the area becomes a accessible natural space for the local community.	EFDC/Qualis/Countryside Care	New signage and wayfinding installed. Project to encourage use of space with EFDM delivered.
Healthier Designed Places that promote better lifestyles and improved access to green spaces	Development of HIA quality assurance guidance for developer and DM officers to ensure HIA are of a good standard and ensure the health benefits of new developments are maximised.	EFDC	Quality assurance guidance developed and approved. HIA masterclass delivered to planning colleagues
Healthier Designed Places that promote better lifestyles and improved access to green spaces	Greater community involvement/partnership involvement in design code for new developments.	EFDC	Design codes to be taken to Action Group for comment and plan to engage wider community
Healthier Designed Places that promote better lifestyles and improved access to green spaces	Refresh of playing pitch strategy and development of play area strategy to support evidence of need for S106 funding.	EFDC	Funding required to refresh plan.
Supporting residents of all ages to be more physically active as part of their daily lives	Deliver LCWIP for Waltham Abbey and access funding to implement recommendations	EFDC/ECC	ECC have commissioned PJA to undertake LCWIP for WA
Supporting weight loss by increasing access to services, increasing nutritional awareness and improving access to healthier food options	Investigate the possibility of developing SPD to limit fast food outlets in areas of high obesity.	EFDC/ECC	Research being undertaken to explore possibility of SPD



## SCRUTINY



## Report to Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of meeting: 5 March 2024**

**Portfolio:** Customer & Communities - Cllr Smruti Patel & Cllr Ray Balcombe

**Subject:** Customer Contact Centre

**Officer contact for further information:** Susan Lewis, Service Manager – Customer & Communities. Email: slewis@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

**Democratic Services Officer:** L Kirman: email: DemocraticServices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  
Tel: (01992) 564243

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### Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Committee receives an update on the performance of the Customer Contact Centre over the past 12 months and notes the work which is underway to review and further enhance the performance of the service moving forwards.

#### 1. Report:

##### 1.1 Background

The Contact Centre provides a telephony service for the Council between the hours of 9.00am and 5.15pm Monday to Thursday and 9.00am to 5.00pm Friday. Calls taken directly via the Contact Centre cover every aspect of the Council's business including Waste, Planning, Environmental Health, and signposting for other services. The Contact Centre also manages customer online enquiries via the Council's website and social media mediums.

Additionally, staff from the team provide information and guidance through the provision of a Welcome Desk service at the Civic Offices. Visitors to the Civic Offices Community Hub are greeted and signposted to appropriate partner agencies or organised activity sessions facilitated within the Hub, and those with appointments are made welcome. The Welcome Officer also manages incoming customer emails in relation to Planning Directorate enquiries and wider administrative duties in relation directly to Customer Services.

Outside of the Council's core business hours, an "Out of Hours" service is provided. A new contract for this service was awarded on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023 to SPS Doorguard Limited and proactive monitoring and on-going dialogue with the new provider is ensuring this is working well.

##### 1.2 Staff resources

The Contact Centre itself is made up of 8.8 FTE Customer Service Officers, who are overseen by the Team Manager - Customer Satisfaction & Complaints, and a dedicated Lead Customer Service Officer.

The wider Customer Service area is made up of a part-time Operations Development Specialist, two further Lead Customer Service Officers with focussed remits and a Complaints & Customer Satisfaction Officer. The Service Manager – Customer & Communities has overall responsibility for all functions and resources.

### 1.3 New telephony system

In October 2023 the new cloud hosted telephony system, Cirrus, was introduced, which facilitates internal and external telephone calls and is integrated with MS Teams. Following some minor inevitable teething problems, the Contact Centre has seen improvements in the overall call handling function and, in particular, increased real time visibility in respect of the nature of the calls waiting to be answered. This has enabled the Contact Centre Manager to focus resources in such a way as to expediate calls through to conclusion in the best possible way.

Whilst the Cirrus system has provided greater transparency on incoming calls and clearly has a wide capability to deliver a plethora of reports, it's acknowledged that further work will need to be undertaken to fully unlock and realise the full benefits of such over the coming weeks and months.

### 1.4 Current KPIs collect in respect of the Customer Services area.

The historical Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) by which the Customer Services area has been reviewed are as follows:

- Overall Customer Satisfaction – target 80%
- First Point Resolution – target 70%
- Complaints resolved within SLA – target 85%

For reasons that are drawn out in more detail within this report, it's acknowledged that these KPIs do not realistically provide the information needed to really understand performance. This, in turn, has restricted the ability to drive forward meaningful and ambitious continuous improvement for customers.

## **2. Performance over the past 12 months:**

The existing KPI figures are reported on a quarterly basis through the Council's Overview 7 Scrutiny Committee. A summary table of the data recorded for 2023-24 is as follows:

<b>KPI descriptor:</b>	<b>Quarter 1</b>	<b>Quarter 2</b>	<b>Quarter 3</b>
Overall Customer Satisfaction	63.60%	56.3%	63.39%
First Point Resolution	69.30%	76.2%	58.25%
Complaints resolved within Service Level Agreement	89%	86%	77%

With the implementation of the new telephony system in Quarter 3, the Team saw an initial dip in "first point resolution" performance as Officers got to grips with the new Cirrus technology. The functionality of Cirrus does require call handlers to log if a call was resolved at the "first point" manually in a separate place, which all adds precious seconds to busy workloads. It's accurate to say that, in reality, the Contact Centre did resolve a far higher number of calls in Quarter 3, but complete data was simply not captured in the early stages of Cirrus being rolled out.

## **3. Review plans and progress to date:**

### 3.1 Setting the scene.

It has become evident over some time that the approach, tools, and reporting mechanisms in respect of assessing the performance of the Contact Centre specifically, but also the broader functions of the Customer Services area within the Council, need to be reviewed in order to ensure continuous improvement and an optimum, excellent experience for customers moving forwards.

Enhanced metrics and the ability to accurately gather these in an easy way which does not



place cumbersome, time-consuming burdens on front line staff is key to success.

A thorough review of all aspects of the Contact Centre in particular is, therefore, underway. The review will involve a number of approaches over the coming months, however, the initial focus has been to undertake a survey with other councils in Essex, and wider, to begin to benchmark Epping Forest District Council's service and performance in line with other authorities.

### 3.1 Methodology for the survey with other Local Authorities

In December 2023, a simple survey was devised comprising of the following questions and sent out to neighbouring Councils by the Service Manager:

- ❖ What services does your Contact Centre take calls for?
- ❖ What is your Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff resource?
- ❖ What is your average:
  - Call volume per month
  - Wait time (speed to answer)
  - Abandoned rate
  - Call duration
  - First point resolution
- ❖ What target do you set for emails
- ❖ Do you make outbound calls
- ❖ What are the opening times of your phones
- ❖ Do you measure customer satisfaction, if so, what are your KPI's

The survey was helpfully completed and returned by the following 14 Councils in early January 2024:

- Basildon
- Braintree
- Brentwood
- Castlepoint
- Chelmsford
- Colchester
- East Herts (information shared in response to an FOI request)
- Harlow
- Maldon
- Rochford
- Southend
- Tendring
- Thurrock
- Uttlesford

Details of the responses received can be found at Appendix A.

### 3.2 Key findings from survey undertaken with other Councils:

Whilst Contact Centre opening times are fairly similar across the piece, there are differences in respect of the exact services and functions other Council's Contact Centres provide. It is, therefore, not possible to precisely compare like-for-like due to key variables.

For comparison purposes, the Councils which are closest aligned to Epping Forest District Council's Contact Centre offer are Uttlesford, Tendring and Braintree. The services covered, call volumes and staff resources in these three Councils are commensurate with EFDC's.

All local authorities who took part in the survey collect the same standard Contact Centre day-

to-day metrics as EFDC, as drawn out the questions posed.

The survey highlighted that only eight of the fourteen respondents currently attempt to measure “overall customer satisfaction”, with just four Councils reporting on an actual KPI with this broad description. Furthermore, the methods used by these Councils to capture “overall customer satisfaction” varied widely from undertaking a bespoke survey every two years, to staff making outbounds phone calls to customers, or surveys being requested at the end of calls.

The findings of the survey call into question how meaningful it is for EFDC`s to continue to attempt to measure “overall customer satisfaction” as a KPI. The reality is that this KPI is too generic. The tendency is for customers to leave feedback which directly relates to the outcome of the specific enquiry they have or, for example, a request they may have made which may not be in the Council`s gift to resolve, as opposed to providing feedback on the level of satisfaction they experience in relation to the service they receive from the Contact Centre itself.

Furthermore, unlike other systems, the technology EFDC`s Contact Centre currently has at its disposal doesn`t allow for an automated customer satisfaction survey to be generated at the end of phone calls. This particular functionality would incur additional costs to the Council, therefore, at present, responses are only captured for customers using the Council`s website and online forms. In the past year only 4% of all the customers who contacted EFDC left feedback via the existing customer satisfaction platform.

Eight other Councils measure “first point resolution” (queries resolved by Contact Centre staff themselves the first time the customer phones in) and EFDC`s KPI target of 70% appears to be consistent with others in this respect.

All respondents measure their “resolution of complaints” in a commentate way to EFDC.

In comparison to Uttlesford, Tendring and Braintree Councils` Contact Centres, which handle a similar volume of calls as EFDC and have a similar staff resource, it is apparent that EFDC`s Contact Centre appears to be falling slightly behind its peers in respect of the length of time customers wait for their call to be answered and also the number of customers who hang up whilst waiting in the queue. Therefore, by working closely with these specific authorities it will be possible for EFDC to take key learning from these teams, identify specific areas of focus to work on and adopt models of good practice accordingly.

### 3.3 Proposals for further consideration and next steps

Underpinning all the work which will be undertaken over the coming months to enhance and continue to improve the performance of the Customer Contact Centre is the need to gather clear and meaningful data. To this end, the Service Manager, Team Manager and senior officers will work closely with the appropriate technology Business Partners to fully understand the capabilities of the Cirrus system in the first instance. If it is identified that there is the ability for specific data or key reports to be generated which could help improve performance, but it transpires there`s additional costs associated with enabling this functionality, cost benefit analysis will be undertaken, and decisions taken accordingly in this respect.

Further staff training on the Cirrus system and its full potential will be arranged to ensure maximum benefit is achieved.

Working closely with other Councils with a similar Contact Centre offer to EFDC, key learning will be sought and implemented, as appropriate, in order to improve the time customers wait for their call to be answered.

Work will be undertaken to establish an improved “contact request” system whereby the Council`s technical officers are alerted to the fact that a customer requires a call back, as opposed to customers being put through to a voicemail message system.

Clear recommendations will be made as part of the overarching corporate review into KPIs generally. As already explained in detail within this report, the historic data and KPIs captured in respect of the Contact Centre and wider customer services needs refreshing to provide clearer insight.

Ultimately, in liaison with key stakeholders, a short, medium and long-term improvement plan will be developed for the Contact Centre underpinned by the Council's Fit for the Future Transformation Programme which includes a key Digital Customer pillar.

**Reason for decision:** To note the update on the performance of the Customer Contact Centre and the proposals for enhancing the performance of the service moving forwards.

**Options considered and rejected:** N/A

**Consultation undertaken:** Consultation with Local Authorities across Essex and one Hertfordshire local authority

**Resource implications:** None

**Legal and Governance Implications:** None

**Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:** None

**Background Papers:** None

**Risk Management:** None

**Equality:** None

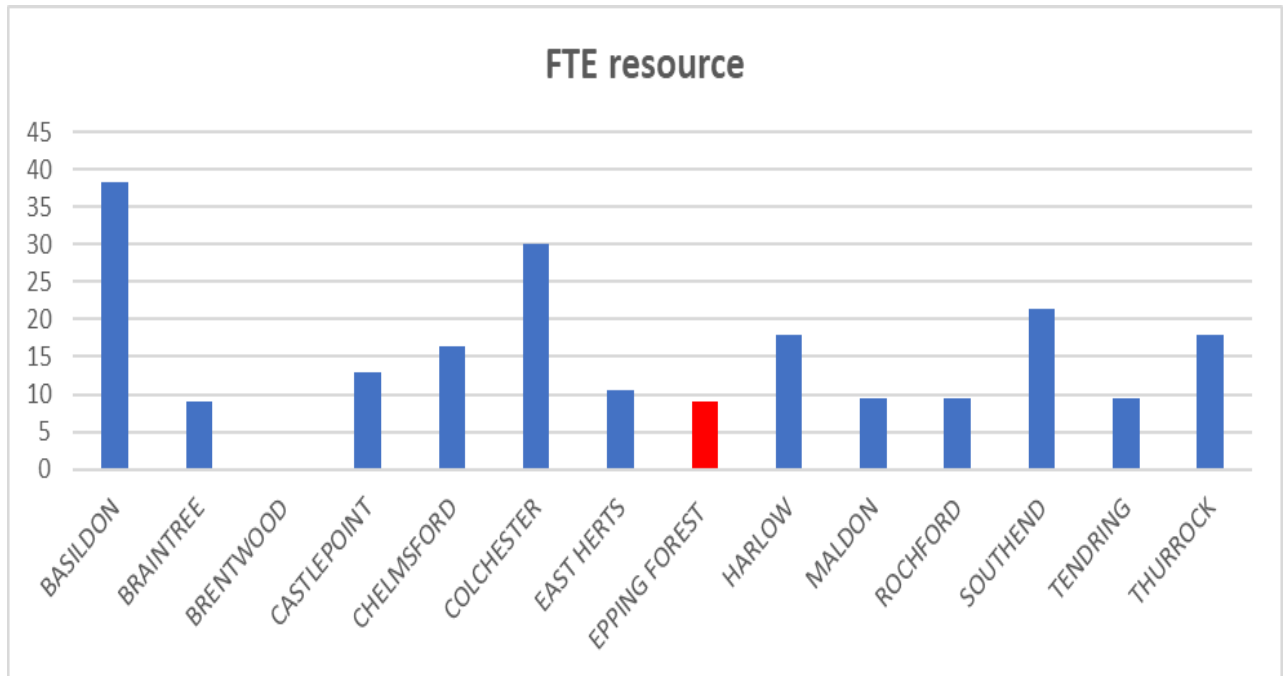
## APPENDIX A

### Local Authority Contact Centre Survey

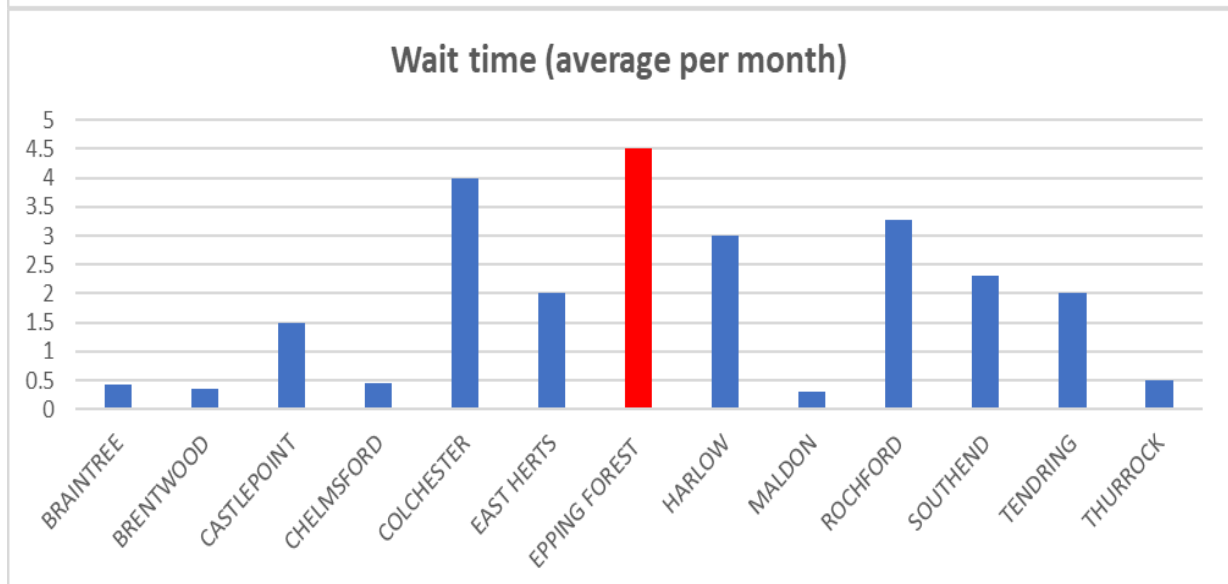
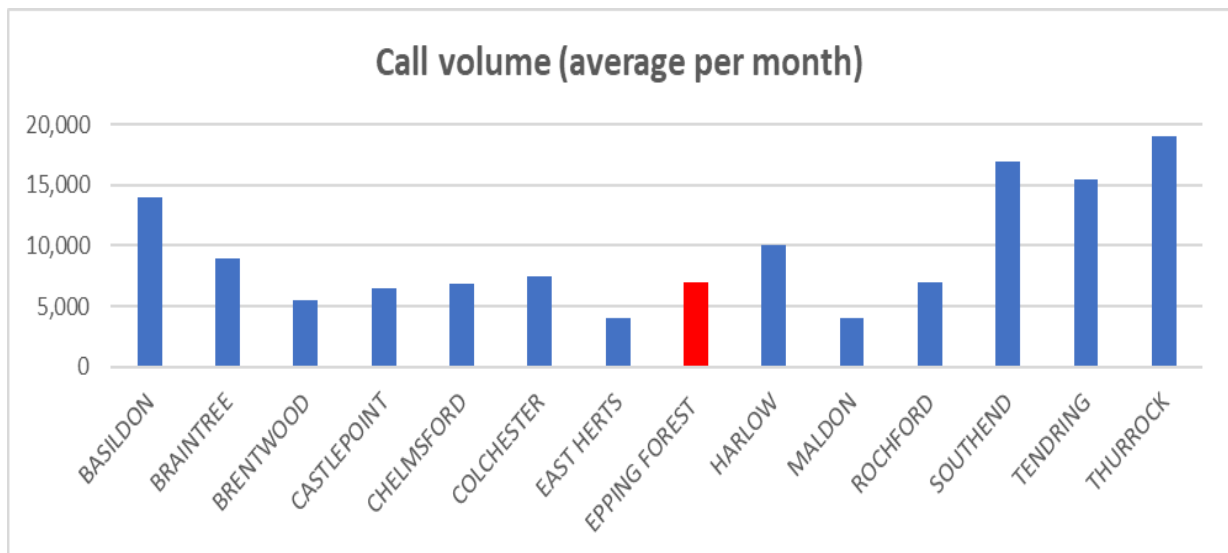
#### Question 1. Services covered by contact centres

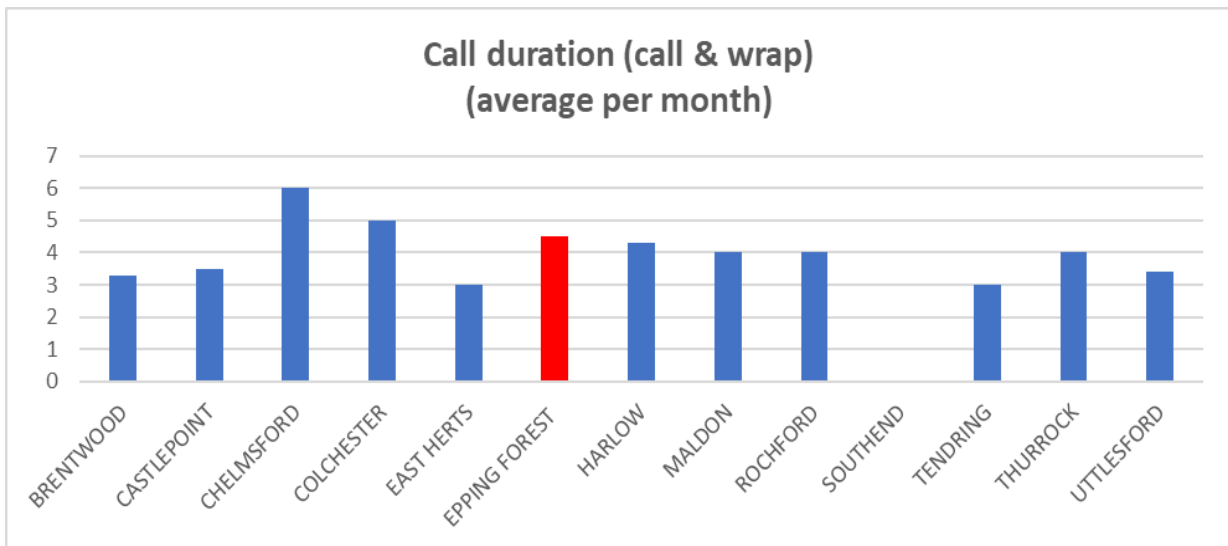
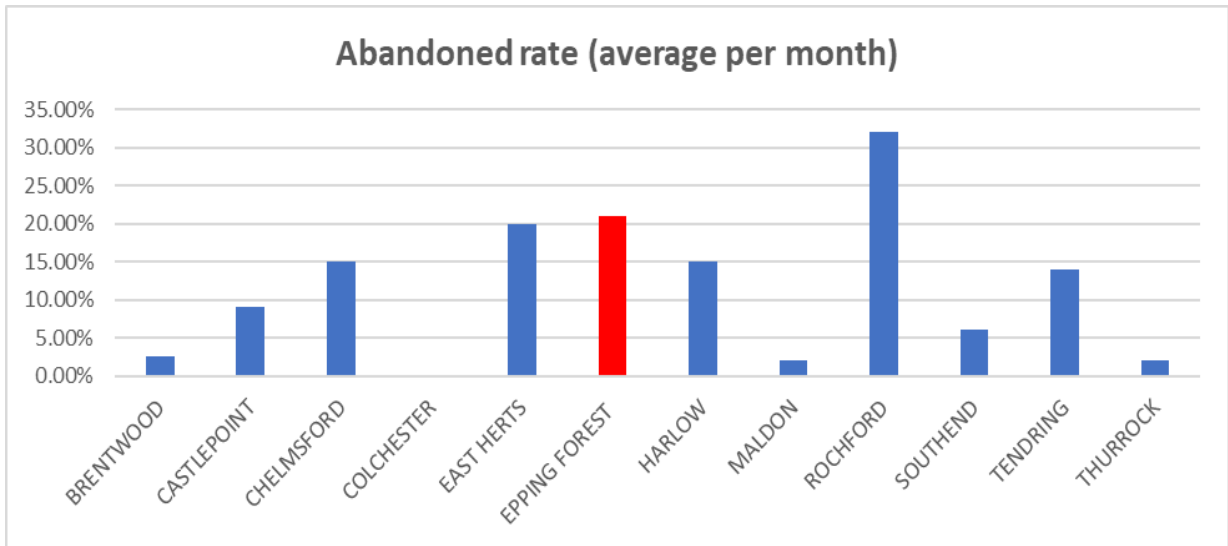
Local Authority	What services do you take calls for
<b>BASILDON</b>	Benefits also for Brentwood, Council Tax also for Brentwood, Housing, Homeless Prevention, Electoral Services, Rent, Planning, Street care, EVH, Special collections, Members, Complaints, Payments
<b>BRAINTREE</b>	Environmental, Pest Control, Refuse, Recycling, Street Cleansing, Bulky Waste (Furniture) Collections, Food Vouchers, Messages for Housing Assessment, Housing Options, Planning, Complaints
<b>BRENTWOOD</b>	Refuse and recycling, bulky waste collections, Housing General, Housing Estates, Housing Needs, Environmental Health & Licensing, Planning, Building Control, Parking
<b>CASTLEPOINT</b>	Benefits, Council Tax, Environmental Health, Halls, Housing Options, Planning & Building Control, Refuse & Recycling, Street scene
<b>CHELMSFORD</b>	Benefits, Council Tax, Housing, Homelessness, Electoral, Public Health, Parks, Planning, Building Control
<b>COLCHESTER</b>	Colchester Borough Homes, Building Control, Planning, Licensing, Food Safety(C&E), Neighbourhood services i.e. Recycling and Waste, Road Closures, Allotments, Markets. Green areas i.e. parks, grass cutting
<b>EAST HERTS</b>	Waste, Parking and Benefits
<b>EPPING FOREST</b>	All except Housing & Repairs
<b>HARLOW</b>	Every service except Repairs
<b>MALDON</b>	Council Tax, Housing Benefits, Housing (Homelessness, Prevention, and Gateway), Waste & Recycling Planning, Building Control, Enforcement, Elections, Parks & Open spaces, Environmental Health (Noise, Licencing), Abandoned vehicles, lost/stray dogs, Payments, Parking, Community Development, Cemeteries, Councillors
<b>ROCHFORD</b>	EH, Revenues and Benefits, Planning, Building Control, Licensing, Housing, Waste, Open Spaces, Payments, Car Parking
<b>SOUTHEND</b>	Council Tax, Benefits, Planning/Building control, Housing options/housing officer queries, Environmental Health, Elections, Licensing, General enquiries
<b>TENDRING</b>	Benefits, Council Tax, NNDR, Housing Enquiries, Housing Repairs, Private Sector Housing, Environmental, Waste, Garden Waste, Abandoned Vehicles
<b>THURROCK</b>	Awards, Benefits, Building Control, Complaints, Council Tax, Environmental, Payments, Councillor Calls, Highways, Homeless, Housing allocations, Housing - Tenancy management, Planning, Recovery, Rents, Schools, Sundry Invoice, Switchboard, Waste & Recycling
<b>UTTLESFORD</b>	Council Tax, Benefits, Planning/Building control, Housing options/housing officer queries, Environmental Health, Elections, Licensing, general district council enquiries

Question 2. Contact Centre FTE resource

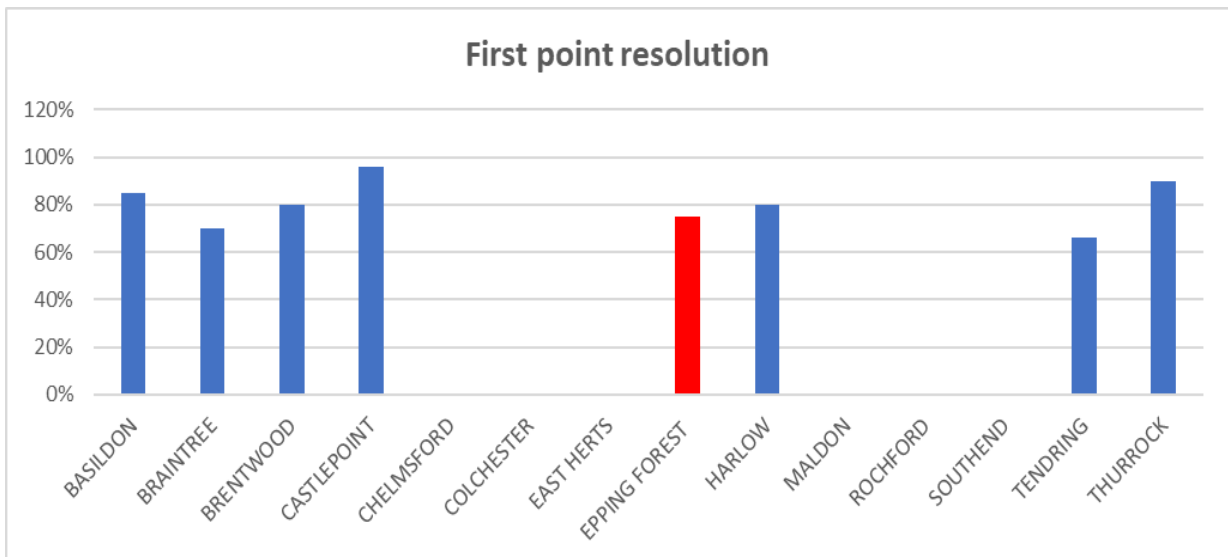


Question 3. Contact Centre metrics





(Note. Wrap time includes the admin required after ending the call before the Officer is available to take another call)



Question 4 – What target to do you set for email responses?

Answers ranged from one day to acknowledge and up to ten working days to resolve; this is in line with the Councils timescales for response.

Question 5 – Do you make outbound calls?

Nine local authorities make outbound calls, this ranges from taking Payments to processing Housing Applications. The Council do make ad hoc outbound calls to follow up with customers as required, for example to take payments for new bin requests and licensing fees.

Question 6 – What are your opening hours?

EFDC`s Contact Centre opening hours are comparable with those Local Authorities who participated in the survey.

Question 7 – What are your KPI's?

This question is covered in the main report.