

Scrutiny Standing Panel Agenda



Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel Tuesday, 31st October, 2006

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Time: 5.30 pm

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry, Research and Democratic Services
Tel.01992 56 4246; email: ahendry@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, D Bateman, Mrs P Brooks, Councillor Mrs D Borton, Mrs H Harding, Mrs J Lea, G Mohindra, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs J H Whitehouse and J Wyatt

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

(Head of Research and Democratic Services) To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Head of Research and Democratic Services). To declare interests in any items on the agenda.

In considering whether to declare a personal or a prejudicial interest under the Code of Conduct, Overview & Scrutiny members are asked pay particular attention to paragraph 11 of the Code in addition to the more familiar requirements.

This requires the declaration of a personal and prejudicial interest in any matter before an OS Committee which relates to a decision of or action by another Committee or Sub Committee of the Council, a Joint Committee or Joint Sub Committee in which the Council is involved and of which the Councillor is also a member.

Paragraph 11 does not refer to Cabinet decisions or attendance at an OS meeting purely for the purpose of answering questions or providing information on such a matter.

4. TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF LAST MEETING HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2006 (Pages 3 - 6)

Attached

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 7 - 12)

(Chairman/Lead Officer) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed the Terms of Reference of this Panel and associated Work Programme. This is attached. The Panel are asked at each meeting to review both documents.

6. HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME (Pages 13 - 50)

(Head of Housing Services) To consider the attached Housing Allocation Scheme.

7. HOUSING SERVICES STRATEGY - EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY & EMPTY COUNCIL DWELLINGS (Pages 51 - 80)

(Head of Housing Services) to consider the attached report and strategies.

8. EPPING FOREST LOCAL SUPPORTING PEOPLE STRATEGY 2006-2010 - SIX-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT (OCTOBER 2006) (Pages 81 - 94)

(Head of Housing Services) To consider the attached report and strategy.

9. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS UPDATE

To receive a verbal update on the Choice Based Lettings Scheme from the Assistant Head of Housing.

10. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

To consider which reports are ready to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting.

11. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meetings of the Housing Scrutiny Panel are:

30 January 2007, and
30 April 2007.

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2006
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 5.30 - 6.55 PM**

Members Present: S Murray (Chairman), , K Angold-Stephens, Mrs P Brooks, Mrs H Harding, Mrs J Lea, Mrs J H Whitehouse, J Wyatt and Mrs M Carter (Epping Forest Tenants and Leasholders Federation)

Other members present: D Stallan

Apologies for Absence: Mrs R Gadsby and Councillor Mrs D Borton

Officers Present A Hall (Head of Housing Services), R Wilson (Assistant Head of Housing Services (Operations)) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance:

11. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

12. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Panel noted that there were no declarations of interest.

13. NOTES OF LAST MEETING - 27 JULY 2006

The minutes from the last meeting were noted and agreed.

14. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference and Work Programme were noted.

15. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

The Panel considered the draft Specification for the implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. The Panel also considered a draft Portfolio Holder report on Choice Based Lettings proposing to authorise the Head of Housing Services to agree the final version of the specification.

The Assistant Head of Housing Services took the Panel through the background of this scheme. The Council has agreed to work in partnership with five other local authorities, creating a consortium of six authorities, Brentwood BC, Broxbourne DC, Chelmsford BC, East Herts DC, Epping Forest DC and Uttlesford DC. The scheme is based around a website and a free sheet being distributed every two weeks, which would advertise any vacancies in the housing stock of the relevant authorities. The people on the housing register could then express their interest in any property advertised. The expressions of interest are then analysed and prioritised by an external Choice Based Lettings Agency. The next website update and issue of the

free sheet will then show the properties allocated and any background information associated with it. It was noted that:

- It was too early to determine whether there would be any staffing implications associated with this; the Choice Based Letting Agency would in theory handle most of this work and once the scheme had been operating six months to a year the staffing implications could be analysed.
- Each authority would continue to have its own Allocation Scheme, which the Choice Based Lettings Agency would apply.
- A tenant could apply to go on another Council's list, but were more likely to get something from their own Council as they would be higher on their list.
- The website and free sheets could and will be used to put other relevant information in each advert such as distance from the nearest rail station and the local bus routes.
- Also available on the website and with the free sheet will be a User Guide.
- Each of the six authorities will have a Memorandum of Understanding amongst themselves and individual contracts with the Choice Based Letting Agency, if one of them wants to leave the consortium then it would not affect the others, although these agreements would make it difficult for a council to leave.
- When the scheme starts each tenant will get a pack explaining how it works and how to express an interest in the properties advertised.
- The current target date for implementation of this scheme is 1st June 2007, although officers consider this optimistic.
- The Choice Based Letting Agency would let the Council have a whole range of management reports including identifying any vulnerable applicants who may not be participating.
- The system will also report back on any ineligible bids to officers.

The Panel were happy that the Head of Housing Services agree final changes to the specifications in conjunction with the Housing Portfolio Holder, and amended Recommendation 2 of the Portfolio Holder's report accordingly. The recommendation would now read:

"That, following any requested changes made by the partner authorities in the Consortium and/or as a result of the Public consultation, the Head of Housing Services be authorised in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder to agree on behalf of the Council the final version of the Specification, generally in line with the draft version."

The budget details were then considered by the Panel. They noted that an initial government grant of £96,000 had been received to set up the project, around £58,000 of which will go to the Project Management Consultants, leaving a balance of £38,000 to meet the remaining set up costs. Additional budget provision of £40,000 had been made by EFDC to meet the set up costs for 2006/07 in case the £38,000 did not cover all the Consortium's costs. The consultants estimate that an ongoing budget of around £25,000 (for EFDC) would be required; the main costs would be the periodic publication. Budget provision of £35,000 per annum is currently being included within the Housing Revenue Account from 2007/08.

The Panel thought that it was sensible to limit the expressions of interest per applicant per edition of the free sheet, as there was a possibility that some people would apply for every property they could. It was also a good idea that all six authorities kept to a consistent number; in this case, up to a maximum of three properties per applicant was mentioned. The Panel agreed that their view that there

should be some limit to the number of bids applicants could make should be added to the Portfolio Holders Report as a further recommendation.

The Panel agreed that the word 'separately' should be added to paragraph 16.1 of the draft specification so that it reads "...their share of the costs and should be invoiced 'separately' on this basis."

It was also agreed that about a year after the scheme had been operating the applicants should be re-consulted to find out what they thought of the system and the procedures used.

RESOLVED:

1. The Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel agreed the draft specification on Choice Based Lettings, but with the following comments:
 - They did not want unlimited bids made on properties;
 - The word 'separately' to be added to paragraph 16.1 of the draft specification;
 - A survey of the applicants should be carried out a year into the scheme.
2. The progress made on the implementation of the Choice Based Letting Scheme for the Council's entire vacant social rented properties was noted.
3. The second recommendation of the Portfolio Holders report be altered to read:

"That, following any requested changes made by the partner authorities in the Consortium and/or as a result of the Public consultation, the Head of Housing Services be authorised in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder to agree on behalf of the Council the final version of the Specification, generally in line with the draft version."
4. An extra recommendation should be added to the Portfolio Holders Report stating:

"That the Council will not agree to applicants being able to make unlimited expressions of interest."

16. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Choice Based Letting Scheme to be reported to the next Overview and Scrutiny committee meeting.

17. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meetings of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel are:

31 October 2006,
30 January 2007, and
30 April 2007.

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TERMS OF REFERENCE - STANDING PANEL

Title: Housing

Status: Standing Panel

Terms of Reference:

(1) To undertake reviews of public and private sector housing policies on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Housing Portfolio Holder or Head of Housing Services and to make any recommendations arising from such reviews to the Housing Portfolio Holder or Cabinet as appropriate.

(2) To undertake specific projects related to public and private sector housing issues, as directed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to make any recommendations arising from such reviews to the Housing Portfolio Holder or Cabinet as appropriate.

(3) To consider and provide comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder on the following matters, prior to consideration by the Cabinet:

- (i) Draft Housing Strategy (to be adopted by full Council in accordance with the Council's Constitution)
- (ii) Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy
- (iii) Draft Private Sector Housing Grants Policy
- (iv) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme

(4) To consider and provide comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder on draft versions of the following documents:

- (i) Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan
- (ii) Local Supporting People Strategy
- (iii) Housing Service Strategies

(5) To undertake the Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants and Housing Allocations, in accordance with the Code of Practice in Rented Housing.

(6) To monitor progress with the actions plans contained in the following documents, on a six-monthly basis:

- (i) Housing Strategy
- (ii) Local Supporting People Strategy
- (iii) Private Sector Housing Strategy
- (iv) Housing Services Development Plan

(7) To consider the Housing Portfolio Holder's draft response to any consultation papers relating to public or private sector housing that the Housing Portfolio Holder considers warrants a response from the Council.

Work Programme 2006/07

Item	Priority	Report Deadline
(1) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants	Medium	July 2006
(2) Updated Draft Housing Strategy	High	Was July now October 2006
(3) Empty Property Strategy	High	July 2006
(4) Housing Service Strategy on the Private Rented Sector	Low	July 2006
(5) Housing Services Strategy on Empty Council Properties	Low	Was July now October 2006
(6) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	High	October 2006
(7) Six-monthly Progress Report on Local Supporting People Strategy Action Plan	Medium	October 2006
(8) Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy	High	October 2006
(9) Six-monthly Progress Report on Housing Strategy Action Plan	Medium	January 2007
(10) Updated draft HRA Business Plan	High	April 2007
(11) Updated Draft Local Supporting Peoples Strategy	High	April 2007
(12) Implementation of Choice Based Lettings	High	Final Report – April 2007

Chairman: Cllr Stephen Murray

Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 31 October 2006



Subject: Housing Scrutiny Panel Work Programme 2006/7

Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall, Head of Housing Services

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry

Recommendations:

That the Progress Report on the Panel's Work Programme 2006/7, attached as an Appendix, be noted.

Report

1. At its first meeting in July 2006, the Panel noted its Work Programme set by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
2. Attached as an Appendix is the current position with regard to each of the tasks assigned to the Panel, which includes additional tasks agreed by the Panel since July 2006.

Housing Scrutiny Panel
Work Programme 2006/7

PROGRESS REPORT

Item	Priority	Original Report Deadline	Current Position
WORK PROGRAMME			
Issues Within the Original Work Programme			
(1) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants	Medium	July 2006	Completed – At 27 July 2006 meeting.
(2) Updated draft Housing Strategy	High	July 2006	Delayed – Due to other commitments. It is hoped that the update draft Housing Strategy can be reported to the Panel in the near future
(3) Empty Property Strategy	High	July 2006	Completed – At 27 July 2006 meeting.
(4) Housing Service Strategy on the Private Rented Sector	Low	July 2006	Delayed – The Service Strategy has been drafted, but further work is required.
(5) Housing Service Strategy on Empty Council Properties	Low	July 2006	To be considered at this meeting – The Service Strategy is due to be considered at this meeting.
(6) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	High	October 2006	To be considered at this meeting – Proposed amendments to the Allocations Scheme are due to be considered at this meeting.
(7) Six-monthly Progress Report on Local Supporting People Strategy Action Plan	Medium	October 2006	To be considered at this meeting – The Six-Month Progress Report is due to be considered at this meeting.
(8) Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy	High	October 2006	Completed – At 27 July 2006 meeting

(9) Six-monthly Progress Report on Housing Strategy Action Plan	Medium	January 2007	Not yet required
(10) Implementation of Choice Based Lettings	High	July 2007	In progress – The Panel considered the draft specification at its special meeting on 11 September 2006.
(11) Updated draft HRA Business Plan	High	April 2007	Not yet required
(12) Updated Local Supporting People Strategy Action Plan	High	April 2007	Not yet required
Issues Added to the Work Programme During the Year			
(13) Housing Service Strategy on Harassment	Medium	July 2006	Completed – At 27 July meeting.
(14) Housing Service Strategy on Diversity and Equality	Medium	September 2006	To be considered at this meeting – The Service Strategy is due to be considered at this meeting.
(15) Leaseholder Service Charges for Major Works and Improvements – Payment Arrangements	Medium	January 2007	To be considered at the January 2007 meeting – Report requested by the Chairman of the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

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Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of report: 31 October 2006

Subject: Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme

Author: Roger Wilson, ext. 4419

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, ext.4246



Decision:

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers the attached draft report on the review of the Housing Allocations Scheme, prior to consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, registered social landlords operating in the District and local councils, and pass on their comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder for his consideration prior to its submission to the Cabinet.

Background Report:

1. The Council is legally required to have an Allocations Scheme setting out the procedures for allocating its housing accommodation and making nominations to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). Each year the Cabinet considers the Council's Allocations Scheme and reviews any changes to be made.
2. The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the attached report on proposed changes to the Allocations Scheme to take effect from 1 April 2007, and the changes needed to meet with the requirements of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme to be implemented later in 2007. The Panel's comments will be considered by the Housing Portfolio Holder, prior to the report being submitted to the Cabinet.
3. Following the Housing Scrutiny Panel's meeting, the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, all RSLs operating within the District and all local councils will be consulted on the proposed changes, with their comments taken into account by the Housing Portfolio Holder prior to reporting to the Cabinet.

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Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C/nnn/2006.

Date of meeting: 18 December 2006



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D Stallan

Subject: Review of the Housing Allocation Scheme

Officer contact for further information: Russell Wallace extension 4024

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That, following detailed consideration by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, and consultations with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, Parish and Town Councils and Registered Social Landlord Partners, the proposed changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme as recommended by the Housing Portfolio Holder be agreed as follows:

(a) The changes to the general information on the Allocations Scheme as set out at Appendix Two take effect from 1 April 2007;

(b) The changes to the Allocations Scheme in respect of the priority bandings as set out at Appendix Three take effect from 1 April 2007;

(c) The changes to the general information on the Allocations Scheme which are needed to meet the requirements of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme set out in Appendix Four take effect from its implementation; and

(d) The changes to the Allocations Scheme in respect of the priority bandings which are needed to meet the requirements of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme set out in Appendix Five take effect from the implementation date of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

Report:

1. The Council is legally required to have an Allocations Scheme setting out the procedures for allocating its housing accommodation and making nominations to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). Each year the Cabinet considers the Council's Allocations Scheme and reviews any changes to be made, which is the purpose of this report. A copy of the current Scheme is attached at Appendix One. In September 2004, the Council introduced a Banding Scheme which forms the basis of prioritising housing applications. Since its introduction, this system of allocating properties has worked well with no major problems arising.

2. At its meeting on 31 October 2006, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered in detail the proposed changes to the Allocations Scheme from 2007 and their comments have been incorporated into the report.

3. The changes which are suggested would be implemented in two stages as follows:

Stage One – Changes to the Allocations Scheme from 1 April 2007

4. Attached at Appendix Two is a table setting out the proposed changes to the general information which would take effect from 1 April 2007. It shows the reference to the current scheme, the suggested changes and the reason for the changes. These are proposed, irrespective of the planned introduction of Choice Based Lettings.

5. Attached at Appendix Three is a table setting out the proposed changes to the Allocation Scheme bandings which would also take effect from 1 April 2007. As can be seen, it is proposed to merge Band Two and Band Three, thereby reducing the number of bandings from seven to six. Furthermore, it is proposed to denote each bullet point as (a), (b), (c) etc. for ease of reference.

Stage Two – Changes to the Allocations Scheme to meet with the Requirements of Choice Based Lettings

6. At its meeting on 24 May 2004, the Cabinet agreed the recommendations of the former Overview and Scrutiny Committee (1) that the Council adopts a move towards a Choice Based Lettings system in principle. This followed detailed examinations of the principles and issues at a number of meetings by the former Working Group on Housing.

7. At its meeting on 15 September 2005, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered and made comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder on a detailed report setting out the proposed way forward on the implementation of the Scheme. Following the meeting, the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed the principle of introducing a Choice Based Lettings Scheme operated through an agreement with a Choice Based Lettings Agency for all applicants on the Council's Housing Register.

8. On 6 February 2006, the Cabinet agreed that the functions relating to the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium, a partnership with five other local authorities, be delegated to the Head of Housing Services in accordance with Financial Regulations F1 to F9 within the Council's Constitution. The partner authorities within the Consortium were as follows:

- Brentwood Borough Council
- Chelmsford Borough Council
- Broxbourne District Council
- Uttlesford District Council
- East Herts District Council

9. However, it should be noted that, in September 2006, Uttlesford District Council formally notified the Consortium they were withdrawing from the Consortium as they intend to review their allocation processes and develop a scheme which they believe will be tailor made to their requirements. Despite Uttlesford's views, the view of the other five members of the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium is that Choice Based Lettings Scheme will meet the requirements of housing applicants locally as the councils' own Allocation Schemes will continue to be applied.

10. Under a Choice Based Lettings scheme, all vacant social rented properties will be advertised to applicants on the Housing Register in a fortnightly publication, website, or other media. Applicants will apply for a property by expressing an interest, either in person, by post, telephone, text, email or Internet. At the end of the fortnightly cycle, the Council will analyse all expressions of interest received and allocate each property following a prioritisation and selection process in accordance with its Allocations Scheme. In general terms, the property will be offered to the applicant in the highest band, who has been registered the longest, who has expressed an interest for the specific vacancy.

11. The results of all expressions of interest on each property advertised will then be published in the next fortnightly publication, setting out the number received on each property, as well as the Band and registration date of the successful applicant. This helps applicants to see how long the successful applicant has been waiting and gives greater transparency in the allocation of accommodation.

12. In order to meet the requirements of the Choice Based Letting Scheme, changes will need to be made to the Allocations Scheme on implementation. The original target implementation date was April 2007. However, due to the preparation work that needs to be done, it is now expected to commence later in 2007. The table attached at Appendix Four sets out the changes required to the Housing Allocations Scheme's general information in order to meet the requirements of Choice Based Lettings. The table at Appendix Five sets out the changes to Band One of the Allocations Scheme, which would also be required.

13. Attached at Appendix Six is a draft of the proposed new Bandings (with effect from 1 April 2007, and from the implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme), setting out how they would be presented if Members agreed all of the proposed changes.

Statement in support of recommended action:

14. The changes proposed to the Allocations Scheme are important to meet Government targets and to ensure fairness to all applicants on the Housing Register for the reasons set out in the report. In addition, further changes must be made to ensure that the requirements of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme are met on implementation.

Options for action:

15. Not to agree the changes to the Council's Allocation Scheme from 1 April 2007, and the required changes to meet with the Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

Consultation undertaken:

16. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, all of the Council's partner Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) (in accordance with the Housing Act) and Local Councils (in accordance with the Local Council's Charter) have been consulted on the proposed changes, and where considered appropriate, their views have been incorporated into the report. A summary of all the comments received is given at Appendix Seven, together with the views of the Housing Portfolio Holder.

Resource implications: N/A

Budget provision: N/A

Personnel: N/A

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1996

Background papers: Allocation Scheme

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A

Key Decision reference (if required): N/A

APPENDIX TWO

Changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme General Information from 1 April 2007

Current Allocation Scheme Reference	Proposed Change From 1 April 2007	Reason for the Change
Add new paragraph at 2.2	During 2007, there will be a major change in the way in which the Council allocates its properties, under a new Choice Based Lettings Scheme. The scheme will enable applicants to express an interest in available properties which will be advertised in a fortnightly publication and on a website. All applicants will receive detailed information on Choice Based Lettings before implementation. The Allocations Scheme will be amended to take into account the required changes to meet the requirements of the scheme with effect from the implementation date.	Paragraph to be added to explain what will happen when Choice Based Lettings is implemented
4.5	c) amend to "... where a tenancy is assigned by way of a mutual exchange to an existing secure tenant."	To cover assignments made to secure tenants rather than Introductory Tenants
4.5	Additional sentence within (c) "Where an Introductory Tenant undertakes a mutual exchange with a Secure Tenant, each party will surrender their tenancies, with the Council granting each party a new tenancy which reflects their previous tenancy status. Any period the affected tenant spent as an Introductory Tenant in their previous property will count towards the fulfillment of the 12-month "introductory period" in the new property."	To cover the mutual exchange arrangements (in accordance with the Regulations) where an Introductory Tenant is one of the parties to the exchange
4.5	e) amend to "where a priority transfer is agreed in urgent circumstances due to person's safety being at risk (appendix 3 refers)"	To clarify that priority transfers will only be granted in urgent circumstances
6.3	Delete paragraph	Advised by the Head of Information and Communications Technology that under the Data Protection Act the Council should not require that applicants provide photographs
8.2	Amend to Band 6 representing the lowest Band	Number of Bands changing to 6 from the current number of 7
8.5	Amend to Band 5	Due to number of Bands changing to 6 from the current number of 7

APPENDIX TWO - CONTINUED

Changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme General Information from 1 April 2007

Current Allocation Scheme Reference	Proposed Change From 1 April 2007	Reason for the Change
8.6	<p>Amend Paragraph to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Generally, the Council will move to the lowest Band any applicant of the Council....” • “Such behaviour will include serious rent arrears or illegal activities” • “Generally, this will include applicants under a Court Order for possession, Notice of Seeking Possession or a Notice to Quit (except where arrears have been cleared) or who are....” 	<p>To clarify that the Council will move to the lowest Band any applicant who has committed the acts set out, but this will not apply in the case of an applicant who has cleared their arrears.</p>
Add new paragraph 9.1	<p>From 1 April 2007, all non secure Council tenants still owed a homeless duty under Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 (with exception of those at Hemnall House, Epping) will be offered secure tenancies of their existing property. The Council’s homelessness duty will be discharged if such tenants refuse the offer of a secure tenancy. Such tenants may continue with their housing application to move to alternative accommodation, with the same registration date, but their banding will be re-assessed with their new status in accordance with the Allocation Scheme</p>	<p>It is essential that all non-secure homeless applicants are made secure tenants to ensure that the Government’s target that the number of people living in temporary accommodation be reduced by 50% by 2010 is met. The Head of Housing Services has had discussions with the DCLG who recommend the approach proposed. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have been consulted and agree with the proposal.</p>
Add new paragraph 9.2	<p>Between 1 April 2007 and the implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, all homeless applicants residing at a Homeless Persons Hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation, if offered Council accommodation, will be offered “permanent” Introductory Tenancies, followed by secure tenancies in accordance with the Council’s Introductory Tenancy Scheme.</p>	<p>It is essential that, in the future, homeless applicants who are living in this type of temporary accommodation are granted Introductory Tenancies if offered Council accommodation, to ensure that the Government’s target that the number of people living in temporary accommodation be reduced by 50% by 2010 is met. The Head of Housing Services has had discussions with the DCLG who recommend the approach proposed.</p>

APPENDIX TWO - CONTINUED

Changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme General Information from 1 April 2007

Current Allocation Scheme Reference	Proposed Change From 1 April 2007	Reason for the Change
9.1	Amend to "The Council will offer all new, potentially, secure tenants Introductory Tenancies in the first instance."	Necessary following the introduction of the Introductory Tenancy Scheme in April 2006
9.2	c) Delete paragraph	The Council does not grant joint tenancies to friends and has no obligation to do so in accordance with DCLG guidance.
13.1	Amend to "...renew their application when required by the Council. Normally this will be annually and a letter will be sent to their last known address".	To clarify the process for renewing applications
13.2	Delete	Not relevant if proposed changes to this section are agreed
13.3	Amend to "If applicants fail to return their renewal form within 28 days they will be deleted from the Housing Register and given written notification to that effect. If the applicant contacts the Housing Needs Section within 28 days of receiving the written notification, the Council may consider re-instatement."	To streamline the process for renewing applications
16.3	Add new paragraph c) applicants offered sheltered accommodation	Following the Housing Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments, it was identified that the ethnicity of this client group be monitored
Appendix Three	Amend headings to "Priority Transfers". Add bullet point "in urgent circumstances where there is clear evidence that an existing tenant's safety is at risk"	To clarify the circumstances in which Priority Transfers may be granted

APPENDIX THREE

Changes to the Allocation Scheme Priority Bandings from 1 April 2007

Current Allocation Scheme Reference	Proposed Change From 1 April 2007	Reason for the Change
Band One	Delete the 6-month deferment.	Deferment not required as the Council will generally be allocating introductory secure tenancies after 1 April 2007, in order to meet the DCLG target.
Band 2 (First bullet point)	Move to current Band 5 (New Band 4)	Under the current scheme, all non-priority need homeless applications are placed in Band 2, which can encourage homelessness, as it gives an incentive to proceed through the homelessness route. This approach was recommended by the DCLG's special advisor on homelessness.
Band 2 (Second Bullet point)	Move to current Band 5 (New Band 4)	It is considered that those with no fixed address should not be given greater priority above those in current Bands 1-4
Band 3 (First Bullet Point)	<p>(a) Delete move to Band 1 after one year.</p> <p>(b) Insert after "Applicants" in first line-"in Council accommodation that is non-secure by virtue of Schedule 1 of the Housing Act 1985."</p> <p>(c) Delete "not in supervised accommodation secured by the Council"</p>	<p>This gives the Council the ability to house some other applicants in non-secure accommodation in certain circumstances, for example to avoid the Homeless Persons Hostel from overcrowding.</p> <p>Clarifies that the client group are those who are currently in non-secure accommodation.</p>
Band 3 (Second bullet point)	Delete	It is now felt that applicants should not be given priority in these circumstances. Should they present themselves as homeless, their case would be assessed in accordance with the legislation

APPENDIX THREE - CONTINUED

Changes to the Allocation Scheme Priority Bandings from 1 April 2007

Current Allocation Scheme Reference	Proposed Change	Reason for the Change
Band 2 and Band 3	As a result of the above changes, the remaining categories in Band 2 and Band 3 be merged to form a new Band 2 (which results in the number of Bands reducing from 7 to 6).	There would be only one category within each of Bands 2 and 3 which it is felt should have equal priority and can easily be merged.
Band 4	Band 4 becomes Band 3. Amend to "Applicants meeting the criteria of (the new) Band 4 (a) or (b) and one other criterion in (the new) Band 4 (including (a) and (b))"	To be more specific about the criteria for applicants in the new Band 3. It is felt that meeting more than one criterion within (new) Band 4, not including (a) or (b), is insufficient to justify new Band 3.
Band 4 (New Band 5)	<p>Add "Homeless people over 60 years of age in non-secure accommodation prior to receiving a decision under S.184 of the Housing Act 1996."</p> <p>Add "All homeless people (by virtue of the Housing Act 1996) who are not eligible for Bands 1 to 4."</p> <p>Add "Single homeless people accommodated in bed and breakfast hotels who in the view of the Head of Housing Services would benefit from the S.A.F.E Project or the Swan Floating Support Scheme."</p>	<p>Older people are normally housed straight into Council housing stock on a non-secure basis until the formal homeless decision is made.</p> <p>Need to give "reasonable preference" to all homeless people even if the only duty is to provide advice and assistance.</p> <p>The Council would not want such applicants to be eligible for priority before being given support.</p>
Band 5	Band 5 becomes Band 4. Second bullet point becomes (a). Third bullet point becomes (b)	It is considered that at least one of these two criteria should be met (along with one other) or both (a) and (b) before any applicant is promoted to the new Band 3
Band 6 Band 7	Become Band 5 and Band 6	Due to the changes proposed there will be one less Band.

APPENDIX THREE - CONTINUED

Changes to the Allocation Scheme Priority Bandings from 1 April 2007

Current Allocation Scheme Reference	Proposed Change	Reason for the Change
Band 6	Band 6 becomes Band 5. Add new bullet point, "Applicants who in the opinion of the Council have sufficient income and/or assets to enable them to purchase accommodation as set out in Paragraph 8.5 of the Scheme."	For clarification purposes
Band 7	Band 7 becomes Band 6 - all other applicants	Due to reduction in the number of Bands
First note on bandings	Delete "unfit"	"Unfit" is no longer a legal definition of the condition of a property.

APPENDIX FOUR

Changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme General Information from the Implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme

Current Allocation Scheme Reference	Proposed Changes From the Implementation of Choice Based Lettings	Reason for the Change
8.8	Amend to “Any vacancy will be offered, subject to new Section 9 below, to the applicant identified by the Council who has the highest priority (based on their band and date of application) and has expressed an interest in that property.”	Under the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, the Choice Based Lettings Agency will send a prioritised list to the Council at the end of each two-weekly cycle which will identify the number of expressions of interest received in order of priority.
Add new Section 9	<p>9. Homeless Households</p> <p>Applicants accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless , eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless under the Housing Act 1996 will be able to participate in the Choice Based Letting Scheme, for a period of 8 weeks (4 cycles) after receiving their S.184 decision letter in accordance with the criteria set out in Band One of the Allocation Scheme. If no successful expressions of interest are made by the Applicant, the Council will make the applicant <u>one</u> offer of accommodation when a suitable property becomes available. If the offer is refused, the Council’s homelessness duty under the Housing Act 1996 to provide accommodation will be considered to be discharged.</p>	To ensure that homeless applicants who are owed a duty by the Council are given deadlines for participating in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme and do not remain in temporary accommodation for long periods.

APPENDIX FIVE

Change to the Housing Allocation Scheme Priority Bandings from the Implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme

Current Allocation Scheme Reference	Proposed Change From the Implementation of Choice Based Lettings	Reason for the Change
Band 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend first bullet point to “.....not intentionally homeless who are living in (a) bed and breakfast accommodation secured by the Council, but excluding those referred to another local housing authority under S.198 of the Housing Act 1996. • (b) Living at the Council’s Homeless Persons Hostel, Norway House, for 3 months after the date of their homelessness decision under S.184 of the Housing Act 1996 • (c) Properties under the Council’s “Fresh Start” “Brook Haven” “Hemnal House” or a Women’s Refuge for 6 months after the date of their occupation in that property, where the Council has accepted a duty. 	To ensure that homeless applicants who are owed a duty by the Council are given deadlines for participating in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme and do not remain in temporary accommodation for long periods.
Additional paragraph under first bullet point	Where the Council has accepted a duty, applicants in these three categories will be able to participate in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme for a period of 8 weeks (4 cycles). If no successful expressions of interest are made the Council will make the applicant <u>one</u> offer of suitable secure accommodation. If the offer is refused, the Council’s homelessness duty to provide accommodation will be discharged.	As above

APPENDIX SIX

Draft of the Proposed new Bandings with effect from 1 April 2007

Band 1

- (a) Applicants with Council or RSL tenancies in the District wanting to move to accommodation with fewer bedrooms.
- (b) Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application, needing to move on strong medical or welfare grounds or for reasons of disability. ***
- (c) Applicants accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless, eligible for housing assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless, in supervised accommodation secured by the Council, but excluding those referred to another local housing authority under S.198 of the Housing Act 1996.
- (d) Applicants living in the Epping Forest District for more than a year immediately prior to application, residing in insanitary, overcrowded or unsatisfactory conditions. *
- (e) Applicants whom the multi-agency referral panel for S.A.F.E. (Single Accommodation for Epping Forest) has notified the Council as having been on the project for at least 9 months and are ready to move on.*

Band 2

- (a) Applicants having to live apart from other members of their household because of lack of accommodation, but not for personal reasons (i.e. family disputes) where the applicant or their partner have lived in the Epping Forest District for more than a year immediately prior to application.*
- (b) Applicants in Epping Forest District Council accommodation that is non-secure by virtue of Schedule 1 of the Housing Act 1985, excluding those referred to another local housing authority under S.198 of the Housing Act 1996, accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless, eligible for housing assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless.

Band 3

Applicants meeting the criteria of Band 4 (a) or (b), and one other criterion in Band 4 (which can also include (a) and (b)).

Band 4

- (a) Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application, needing one or more additional bedrooms.
- (b) Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application needing to move on moderate medical or welfare grounds or for reasons of disability, or needing to move to a particular locality in the District where failure to do so will result in them or others suffering hardship. **
- (c) Applicants accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless and eligible for housing assistance but not in priority need, living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to becoming homeless.

(d) Applicants of no fixed address, living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to being of no fixed address.

(e) Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application, and sharing accommodation with another household.

(f) Households including a child under the age of 15 living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application who have no access to a garden.

(g) Households including a child under the age of 5 living in the District for more than a year, immediately prior to application living in a flat or maisonette above ground floor.

Band 5

(a) Applicants living in the District for less than a year or outside the District in overcrowded, insanitary or unsatisfactory conditions.*

(b) Applicants living in the District for less than a year or outside the District needing to move on medical, welfare or hardship grounds or for reasons of disability.***

(c) Homeless people over 60 years of age in non-secure accommodation prior to receiving a decision under S.184 of the Housing Act 1996.

(d) All homeless people (by virtue of the Housing Act 1996) who are not eligible for Bands 1 to 4.

(e) Single homeless people accommodated in bed and breakfast hotels who in the view of the Head of Housing Services would benefit from the S.A.F.E Project or the Swan Floating Support Scheme.

(f) Applicants accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need but found to have become homeless intentionally.

(g) Applicants accepted by another local housing authority as homeless and eligible for assistance, including those in temporary accommodation secured by another authority.

(h) Applicants living in the District for less than a year or outside the District sharing accommodation with another household or needing one or more additional bedrooms.

(i) Households including a child under the age of 15 living in the District for less than a year or living outside the District with no access to a garden.

(j) Households including a child under 5 living in the District for less than a year or living outside the District living in a flat or maisonette above ground floor.

(k) Applicants who, in the opinion of the Council, have sufficient income and/or assets to enable them to purchase accommodation as set out in paragraph 8.5 of the Scheme.

Band 6

All other applicants

Draft of new Proposed Band 1 from the Implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme

(a) Applicants with Council or RSL tenancies in the District wanting to move to accommodation with fewer bedrooms.

*(b) Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application needing to move on strong medical or welfare grounds or for reasons of disability. ***

(c) Applicants accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless, eligible for housing assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless who are living in:

- Bed and breakfast accommodation secured by the Council, but excluding those referred to another local housing authority under S.198 of the Housing Act 1996.
- The Council's Homeless Persons Hostel, Norway House, for 3 months after the date of their homelessness decision under S.184 of the Housing Act 1996.
- Properties under the Council's "Fresh Start" "Brook Haven" "Hemnall House" or a Women's Refuge for 6 months after the date of their occupation in that property.

Where the Council has accepted a duty, applicants in these three categories will be able to participate in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme for a period of 8 weeks (4 cycles). If no successful expressions of interest are made the Council will make the applicant one offer of suitable secure accommodation. If the offer is refused, the Council's homelessness duty to provide accommodation will be discharged.

(d) Applicants whom the multi-agency referral panel for S.A.F.E. (Single Accommodation for Epping Forest) has notified the Council as having been on the project for at least 9 months and are ready to move on.

(e) Applicants living in the Epping Forest District for more than a year immediately prior to application residing in insanitary, overcrowded or unsatisfactory conditions. *

APPENDIX SEVEN

Organisation	Allocation Scheme Reference	Comment	Housing Portfolio Holder's Views/Comments

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Housing Allocations Scheme

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council is required, by virtue of Section 167 of the Housing Act 1996 to have an allocation scheme for determining priorities and the procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation. This Allocation Scheme has been formulated in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, the associated Code of Guidance and other relevant legislation.
- 1.2 In operating the Allocation Scheme the Council will have due regard to legislation which shall take precedence.

2. The Council's Policy on offering choice to housing applicants

- 2.1 The Council will offer housing applicants the opportunity to express preferences about;
- a) location of accommodation to be offered to them
 - b) type of accommodation to be offered to them
 - c) type of social landlord by whom they wished to be housed

3. The Housing Register

- 3.1 The Council is not legally obliged to maintain a Housing Register but has chosen to do so.
- 3.2 The Housing Register will be maintained by Housing Services at the Civic Offices in Epping.
- 3.3 The Housing Register will be open to all categories of person except those who are ineligible as defined at Paragraph 5.;
- 3.4 The Housing Register will be open to;
- a) applicants of 18 years of age and over
 - b) 16 and 17 year olds owed a full housing duty by a local housing authority under homelessness legislation.

4. The Allocation Scheme

- 4.1 Allocation of accommodation will be through the Housing Register in accordance with the provisions of the Allocations Scheme.
- 4.2 The Council recognises that there may be some exceptional situations not covered by the Allocation Scheme. In such instances, the Head of Housing Services will have delegated authority to make decisions, as he considers appropriate.

4.3 The Scheme will apply to vacancies in the Council's own housing stock and to vacancies in accommodation in the District belonging to RSLs for which the Council is required to make nominations.

4.4. The provisions of this Allocation Scheme will apply to applicants on the Council's Housing Register at the effective date of this Allocation Scheme as well as those who apply after the effective date.

4.5. The Allocation Scheme will not apply in the following cases;

- a) where a tenant succeeds to a secure tenancy on the death of a tenant
- b) where a tenancy is assigned to a person who would qualify to succeed to the secure tenant
- c) where a tenancy is assigned by way of an exchange
- d) where a tenancy is disposed through a tenancy transfer order
- e) where a move is dictated for housing management reasons (appendix 3 refers)

5. Ineligible Applicants

5.1 The following categories of applicant will be ineligible for the Housing Register;

- a) persons subject to immigration control (except those in classes prescribed by the Secretary of State as being eligible for an allocation of housing)
- b) persons not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (i.e. the U.K., Channel Islands, Isle of Man and the Irish Republic)
- c) persons (or a member of their household) who have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable as a tenant of the Council at the time of their application. Such behaviour is behaviour that would entitle a local housing authority to a possession order if there were a secure tenancy and includes serious rent arrears and breaches of tenancy conditions, damage and neighbour nuisance, amongst others. Applicants most likely to be rejected on these grounds are those who, in the last 3 years, have been evicted from a Council or RSL tenancy or have been issued with a Notice Seeking Possession or who are subject to an Anti-Social Behaviour Order or an Anti-Social Behaviour Contract.

5.2 If the Council decides that an applicant for housing is ineligible it will notify the applicant in writing of the decision and the grounds for it.

5.3 If an applicant is found to be ineligible for the Housing Register they may make a fresh application when the grounds for ineligibility no longer apply.

6. Application to the Housing Register

- 6.1 The Council will ensure that advice and information is available free of charge to persons in the District about the right to make an application for housing.
- 6.2 The advice and information will be provided by the Council, the 3 Citizens Advice Bureaux in the District and any other source able to give appropriate advice free of charge.
- 6.3 Housing applicants will be required to provide an original photograph to accompany their application. This photograph to be in 'passport style'.
- 6.4 Housing applicants will be required to sign a formal application for inclusion on the Housing Register and to provide written answers to such questions as the Council deems appropriate to allow an assessment of their entitlement to housing accommodation to be made.
- 6.5 Housing applicants will be required to provide documentary proof from two official sources of;
- a) their identity and
 - b) their current residence.
- 6.6 Required documents in respect of 6.4 above will be;
- a) birth certificate, current passport, current driving licence,
 - b) current tenancy agreement, current medical card, *recent utility bill/statement, *recent document or letter from a Government Department eg. Inland Revenue, Benefits Agency, Customs and Excise, Employment Service.
- *recent, means dated within the last three months.
- 6.7 In respect of all other persons included on their application, housing applicants will be required to provide documentary proof from two official sources of;
- a) identity and
 - b) current residence.
- 6.8 Required documents in respect of 6.7 above will be as set out in 6.6 above.
- 6.9 If required documents cannot be provided the Housing Needs Manager may authorise the acceptance of other documents.
- 6.10 Additional documentary evidence to substantiate an application for housing accommodation may be required as the Council considers appropriate.
- 6.11 Applications not properly completed or not accompanied by supporting documents will be returned to the applicant with a request for the missing information.

6.12 Any necessary assistance in making an application to the Housing Register will be available from Housing Services to people in the Epping Forest District who are likely to have difficulty in applying unless they have assistance.

7. Access to Information

7.1 Upon written request, applicants will be able to;

- a) receive a copy of their details entered on the Housing Register free of charge
- b) receive copies of documents provided by them
- c) have access to their file in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998
- d) have a copy of their full file, subject to payment of a £10 fee
- e) be informed in writing of any decision about the facts of their case and of their right to request a review of any such decision
- f) receive general information to enable them to assess;
 - (i) how their application is likely to be treated
 - (ii) whether accommodation appropriate to their needs is likely to be available and, if so, when.

8. Assessment of Priorities

8.1 Generally, the relative degree of priority to be awarded to applicants on the Housing Register will be assessed by reference to the Banding System set out in appendix 1.

8.2 Band 1 represents the highest priority and Band 7 represents the lowest.

8.3 Applicants will be allocated to bands according to their circumstances and as their circumstances change as appropriate. Where an applicant could arguably be placed in different bands, the most favourable band to the applicant will be used, except as in 8.5 below.

8.4 Applicants who move out of the Epping Forest District for more than a year will be treated as applicants who have not lived in the District for more than a year prior to application.

8.5 Applicants who, in the opinion of the Council, have sufficient income and/or assets to enable them to purchase accommodation will, generally, be placed in Band 6. The thresholds at which this criterion will apply are where;

- three times the gross household income, plus assets (including savings and property equity), exceeds £180,000 and the applicant qualifies for studio or 1 bedroom accommodation

- three times the gross household income , plus assets (including savings and property equity), exceeds £250,000 and the applicant qualifies for 2 bedroom accommodation or larger accommodation.

8.6 The Council reserves the right to move to the lowest band, any applicant (or member of their household) guilty of any behaviour affecting their suitability as a tenant of the Council. Such behaviour could include serious rent arrears, minor but persistent rent arrears, other breaches of tenancy or licence conditions, damage, neighbour nuisance, harassment or illegal activities. Applicants most likely to be moved to the lowest band are those under a Notice of Seeking Possession or Notice to Quit or who are subject to an Anti-Social Behaviour Order or Anti-Social Behaviour Contract or who have a demoted tenancy.

8.7 Applicants within each band will be prioritised in date order of application to the Housing Register.

8.8 Any vacancy, subject to 8.8 and 8.9 below, will be offered to the first applicant in Band 1 in need of that category of accommodation. Further allocations will be made through the band as necessary. If there are no suitable applicants in Band 1, offers will be made to applicants in Band 2 and so on.

8.9 The size of housing accommodation to be allocated to applicants on the Housing Register is set out in appendix 2.

8.10 The Council will operate some local lettings schemes and reserve some vacancies as detailed in appendix 4.

9. Joint and Single Tenancies

9.1 The Council may offer new tenants Introductory Tenancies.

9.2 Joint tenancies will be offered to;

- a) married couples, provided that both applicants are named on the application form, unless both parties request the tenancy to be granted in a sole name
- b) unmarried couples, providing that both request it and the partner of the lead applicant is registered on the application form
- c) adults living together as friends, providing that satisfactory documentary evidence is produced that they have shared a home continuously for the previous 12 months or both names have been included on the application since the date of registration
- d) applicants and their live-in carers, where the Council considers it to be justified.

In all other circumstances, single tenancies will be offered to the lead applicant.

10. Tenancy Start Dates

10.1 Most applicants will have been given an early opportunity to view the property they are being offered and to give the Council a decision. If they are interested in the tenancy they will either be advised by telephoned when the property is ready for letting or made a formal offer of the tenancy by first class post.

10.2 Generally, for properties becoming ready for letting on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the tenancy start date will be the following Monday. For properties becoming ready for letting on Thursdays or Fridays the tenancy start date will be the second Monday following. However, the Council will have regard to an applicant's personal circumstances and allow them a reasonable time to reach a decision about the accommodation offered to them.

11. Redecoration Vouchers Scheme

11.1 Internal decorations to a property are the tenant's responsibility. However, if a property offered to a housing applicant is, in the view of the inspecting officer, in need of redecoration, vouchers for decorating materials will be issued to the incoming tenant after they have signed the tenancy agreement, as a contribution towards costs.

11.2 The value of vouchers to be issued in respect of a particular property will be assessed by the inspecting officer by reference to the Council's Scheme of Redecoration Allowances. Details of maximum allowances which may be offered are set out in the table below.

Room	Allowance
Bedroom 1	£60
Bedroom 2	£60
Bedroom 3	£60
Bedroom 4	£60
Lounge	£60
Diner	£30
Kitchen	£20
Bathroom	£20
W.C.	£10
Hall/Stairs/Landing	£60
Lobby	£10

11.3 Vouchers will not be issued to Epping Forest Council tenants transferring from one property to another until the vacated property has been inspected. The value of the vouchers to be issued in respect of the new property may be reduced by an equivalent amount to those to be issued in respect of the former property.

12. Removal Expenses

12.1 The Council will not meet the cost of housing applicants' removal expenses except as set out in 12.2 below.

12.2 Where an Epping Forest District Council tenant moves from a 3 or 4 bedroom property to a 1 bedroom property owned by the Council, they will be offered £500 to cover removal costs plus £500 for each bedroom 'released', subject to a maximum payment of £2,000.

13. Renewal of Applications and Deletions from the Housing Register

13.1 In order to keep the Housing Register up to date, applicants will be required to renew their application every year.

13.2 Applicants will be sent a form to return to the Council for this purpose.

13.3 If applicants fail to return their renewal form they will be given one written reminder, sent to their last address notified to the Housing Needs Section. If they then fail to renew, they will be deleted from the Housing Register and given written notification to that effect.

13.4 Applicants allocated and accepting accommodation through the Allocation Scheme will be deleted from the Housing Register and will need to make a fresh application if they wish the Council to consider a further request for rehousing from them.

13.5 Applicants not responding to requests for information will not have their applications processed.

14. Decisions on the Allocations Process

14.1 The Council gives delegated authority to the Head of Housing Services to take decisions on the allocation process. In turn, the Head of Housing Services delegates most decisions to staff in the Housing Needs Section.

15. Reviews

15.1 If applicants consider they have been unfairly or unreasonably treated having regard to the provisions of the Allocation Scheme they have the right to request a review of their case.

15.2 In the first instance, subject to 15.4 below, applicants must appeal in writing to the Assistant Head of Housing Services (Operations) and will receive a written response.

15.3 If, having received the response of the Assistant Head of Housing Services (Operations), an applicant wishes to make a further appeal, it will be to the Housing Appeals Panel, comprising District Councillors.

15.4 Where the Assistant Head of Housing Services (Operations) had a significant involvement in a decision in respect of a person's housing application, the appeal will be considered directly by the Housing Appeals Panel.

16. Equal Opportunities

16.1 The Council is committed to equal opportunities in the provision of its housing services. It will seek to ensure that no housing applicant receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of religion, disability, sex, race, colour or nationality.

16.2 The Council will have regard to and implement the provisions of the Race Relations Code of Practice in Rented Housing, which it has adopted. The Council will also abide by the Race Relations Act 1976.

16.3 As an aid to ensuring that applicants are not discriminated against on the grounds of race, through one of its Overview and Scrutiny Committees the Council will monitor the racial origin of

a) applicants on the Housing Register

b) applicants allocated housing.

16.4 The practices and procedures of Housing Services will be monitored by the Head of Housing Services to ensure that they do not discriminate directly or indirectly. Changes will be made if it is established that practices or procedures may be contravening the Race Relations Act 1976.

17. False and Withheld Information

17.1 The Council may prosecute any housing applicant who, in connection with the allocation process

a) knowingly or recklessly makes a statement which is false

b) knowingly withholds information that the Council has reasonably required them to give.

17.2 The Council may seek possession of a property under Ground 5 of Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985 if a tenant has induced the Council to grant a tenancy by knowingly or recklessly making a false statement.

18. Information on the Allocations Scheme

18.1 The Council will

a) publish a summary of its Allocation Scheme in a leaflet and provide copies free of charge on request to any member of the public

b) provide copies of the Allocation Scheme free of charge at the

(i) Housing Needs Section, Civic Offices, Epping

(ii) Area Housing Office, 63 The Broadway, Loughton

(iii) Limes Farm Housing Office, 661a Copperfield, Chigwell

c) enable copies of the Allocation Scheme to be downloaded on the internet from the Council's web-site:

www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing

18.2 Within a reasonable period of time, the Council will notify applicants on the Housing Register of an alteration to the Allocation Scheme reflecting a major change of policy, explaining in general terms the effect of the change.

19. Review of Allocation Scheme

19.1 The Allocation Scheme will be reviewed annually by the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel which shall recommend any changes to the Council's Cabinet.

20. Consultation on Changes to the Allocation Scheme

20.1 Before adopting a new Allocation Scheme or making an alteration reflecting a major change of policy in an existing Allocation Scheme, the Council will notify every RSL with which it has nomination arrangements of the change and afford them a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposals.

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Bandings

Band 1

- Applicants accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless, eligible for housing assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless, in supervised accommodation secured by the Council but excluding those referred to another local housing authority under S.198 of the Housing Act 1996, provided that, generally, no allocation be made to an applicant within 6 months of their being afforded supervised temporary accommodation.
- Applicants whom the multi-agency referral panel for S.A.F.E. (Single Accommodation for Epping Forest) has notified the Council as having been on the project for at least 9 months and are ready to move on.
- Applicants living in the Epping Forest District for more than a year immediately prior to application residing in insanitary, overcrowded or unsatisfactory conditions. *
- Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application needing to move on strong medical or welfare grounds or for reasons of disability. **
- Applicants with Council or RSL tenancies in the District wanting to move to accommodation with fewer bedrooms.

Band 2

- Applicants accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless and eligible for housing assistance but not in priority need, living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to becoming homeless.
- Applicants of no fixed address living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to being of no fixed address.
- Applicants having to live apart from other members of their household because of lack of accommodation but not for personal reasons (ie family disputes) where the applicant or their partner have lived in the Epping Forest District for more than a year immediately prior to application.

Band 3

- Applicants, excluding those referred to another local housing authority under S.198 of the Housing Act 1996, accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless, eligible for housing assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless, not in supervised accommodation secured by the Council. (Applicants in this category to move to Band 1 after one year).
- Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application with valid Notices to Quit on Assured Shorthold Tenancies or tied accommodation.

Band 4

- Applicants meeting more than one of the criteria in Band 5.

Band 5

- Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application and sharing accommodation with another household.
- Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application needing one or more additional bedrooms.
- Applicants living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application needing to move on moderate medical or welfare grounds or for reasons of disability or needing to move to a particular locality in the District where failure to do so will result in them or others suffering hardship.**
- Households including a child under the age of 15 living in the District for more than a year immediately prior to application who have no access to a garden.
- Households including a child under the age of 5 living in the district for more than a year immediately prior to application living in a flat or maisonette above ground floor.

Band 6

- Applicants accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need but found to have become homeless intentionally.
- Applicants accepted by another local housing authority as homeless and eligible for assistance, including those in temporary accommodation secured by another authority.
- Applicants living in the District for less than a year or outside the District in overcrowded, insanitary or unsatisfactory conditions.*
- Applicants living in the District for less than a year or outside the District needing to move on medical, welfare or hardship grounds or for reasons of disability.***
- Households including a child under the age of 15 living in the District for less than a year or living outside the District with no access to a garden.
- Households including a child under 5 living in the District for less than a year or living outside the District living in a flat or maisonette above ground floor.
- Applicants living in the District for less than a year or outside the District sharing accommodation with another household or needing one or more additional bedrooms.

Band 7

- All other applicants

*Where the permitted number, in accordance with the provisions of S. 326 of the Housing Act 1985 is exceeded, or the property is unfit, in a serious state of disrepair, of poor internal or external arrangement, or the property has been classified as having at least one Category 1 Housing Hazard under the Housing Act 2004 or is lacking one or more of the following; kitchen facilities, inside W.C., utility supplies.

**Medical priority to be determined by one of the Council's Medical Advisers or a company commissioned by the Council to provide medical advice on written evidence and taking into account all known facts relating to the application. Welfare and hardship grounds to be assessed on written evidence by the Housing Needs Manager, in consultation with one of the Council's Medical Advisers and one other member of the Housing Needs Section as appropriate. Welfare issues will encompass care and support needs and social needs, for instance, where a secure base is required for a care-leaver or any other vulnerable person to build a stable life or where a person needs to move to make a fresh start to recover from the effects of violence. Hardship may also include a need to move to give or receive care as well as for access to specialist medical treatment or to take up a particular offer of employment or training opportunity.

***Written medical evidence to be accepted by staff in the Housing Needs Section without referral to one of the Council's Medical Advisers. Welfare and hardship grounds to be assessed on written evidence by the Housing Needs Manager.

Sizes of Properties to be Allocated

The sizes of properties allocated to applicants on the Housing Register will be based on the composition of their household, generally in accordance with the following table.

Property size	Household Composition
Studio	Single persons
1 bedroom	Single persons or 2 people without children
2 bedroom	Applicants with 1 child Applicants with 2 children of the same sex
3 bedroom	Applicants with 2 children of opposite sex Applicants with 3 or 4 children
4 bedroom	Applicants with 4 or more children
5 bedroom *	Applicants with 5 or more children

*It should be noted the Council has very few properties with 5 bedrooms in its housing stock

It should be noted in cases where residence of children is shared, where one parent has accommodation available to them comprising at least 2 bedrooms, the other parent, generally, will be afforded 1 bedroom accommodation.

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Transfers for Housing Management Purposes

Transfers for housing management purposes include;

- moves to facilitate major repairs or refurbishment of a property
- moves where property is required to be demolished for safety or redevelopment purposes
- moves in respect of the Council's policy for successor tenants under occupying accommodation
- other moves of a similar nature as determined by the Head of Housing Services

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Allocation Quotas/Local Lettings Plans/ /Reserved Properties/Homelessness

Allocation Quotas or Local Lettings Plans for Housing Association Developments

For some large affordable housing schemes that a housing association develops and/or manages it may be appropriate to look at Allocation Quotas or Local Lettings Plans.

An Allocation Quota is a quota of applicants within specific categories agreed between the Council and the housing association that replaces the usual criteria for nominating applicants.

A Local Letting Plan is an arrangement for the nomination of applicants with specific recognised needs related to the type or design of the new affordable housing.

Where vacancies arise in properties that have been built in rural localities under exceptional planning arrangements (Section 106 Agreements), only applicants who comply with the requirement to have a connection with the locality can be considered.

Local Lettings Plans for Council Housing

Some of the Council's properties have been designated as being particularly suitable for older tenants. This is usually where there is a scheme manager or where an emergency alarm has been fitted in a property. Where vacancies arise in such properties, applicants over 60 years of age will be given preference for them.

The Council has one very sheltered housing scheme for frail older people. Nominations for vacancies at this scheme will be through a multi-disciplinary panel on which the Council will have a housing representative.

Where properties have been purpose built or adapted for tenants with specific needs, for instance, physical disabilities, preference will be given to applicants from households in need of that particular type of accommodation.

Reserved Vacancies

The Council will reserve such vacancies as it considers appropriate to fulfil commitments as set out below;

- up to 5 properties per annum for public sector key workers
- up to 5 properties at any one time for key Epping Forest District Council employees
- for applicants to whom the Council has accepted a duty under the provisions of the Rent (Agricultural) Act 1976
- to reaccommodate managers of the Council's warden-assisted properties as necessary

- up to 2 properties per annum for nominees under the Essex Womens' Refuges Mobility Scheme
- 'top up' or move on accommodation for the floating support scheme operated in conjunction with Cygnet Housing Association.
- move on accommodation for supported housing schemes elsewhere in the county where Epping Forest residents have received placements
- for applicants leaving prison who were Epping Forest District Council tenants immediately prior to being taken into custody
- for applicants who are occupants of an Epping Forest District Council property where a successor tenant has died and they would have succeeded to the tenancy had there not already been a succession. Such applicants to be treated in respect of the property to be allocated by the same criteria as for successor tenants as follows;

where there is no underoccupation – allocation of the property currently occupied

where there is underoccupation – allocation of an appropriate sized property, except that where there is only one spare bedroom and the survivor has lived in the property for more than 10 years or is over 60 years of age, they be allowed to remain if encouragement to move fails.

Homelessness

To reduce the risk of repeat homelessness, wherever possible, homeless households to whom the Council has accepted a full housing duty will initially be offered supported temporary accommodation, as appropriate, as follows:

- At Hemnall House, Epping. This is owned by the Council and tenants receive support on an outreach basis from the managers of Norway House, North Weald
- The Swan(London) Scheme. This is made up of individual bed-sit and one bedroom properties owned by the Council and leased to a housing association. Staff from the housing association provide tenants with support
- The Fresh START Scheme. This is made up of privately owned properties in the Epping Forest area, leased to a housing association. Staff from the housing association provide tenants with support
- At a Women's Refuge. This is supported accommodation for women who have been subjected to domestic violence.

Note: where it is not possible to place homeless households in supported tenancies, vacancies in the Council's general needs housing stock will be used but these are likely to be smaller than properties offered to applicants on a long-term basis.

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 31 October 2006

Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D Stallan

Subject: Housing Service Strategies – (1) Equality and Diversity; and (2) Empty Council Dwellings

**Officer contact for further information: (1) Roger Wilson (01992 564419)
(2) Alan Hall (01992 564004)**

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry



Recommendations:

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers the Housing Service Strategies on Equality and Diversity and Empty Council Dwellings, attached as appendices, and provides any comments for incorporation prior to their adoption by the Housing Portfolio Holder.

Report

1. Housing Service Strategies were originally produced around 5 years ago in accordance with an agreed standard framework, and have since been increased and updated. The Housing Service Strategies give more detail than the Council's main Housing Strategy on the various housing services provided. In total, 16 Housing Service Strategies have been produced to date.

2. The Strategies are produced to a common format that set out how individual housing services will be delivered. They have assisted Housing Services in achieving the Charter Mark award for customer service excellence, ISO 9001:2000 Quality Accreditation, and in a number of cases have been important to meeting the minimum requirement for Supporting People funding under the conditions of the contract.

3. The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider a new Housing Service Strategy on Equality and Diversity and an updated Housing Service Strategy on Empty Council Dwellings, which are attached as appendices to the report and provide any comments for incorporation prior to the adoption by the Housing Portfolio Holder.

Consultation

4. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation is due to be consulted on both Service Strategies at its meeting on 17 October 2006. In addition, the Hate Crime Strategic Group will be consulted at its next meeting (date to be arranged) on the Housing Service Strategy on Equality and Diversity. The outcome of both consultations will be reported orally at the meeting.

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Decision by Housing Portfolio Holder



**Epping Forest
District Council**

**Report reference: C/ /2006
Date of report: 1 November 2006**

Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D Stallan **Authors: (1) Roger Wilson (01992 564419)
(2) Alan Hall (01992 564004)
Committee Secretary: Gary Woodhall**

Subject: Housing Services Strategies on (1) Equality and Diversity; and (2) Empty Council Dwellings

Decision:

That, following consideration by the Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Housing Services Strategies on Equality and Diversity and Empty Council Dwellings, attached as appendices, be approved and adopted.

ADVISORY NOTICE: <i>A Portfolio Holder may not take a decision on a matter on which he/she has declared a prejudicial interest. A Portfolio Holder with a personal interest must declare that interest when exercising delegated powers.</i>	
I have read and approve/do not approve (delete as appropriate) the above decision:	
Comments/further action required:	
Signed:	Date:
<i>Personal interest declared by Portfolio Holder/ conflict of interest declared by any other consulted Cabinet Member:</i>	<i>Dispensation granted by Standards Committee: Yes/No or n/a</i>
Office use only: Call-in period begins:	Expiry of Call-in period:

**After completion, one copy of this pro forma should be returned to
Democratic Services IMMEDIATELY**

Reason for decision:

1. The two service strategies set out in detail the approach the Council will take to the delivery of these two aspects of the housing service. They also assist Housing Services in continuing to achieve the Charter Mark award for customer service excellence, and ISO 9001:2000 Quality Accreditation, and help meet the required standard for Supporting People funding.

Options considered and rejected:

2. Not to approve and adopt the Housing Services Strategies.

<p>Initialed as original copy by Portfolio Holder:</p>

Background Report:

1. Housing Service Strategies have been in place for many years and give more detail than the Council's main Housing Strategy on the various housing services provided. Prior to being approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder, they are considered in detail by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and other interested agencies. In total, 16 Housing Service Strategies have been produced to date.
2. The Strategies are produced to a common format that set out how individual housing services will be delivered. They have assisted Housing Services in achieving the Charter Mark award for customer service excellence, ISO 9001:2000 Quality Accreditation, and in a number of cases have been important to meeting the minimum requirement for Supporting People funding under the conditions of the contract.
3. The Housing Portfolio Holder is asked to approve and adopt a new Housing Service Strategy on Equality and Diversity and an updated Housing Service Strategy on Empty Council Dwellings, which are attached as appendices to the report.

Consultation

4. The Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation considered both service strategies at their meetings held on the 31 and 17 October respectively. In addition, the Hate Crime Strategic Group has been consulted on the Housing Service Strategy on Equality and Diversity. Their comments have been included within the Services Strategies.

Resource implications:

Budget Provision:N/A

Personnel: N/A

Land: N/A

Council Plan/BVPP Ref : Meeting Housing Need

Relevant statutory powers: As set out in the housing service strategies

Background papers: Nil

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act: As set out in the housing service strategies

Epping Forest District Council

**HOUSING SERVICE STRATEGY ON
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Strategy sets out Housing Services’ approach to promoting equality and diversity in line with the Council’s corporate Equality and Diversity Policy and its statutory duties as a public authority to promote equality. This includes actions designed to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity
- recognise and value the needs and contributions of individuals and identifiable groups within the wider community served by Housing Services
- ensure that everyone who needs housing advice and services is fully able to access them
- promote understanding and tolerance of different cultures and good relations within the communities served by Housing Services.

1.2 Housing Services’ Equality and Diversity Strategy is consistent with the Council’s role as a fair employer. Further details about the Council’s Equal Opportunities Policy relating to employment may be obtained from the Head of Human Resources and Performance Management.

1.3 Dealing effectively with all forms of discrimination, is an important role for the Council as social landlord. This Strategy is linked to the Housing Service Strategies on Harassment and Anti-Social Behaviour.

1.4 Housing Services is also well placed to promote equality in its role as Local strategic Housing Authority working in partnership with the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to develop and manage affordable housing in the district.

- 1.5 Furthermore, the Council has a role in supporting vulnerable adults in the community, older people and those who are homeless, who may be more at risk of discrimination and unfair treatment and less able to challenge it.
- 1.6 As with related issues, such as responding to racist, homophobic and other anti-social behaviours, the Council works in partnership through the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership with Essex Police, Essex County Council, Essex Race Equality Council, Victim Support, and other relevant agencies.
- 1.7 The Strategy has been developed in accordance with the provisions of equality and housing legislation and, where relevant, the associated codes of practice.
- 1.8 The Equality and Diversity Strategy has been developed in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Association which is working to enhance equality and diversity.
- 1.9 The Equality and Diversity Strategy was approved by the Council's Housing Portfolio Holder on xxxxxx following consultation with the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council has a legal responsibility not to discriminate on grounds of race, sex and disability in its provision of goods, facilities, services and premises.
- 2.2 In addition, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires all public authorities to take a more pro-active approach, which entails promoting equality of opportunity, eliminating unlawful racial discrimination and promoting good relations between persons of different racial groups. These three elements are combined to form a 'general duty'. There are also specific duties, which includes a requirement to prepare and publish a Race Equality Scheme setting out:
 - A prioritised list of relevant functions and policies
 - Monitoring arrangements to check for any adverse impact on promoting race equality
 - Impact assessment and consultation arrangements to assess the likely impact of proposed functions and policies
 - Publication of the results of monitoring, assessments, and consultation and any changes made to functions and policies arising
 - Arrangements for ensuring public access to information and Council services
 - Staff training.
- 2.3 Similar statutory duties will apply in relation to disability (from December 2006) and gender (from April 2007).

- 2.4 The Council developed and agreed its Race Equality Scheme, including an action plan, in 2002. Since then, the Council has conducted a review of all relevant services and assessed how well it is achieving its equality performance targets. This resulted in service specific action plans plus a Corporate Equality Action Plan in 2006. Whilst the current statutory requirement relates to race equality, other aspects were considered throughout this process, e.g. potential inequality relating to gender, religion, disability, age, etc.
- 2.5 As part of this review process, Housing Services undertook equality impact assessments and developed equality action plans for all of its service areas as follows:
- Housing Needs
 - Housing Assets & Repairs
 - Housing Management
 - Older Peoples Services
 - Housing Strategy
 - Housing Information
- 2.6 The purpose of these assessments was to identify:
- Consultation and monitoring arrangements that were already in place for existing services and identify any gaps
 - Arrangements required for conducting impact assessments and formal consultation processes for proposed policies
 - The accessibility of its services
 - The need to raise awareness and understanding of equality and diversity issues amongst tenants
 - Staff training needs
 - Which external organisations (public, private or voluntary) were working in partnership with Housing Services to deliver services and the extent to which they were contributing to the general duty.
 - Overall impact in terms of promoting equality, eliminating unlawful discrimination and promoting good relations between different sectors of the community.
- 2.7 The purpose of the action plans was to address any shortfalls in these areas and all the action items are scheduled to be delivered by April 2007 or earlier. These are summarised under the relevant headings in this Strategy. Actions which need to be tackled on a corporate basis were carried into the Corporate Equality Action Plan.

3. Legal Framework

- 3.1 The following legislation has particular implications for services delivered by public authorities, including Housing Services, in relation to equality and diversity.

3.2 Human Rights Act 1998

It is unlawful for a public authority to act in a way that is incompatible with a Convention right. The Act includes the following rights to:

- Private and family life, home and correspondence (Article 8)
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion and to manifest their religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance (Article 9)
- Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family (Article 12)
- The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth to be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status (Article 14).

3.3 Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and Race Relations Act 1976 - Provision of Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises

It is unlawful for anyone (including specifically local authorities) concerned with the provision of goods, facilities or services to the public to discriminate on grounds of race or sex:

- By refusing or deliberately omitting to provide them
- As regard to their quality
- The manner or terms on which they are provided
- Irrespective of whether the goods, facilities or services are provided for payment or free of charge
- In relation the letting or disposal of premises.
- Exceptions include:
- Single sex establishments providing special care or supervision (e.g. women's refuges).
- Facilities for single sex users in order to preserve privacy and decency.

3.4 Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

Public authorities are required to meet a general duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good relations between persons of different racial groups.

The Race Relations Code of Practice in Rented Housing gives specific guidance in relation to race equality in relation to providing Housing Services.

3.5 Equality Act 2006

From April 2007, public authorities will be required to meet a general duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful gender discrimination (this also covers transsexuals)
- Promote equality of opportunity between women and men

This Act will also extend the legislation relating to the provision of goods, facilities, services and premises to cover religion, belief and sexual orientation.

3.6 Civil Partnership Act 2004

This Act provides rights and responsibilities that are broadly similar to married couples for same sex partners who have legally registered a civil partnership.

3.7 Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – Provision of Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises

It is unlawful to discriminate against disabled people by:

- Refusing to provide a service without justification.
- Providing a service to a lesser standard without justification.
- Providing a service on worse terms without justification.
- Failing to make reasonable adjustments to the way services are provided for disabled people.
- Failing to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of service premises, to overcome physical barriers to access.

3.8 Disability Discrimination Act 2005

From December 2006, public authorities will be required to meet a general duty to:

- Eliminate discrimination and harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- Take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- Encourage participation by disabled persons in public life.

4. Relationship with Other Documents, Strategies, Policies and Procedures

4.1 The following Housing Service Strategies, policies and procedures are relevant to this Equality and Diversity Strategy:

- Homelessness Strategy
- Housing Service Strategy on Harassment
- Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy
- Equality and Diversity Action Plans
- Housing Charter
- Housing Allocations Scheme
- Housing Appeals Procedures
- Standard Tenancy Agreements

4.2 The following corporate strategies, policies and procedures also have links with this Strategy:

- Corporate Equality and Diversity Policy
- Corporate Equality Action Plan
- The Council's Race Equality Scheme
- The Council's Harassment and Bullying Policy including harassment procedures for its employees
- Staff equality, diversity and dignity training programme
- Equality monitoring statistics and Census data
- Corporate Compliments and Complaints procedure

4.3 The following strategies, policies and procedures, delivered in partnership with other agencies, are also relevant to this strategy:

- Local Supporting People Strategy
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Hate Crime reporting procedures
- Guidelines for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults from Abuse
- Floating Support Scheme for vulnerable single adults
- Stay Safe Scheme for women experiencing domestic violence
- Mediation services (provided by Relate and Mediation Norwich)

5. Aims and Objectives

5.1 Housing Services is committed to:

- Ensuring that its public services are fully accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of all groups and communities served.
- Working proactively, and in partnership with others, to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unfair discrimination and build cohesive communities.

5.2 The objectives of this Strategy are to:

- Develop a cohesive approach to equality and diversity within Housing Services and organisations working in partnership or contracted to supply services.
- Ensure the Council, and other bodies delivering housing services, meet their statutory requirements.

- Raise public awareness about Housing Services' approach to equality and diversity; to promote greater understanding and tolerance among residents and tenants; to celebrate diversity and to enhance good community relations.
- Ensure any allegations of unfair discrimination are properly and promptly investigated by people who understand the issues.
- Ensure that councillors, Housing Services staff and associated persons understand this Strategy and have received the necessary training.
- Ensure the effectiveness of the Strategy is monitored and reviewed.

5.3 To achieve this, Housing Services will:

- Establish monitoring systems and processes to gather equality data on service users and consultees which can be analysed to assess any adverse impact by decisions, policies, procedures and practices to ensure they are non-discriminatory.
- Seek feedback from staff, partner organisations and service users on policies, procedures and practices that affect them.
- Encourage diverse involvement and participation in consultation exercises and in membership of bodies such as the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Federation and Social Club Committees.
- Review accessibility of information, services and premises, and make reasonable adjustments where required.
- Conduct equality impact assessments and formally consult on proposed policies prior to making decisions about their implementation.
- Publicise the outcome of monitoring, consultation and impact assessments.
- Provide equality/diversity training for its employees.
- Raise awareness among service users, non-users and partner organisations about what this Strategy means and how it is being implemented.
- Investigate and take action to address allegations of unfair discrimination.
- Regularly review the effectiveness of this Strategy (at least every three years).

5.4 The target audience for this Strategy is:

- Epping Forest District Councillors
- Housing Services managers and employees.
- Tenants and leaseholders of Council property and other people living in the same communities, including residents of Council-run accommodation such as sheltered housing, hostels for homeless people, etc.
- All organisations working with the Council in delivering housing services or in providing support to people who may suffer from inequality and unfair discrimination.

6. Consultation on this Strategy

6.1 People likely to be affected by the Equality and Diversity Strategy and those who will be involved in implementing the Housing Services' Equality Action Plan have been consulted on this Strategy prior to its implementation. This includes the following:

- Epping Forest Tenants' and Leaseholders' Federation.
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Network Group which forms part of the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership.
- The three Citizens' Advice Bureaux in the District.
- Operational Managers and key staff responsible for each aspect of Housing Services.
- The Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Housing Portfolio Holder.

7. Terminology and Examples of Discrimination

7.1 Equality is about making sure that every person has equal and fair access to services irrespective of personal attributes, such as their race, gender, disability, age, religion, sexuality, etc. Discrimination may be open and deliberate or covert and unintentional - for example a particular policy, decision, process, criterion, requirement or practice may unintentionally prevent some people from doing or accessing something which they legitimately should be able to do.

7.2 Direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably because of their ethnic origin, colour, nationality, sex, marital status, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, etc. In most of these cases, such discrimination would be unlawful. (Harassment on such grounds is a form of direct discrimination.) However, some forms of direct discrimination are necessary and can be justified such as the provision of a refuge restricted to women who are at risk of domestic violence or services specifically designed to help older or disabled residents.

7.3 Discrimination can also occur for reasons that are not covered by the law. For example, people may be treated less favourably because of their appearance (height, weight, attractiveness, how they dress, etc.), how they communicate (their accent, verbal skills, etc.), their lifestyle (relationships, habits, occupation, educational achievement, etc.) and any other personal attribute. People are more likely to suffer from discrimination if they are perceived to be different from the majority group or they have less power and are less able to challenge discrimination.

- 7.4 Indirect discrimination is where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice is applied equally to everyone, but it puts people from one race/sex/religion etc. at greater disadvantage than others. If the discriminatory effect cannot be objectively justified (or it is a disproportionate means of achieving a legitimate end), then as with direct discrimination, it may be unlawful. For example, if Housing Services only ever provided information in English, people who cannot speak or read English could suffer indirect discrimination by not being able to find out what services are available. (To avoid such discrimination, translation or interpreter facilities are available on request).
- 7.5 Positive action is allowed in certain circumstances – section 35 of the Race Relations Act allows housing organisations to make special provision for particular racial groups in service provision.
- 7.6 Diversity is concerned with recognising and valuing difference in its broadest sense. It is about creating a culture and practices that recognise, respect, value and harness differences for the benefit of the community, the organisation and the individual. Diversity encompasses factors covered by legislation, such as age, gender, race, sexuality, disability, and religion, as well as other factors such as appearance, lifestyle, education and socio-economic status.
- 7.7 Equality and diversity are not inter-changeable but are inter-dependent. Equality of opportunity does not happen where difference is not recognised and valued.
- 7.8 Race is defined by the Race Relations Act 1976 as including colour, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origin. People who are more likely to suffer from racial discrimination are those from minority ethnic groups such as:
- Black people who are African, Caribbean, Asian or people of mixed heritage.
 - White people such as Eastern Europeans, Jews, Sikhs, Gypsies and Irish Travellers.
- 7.9 The 2001 Census showed that, in the Epping Forest District, 8.7% of the population are from a minority ethnic group (including dual heritage), with the largest single group being Indian. The census does not break down the number of white minority ethnic groups residing in the District, but this includes, among others, Italian communities, Gypsies and Irish Travellers.
- 7.10 Racism – The MacPherson Report, which followed the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, provided the following definitions:
- “Racism in general terms consists of conduct or words or practice which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. In its more subtle form it is as damaging as in its overt form.”*
- 7.11 Institutional racism is described as:
- “The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping.”*

- 7.12 Religion - this includes any religious or similar philosophical belief (which is likely to include a form of collective worship, a clear belief system and a profound belief affecting the way of life or view of the world). Religion can define who you are, how you view the world around you and how you interact within it. The largest minority religious groups in the District are Muslim and Jewish (2001 Census). There are various religious customs and requirements in relation to everyday living. For example, many religions include a requirement to wash in free-flowing water before and after certain functions, which means that having access to a shower is more of a necessity for some people than others.
- 7.13 Disability – a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A few examples include: learning disabilities, some long-term medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy), progressive illnesses (e.g. cancer, multiple sclerosis, HIV, Parkinson's disease), physical impairments (e.g. musculoskeletal disorders, Chrone's disease, heart conditions), mental impairments (e.g. schizophrenia, manic depression, phobias which have a substantial effect on a person's life), facial disfigurement, sensory impairments (e.g. blindness, impaired hearing). It can be seen that many disabilities are not generally visible and people may need specially adapted facilities, support or services for reasons that are not always obvious to others.
- 7.14 Reasonable adjustments are required by the Disability Discrimination Act to the way services are provided for disabled people and/or to the physical features of premises to overcome physical barriers to access. Whether specific adjustments are regarded as 'reasonable' depends on a number of factors including the size and resources of the organisation, the extent to which the adjustment removes any disadvantage caused by a person's disability and other factors, e.g. any legal or practical constraints relating to the premises. Examples could include: providing materials in different reading formats (on request), improving lighting, providing an induction loop or making changes to a premises such as installing ramps, a lift, accessible toilets, automatic doors, wider parking bays, etc.
- 7.15 Sexism - is discrimination, prejudice or oppression based on gender. It can be directed towards individuals such as comments and jokes that demean women, discrimination in the workplace or when delivering services or by violence e.g. sexual assault, domestic abuse. Sexism is usually experienced by women because men often have greater power, e.g. in society, the workplace, religion and in many homes. However, individual men may suffer sexism e.g. where they are employed in typical female occupations or in relation to roles seen as female, such as childcare.
- 7.16 Examples of institutional sexism include:
- Processes or attitudes that assume that the man is the main decision maker or higher earner when providing goods and services to couples.
 - Unintended barriers to women's participation in activities e.g. by having meetings in the early evenings when women with family care responsibilities are busy providing the evening meal or putting children to bed.

- Organisational decisions and practices based on an assumption of male superiority such as restricting women from access to resources or from tackling high risk challenges or high profile tasks.
- Unequal pay where financial rewards for 'male' occupations are typically higher than for 'female' occupations requiring the same degree of knowledge and skill.

7.17 Homophobia - is the irrational fear of people who are, or perceived to be gay, lesbian or bisexual. Homophobia can lead to prejudice, discrimination and harassment, sometimes violence, based on an individual's sexual orientation.

7.18 Ageism - is discrimination or prejudice based on age and is often associated with the stereotyping of older people as being physically and mentally weak and incompetent, set in their ways and dependent. The status, roles and aspirations of older people are frequently diminished by society. People at the other end of the age spectrum may also suffer from ageist attitudes by not being taken seriously or considered suitable for positions of responsibility or leadership.

8. Complaints of Discrimination

8.1 If a person, living in or near Council provided accommodation, feels that they have experienced unfair discrimination in the way they have been treated by the Council, or other bodies acting on behalf of the Council, they have the right to raise this and have the matter investigated. Options for dealing with alleged discrimination include:

- Seek advice – via an experienced body such as Epping Forest Housing Services, housing associations, the Citizens Advice Bureaux, Victim Support, South Essex Switchboard (for homophobic incidents) or Essex Racial Equality Council.
- Raise the matter informally – by contacting an Epping Forest District Councillor or a Housing Services' officer to request that the matter be investigated. An explanation may indicate that there was an objective and fair rationale behind the decision, policy, practice, etc.
- Formal complaint – if a person is not satisfied with the response to their informal enquiry or they wish to submit a formal complaint in the first place, this will be progressed in accordance with the Council's Compliments and Complaints Procedure. This is explained in the Council's Compliments and Complaints booklet, available from the Council's offices.
- Investigation – all formal complaints of discrimination will be investigated and the complainant will be informed, in writing, of the outcome.

- Complaints monitoring – all formal complaints of discrimination or otherwise and the outcomes of investigations will be monitored and reported half yearly to the Housing Management Team. In order to ensure that certain sections of the community are not suffering from unfair discrimination, all those who submit a complaint will be asked to complete an equality monitoring form. Therefore, monitoring will record the types of people who feel they are experiencing discrimination as well as the types of discrimination being complained of.

9. Consultation of Service Users

- 9.1 Housing Services has a duty to involve and consult anyone likely to be affected by its policies in order to make sure people from particular sectors of the community (e.g. minority ethnic groups, people living according to different religions or cultural traditions, single parents, large families, gay couples, etc.) will not be adversely affected or, where this is unavoidable, that such impact is proportionate and lawful.
- 9.2 Housing Services' approach to consultation is being enhanced as a result of the 2005 equality review by the following:
- All Council partners are consulted on Housing Strategies, policies and procedures affecting them, through the most appropriate means.
 - Prospective tenants are consulted, during the Accompanied Viewing process, about their accommodation requirements as affected by e.g. their religion, disability, family circumstances, etc.
 - Customer exit surveys are to be introduced to measure tenants' and leaseholders' satisfaction with the services they have received.
 - Feedback is sought from users and non-users e.g. via the website, to assist in developing housing information and tenant participation initiatives.

10. Involvement and Participation of Service Users

- 10.1 Housing Services has a duty to enhance community cohesion and to ensure that representative bodies reflect the diversity of their communities, as far as possible. To achieve this, Housing Services will proactively encourage residents and tenants from different sectors of the community to become involved and participate in bodies such as the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Federation, Residents Associations and Social Club Committees.
- 10.2 People who are currently under-represented in such activities include younger people, single parents and people who live in rural areas. Methods such as rural initiatives and targeted participation activities are being considered to encourage a more representative cross-section of the community to become actively involved in tenant activities.
- 10.3 On-going support, including equality/diversity training, will be made available to assist those people understand the issues covered by this Equality and Diversity Strategy and the Harassment Strategy. If necessary, translation services will be used to enhance communication with members who do not speak or read English well. Support will be provided by Housing Services (or partner organisations) for individuals willing to participate in voluntary Housing groups should they be faced with any problems associated with their role.

10.4 A key area for Housing Services' interaction with service users is in relation to supported housing. The Council will consult service user representatives annually on the Districts local Supporting People Action Plan, and undertake a more extensive consultation on revisions to the strategy itself every three years.

11. Monitoring

- 11.1 Monitoring involves collecting, analysing and evaluating information to measure performance, progress and change. It includes quantitative data (such as numbers of people from different ethnic groups who use a particular service) and qualitative data such as feedback from service users, non-users, employees, partners, etc. (e.g. via satisfaction surveys, consultation exercises and complaints procedures).
- 11.2 Where quantitative data is used, the results need to be compared to a base line in order to assess whether there has been any adverse impact. In order to create this, Housing Services is conducting a census in 2006 of all its tenants and leaseholders in relation to their ethnicity, gender, disability and age. This data will be included with the person profiles held on the Anite Open Housing Management System (OHM's). Together with the latest national census data for the Epping Forest District population, this will provide two clear benchmarks against which access and service usage, sanctions taken against tenants and leaseholders, and repairs and planned maintenance can be compared.
- 11.3 Where monitoring data is not currently available, monitoring systems will be introduced and analysed after twelve months to see if there appears to be any adverse impact. The target date for implementing new monitoring arrangements and for completing the census of tenants is March 2007. This means that the first comprehensive review of what the monitoring data shows is due to take place in March 2008.
- 11.4 Housing Services currently records the ethnic origin of people on its Housing Register and of those who are allocated Council accommodation to determine if there is any apparent adverse impact in housing allocations. (The data for 2005/06 showed a very close correlation between housing applications and allocations.)
- 11.5 The following additional monitoring is being introduced as a result of Housing Services' 2005 Impact Assessment:
- A separation of equality monitoring for sheltered housing residents.
 - Equality monitoring of Careline dispersed alarm users.
 - Equality monitoring of Social Club users (to be conducted by Social Club Committees, with their agreement).
 - Equality monitoring data will also be gathered as part of all consultation exercises – to include ethnicity, sex, disability and age - so that the outcomes can be analysed to show if responses vary for different sectors of the community.
 - CDRP and Essex CC Social Care Services to be asked if services they are delivering are being monitored and, if so, what this shows.

12. Staff Training

12.1 Housing Services will ensure that all employees receive appropriate equality/diversity guidance and training as part of the induction process and on a regular basis thereafter, to retain the focus on equality and diversity and ensure staff remain up-to-date. Such training will include:

- Legislation updates on statutory duties and individual rights and responsibilities.
- Ensuring managers consider the possible equality impact of decisions and policies they make and know how to conduct equality impact assessments.
- Ensuring staff responsible for conducting consultation exercises and equality monitoring know how to do this effectively and what to look for.
- Guidance notes will be published on the Council's intranet for front-line staff on dealing with vulnerable residents.
- Equality/diversity training for front-line staff within the Corporate Training Programme – to include disability awareness and disability etiquette.

12.2 The Council has commissioned a new programme of equality and diversity training for managers and front-line employees commencing September 2006.

13. Procurement and Partnerships

13.1 The statutory duties to promote equality still apply when relevant services are contracted out to an external supplier or partner organisation. Contractors must not discriminate unlawfully, but they do not have the same legal obligation as a public authority to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations. Housing Services remains responsible for meeting the general duty and will ensure the statutory duties are met, regardless of who is carrying them out.

13.2 The duty to promote equality applies indirectly to housing associations, because they are regulated by the Housing Corporation, which is directly covered.

13.3 Public authorities and housing associations must also comply with EU procurement rules which means they must make sure that, where relevant, anti-discrimination and equal opportunity requirements are explicitly specified in the procurement process, from the start, e.g. by ensuring that equality considerations are built into the tendering process.

13.4 Following the 2005 equality impact assessment, Housing Services will:

- Ask all potential contractors and partners to provide copies of their equal opportunities policies and to demonstrate their commitment, both in principle and practice, to equality.
- Include equality clauses in all future housing agreements, making clear what the Council requires of its contractors and partners.

- Require monitoring data to be provided by sub-contractors and partners in line with Housing Services' monitoring categories.
- Seek to negotiate changes to existing agreements to achieve the above.
- Supervision of the contract will include assessment against the agreement and outcome of equality monitoring. Steps will be taken to encourage improvement or enforce compliance if performance falls short.

13.5 Housing Services will also ensure that the methods used for advertising and awarding future contracts is non-discriminatory and, where practicable, that businesses run by minorities are encouraged to participate in the tender process.

14. Equality Impact Assessments

14.1 Impact Assessments are a means of systematically and thoroughly assessing the effects that a proposed policy, procedure or practice is likely to have on people, depending on their race, disability or gender. The main purpose of an equality impact assessment is to pre-empt the possibility that a new policy could affect some groups unfavourably. An impact assessment is preventative rather than remedial and is a form of risk assessment.

14.2 Key stages of conducting an impact assessment, include:

- Identify all aims of the policy;
- Consider available evidence (e.g. monitoring, survey, consultation data) and gather more if required;
- Assess likely impact, taking into account the evidence;
- Consider alternatives if the policy is likely to have an adverse impact;
- Consult formally;
- Decide whether to adopt the policy.

14.3 Formal consultation of Housing Services staff, service users and any others affected by changes to the service or new policies and procedures is an essential element of the impact assessment process and will be carried out, taking into account the principles of relevance and proportionality. In some cases, views will be sought at an early stage to inform policy development and then again when the proposals are finalised. The aim will be to ensure all persons likely to be affected by changes or new policies and procedures have an opportunity to express their views, concerns or suggestions before decisions are made.

14.4 The specific duty of monitoring relates to relevant functions and policies once they have been put into practice, and being alert to any concerns about the way they are working. When new Housing Services policies, procedures or practices are introduced, appropriate equality monitoring systems will be implemented at the same time.

15. Publicity

15.1 The outcomes of impact assessments, consultation and monitoring will be communicated to all parties via the Council's website.

15.2 Articles will be included from time to time in the tenants' magazine *Housing News* to:

- Publicise the Council's commitment to equality and diversity and to explain what this means for tenants and housing applicants.
- Raise awareness of equality and diversity initiatives affecting tenants and residents.
- Encourage wider participation in consultation exercises and involvement activities and communicate the outcome of feedback surveys and consultation exercises.
- Explain why monitoring is being carried out and what it shows.
- Celebrate diversity and promote good relations within the community.
- Challenge assumptions and stereotypes about different life choices (e.g. Gypsies and Travellers, same sex couples), different religions (e.g. Muslim or Jewish customs and beliefs), people living with disabilities (e.g. mental health problems), etc.
- Counteract inaccurate or negative publicity in the media which is contrary to the aims of this strategy.

16. Action Plan

16.1 The following actions will be undertaken in the future by Housing Services:

Action	Lead Officer/s	Timescale	Resource Implications
Annual ethnicity monitoring report to include separate ethnicity monitoring of allocations made at sheltered housing accommodation	Housing Needs Manager	September 2007	Within existing resources
Complete Impact Assessment Actions	All Managers	April 2007	Within existing resources
Continue to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005	All Managers	On going	Within existing resources
Corporately meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2006	Head of Human Resources and Performance Management	April 2007	Within existing resources
Undertake consultation at accompanied viewing on whether the accommodation meets requirements in terms of religion, disability etc	Housing Repairs Manager	December 2006	Within existing resources
Undertake customer exit surveys from time to time	All Managers	On going	Within existing resources
Monitor the ethnicity of Social Club users	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	On going	Within existing resources

Action	Lead Officer/s	Timescale	Resource Implications
Request copies of equal opportunities policies from all external contractors	All Managers	On going	Within existing resources
Publish the outcomes of the Council's Impact Assessments on the website	Head of Human Resources and Performance Management	December 2006	Within existing resources
Publicise in the tenants magazine Housing News articles demonstrating the Council's commitment to equality and diversity	All Managers Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Information)	On going	Within existing resources

17. Reviewing the Strategy

17.1 This Housing Services Strategy on Equality and Diversity will be reviewed by the Housing Scrutiny Panel in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Anti-Social Behaviour Group, and the Citizens Advice Bureaux no later than October 2009.

**HOUSING SERVICE
STRATEGY ON
VACANT COUNCIL DWELLINGS**

1. Introduction

1.1. This strategy sets out how Housing Services will keep the amount of time Council dwellings are empty between tenancies to a minimum and assists the Council in discharging its duty to people who are homeless or otherwise in housing need and helps to ensure that loss of rent and Council Tax due to vacancies is kept as low as possible. It also reduces the possibility of squatting and vandalism and the associated expenditure on empty Council dwellings.

1.2 It should be noted that this strategy only relates to empty Council properties. The Council has produced a separate Empty Property Strategy that deals with the Council's strategic approach to minimising the number of empty properties in the private sector.

1.3 This Housing Service Strategy was originally adopted in July 2003. This updated version was formally approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder on XXXXXX, following consultation with the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

2. Background to the Service

2.1 In 2005/6, the Council relet 574 dwellings, compared to 513 in the previous year.

2.2 Generally, the responsibility for ensuring vacant Council dwellings are in suitable condition for reletting and are relet as speedily as possible, in accordance with legislation and Council policy, rests with the Housing Repairs and Housing Needs Sections of Housing Services. Their performance is closely monitored on a quarterly basis to ensure that targets are met and losses to the Council resulting from vacancies in its housing stock are kept to a minimum.

2.3 Housing Services has been accredited with the ISO 9001:2000 quality management system by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance since 2002 which, following its renewal in 2005, is now effective until 2007. Housing Services also achieved the Government's Charter Mark award for excellence in the public sector in January 2005, and has held the Investors in People Award since 2001.

3. Coverage

3.1 This strategy sets out the approach that will be taken by the Council, in particular by the Housing Needs Section and Housing Repairs Section within Housing Services, to deal with empty Council properties. In particular, it covers:

- The standard to be adopted for letting vacant Council properties;
- The main procedures to be followed whilst properties are vacant; and
- The targets applicable to the re-letting of Council properties;

4. Relationship to other documents

4.1 This strategy operates within the main *Council Plan* and accords with the Council's *Best Value Performance Plan*, which sets out annually the authority's intentions for the delivery and development of its services, giving information on past performance and how the Council plans to improve services on a continuing basis. One of the key themes of both the *Council Plan* and the Local Strategic Partnership's *Community Strategy* is 'Homes and Neighbourhoods'.

4.2 This Strategy forms part of the Council's overall *Housing Strategy* and the *Housing Revenue Account Business Plan*.

4.3 The Council has adopted a *Housing Charter*, which sets out in simple, clear and precise terms its general approach to all its housing services.

4.4 This Strategy inter-relates with the Council's *Homelessness Strategy*, *Housing Service Strategy on Allocations* and *Housing Allocations Scheme*.

4.5 The Council follows the requirements set out in the Commission for Racial Equality's *Code of Practice in Rented Housing*.

4.6 The Council follows advice from central government, including the Department of Communities and Local Government's *Homelessness Code of Guidance* and *Allocation of Accommodation Code of Guidance to Local Authorities*..

4.7 A copy of the Council's *Housing Allocations Scheme* is available, on request, free of charge. A summary of this scheme is given in booklet form; *Moving home with the Council* and free leaflets are also available, entitled *Redecoration Voucher Scheme* and *Repairs and improvements to your home*.

4.8 Information available about Housing Services is available on the council's website, www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing

5. Aims and Objectives

5.1 The aim of the Council's Strategy on Vacant Council Dwellings is:

"To ensure vacant Council dwellings are in a suitable condition for re-letting and are re-let as soon as possible in accordance with legislation and Council policy, keeping expenditure low and revenue loss to a minimum."

5.2 This aim will be met by the achievement of the following objectives;

- a) Ensuring that Housing Services meets all its targets for empty Council properties;
- b) Continually monitoring all aspects of the Council's performance on empty properties;
- c) Continually reviewing and updating the Council's procedures;
- d) Considering any initiatives to reduce the numbers of difficult-to-let properties, such as the conversion of bedsit dwellings to one bed flats in whole schemes, or for specific properties, including the involvement of other partners if this facilitates a more viable outcome; and
- e) Maximising the use of accompanied viewings, to increase the engagement of prospective tenants within the process and associated tenant satisfaction and to minimise expenditure on repairs to empty properties.

6. Statutory Requirements

6.1 A variety of Government legislation and regulations have an indirect bearing upon the time properties remain empty. Relevant requirements are contained within;

<i>Landlord and Tenant Act 1985</i>	Fitness for human habitation (section 10)
<i>Gas Act 1974</i>	Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regs 1996
<i>Housing Act 1996 (as amended)</i>	Allocation of Housing Accommodation (Part VI) and Homelessness (Part VII)
<i>Local Government Finance Act 1990</i>	Dwellings exempt from Council Tax

Local Government Act 1999

Council's responsibilities in respect of Best Value.

Race Relations Act 1976

Code of Practice in Rented Housing

7. Client Consultation and Information

7.1 When this strategy was first drafted in 2003, specific targeted consultation was undertaken with those waiting for, and recently offered, Council accommodation, since they are most directly affected by the Council's performance on dealing with vacant Council properties. Their comments were considered as part of a major Voids and Lettings Study that led to, amongst other things, a more streamlined lettings process and the introduction of an accompanied viewing process and an empty property standard.

7.2 As part of the accompanied viewing process, housing applicants offered a vacant Council property are consulted on both the level of proposed repairs to be undertaken and which repairs should be undertaken after the tenant has moved in. In a number of cases, repairs that the Council would ordinarily undertake are declined by tenants, because of their intention to undertake their own improvements.

7.3 When housing applicants first register for housing, they are consulted on which areas within the District they would wish to receive offers of accommodation. As part of the Council's Housing Service Strategy on Allocations, the Council has agreed to the introduction of a "choice based lettings" scheme, in partnership with four neighbouring local authorities working as a Consortium. The Consortium successfully obtained £96,000 funding from the DCLG to implement a joint choice based lettings scheme. The target date for implementation of the choice based lettings scheme is June 2007. Once introduced, it will have an effect on both the way Council properties are let and the turnaround time for letting empty properties. Tenants and housing applicants will be consulted on the proposed operation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme in Autumn 2007.

7.4 The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation was consulted on this revised Housing Service Strategy before adoption.

8. General Principles

8.1 Housing Services will continue to focus on reducing the time taken to re-let empty properties. There has been all round improvement as a direct result of introducing the integrated Open Housing Management System (OHMS) and a robust performance management regime within Housing Services. This enables the gathering and interpretation of a greater range and amount of information, allowing increased flexibility and speed in decision making and policy direction. This means that senior housing management and housing managers have detailed information to hand and targets can be more accurately monitored.

8.2 Generally, the voids and lettings process starts with existing tenants giving 4 weeks notice of vacation. The notice is acted upon immediately by the Housing Needs Section, with the tenancy termination being recorded on OHMS.

8.3 This enables Housing Needs Officers to select a new tenant for the property from the Housing Register, in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme. The new tenant is not generally notified of the availability of the property at this point. This is done when the keys are returned by the outgoing tenant; experience has shown that this avoids upset if the outgoing tenant has a change of mind.

8.4 At the expiry of the notice, Housing Needs staff receive the keys from the outgoing tenant (chasing them up, if necessary), log their receipt on OHMS and pass them to Housing

Repairs staff who arrange, in all cases, for standard essential checks and works to be carried out on the property by the Building Maintenance Section. These works are as follows:

- Replacement door locks
- Gas safety check
- Electrical safety check
- Rubbish removal
- General clean of kitchen cupboards, worktops and bathroom sanitary ware

8.5 Whilst this is taking place, a Housing Needs Officer will contact the selected housing applicant to advise them of the vacancy and ask them to contact the Housing Repairs Section so that they can view the property, by appointment, accompanied by the officer responsible for overseeing the repairs process.

8.6 A complete survey of the property is undertaken, including loft spaces and any external stores. Housing Repairs Officers (HROs) also consider the possibility of asbestos being present and note the degree by which it could be disturbed whilst repairs are completed. They then follow the accepted procedure for dealing with any such issues. This survey identifies all minor repairs and also major works for which the Council is responsible.

8.7 In order to reduce the period that properties remain empty while undergoing repair, HROs ensure that empty properties meet a basic standard and only arrange the completion of essential work whilst the property is empty; repairs of a minor nature are arranged after the new tenant has taken up occupation.

8.8 The work undertaken whilst properties are vacant includes the following:

- Any major works of a nature that would make it impossible to occupy all or part of the property.
- Any works requiring the lifting of more than 2 square metres of flooring boarding for more than one day.
- The replacement of broken (unserviceable, not cracked) sanitary fittings.
- The provision of a kitchen sink if missing or unserviceable.
- The emulsions of a maximum of two rooms where the property is designed for an older person (i.e. sheltered accommodation or 1 bed flats) and has had no redecoration completed during the previous five years, or in other properties where the redecoration allowance would exceed a specified sum. In the latter case the hallway (if present) is decorated and either the kitchen or bathroom, whichever is in the worse condition.
- Clearing of any rubbish within the property and its curtilage and clean throughout.
- Any additional works agreed if the dwelling has proved difficult to let.

8.9 In addition to the above, the following works are undertaken (if required) after the tenant has taken up occupation, to provide a lettable standard:

- All kitchens will be provided with a sink and the equivalent of 4 single cupboards (either floors or wall). Built in larder cupboards are disregarded. The kitchen layout is to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard
- All habitable rooms will have a means of heating. A radiator or an open fire meets this requirement.
- Any open fires and/or their surrounds are left within the property.

- “Butler” sinks are left within the property.
- Any fittings installed by the previous tenant are left, unless unserviceable or dangerous.

8.10 Any works that need to be undertaken due to the negligence of the outgoing tenant are recharged. This includes the following works:

- Replacement of front or back door lock, or security key fob, due to no keys or key fobs being returned*
- Clearance of rubbish;*
- Supplying and fitting of (due to them being missing or damaged):
 - light rose, flex and bulb holder
 - socket outlets
 - light switch
 - panel door

(* Tenants over 65 years of age are not recharged for these works)

8.11 Accompanied viewing was introduced in 2003 to allow prospective tenants to visit the dwelling at the same time as the officer completing the empty property inspection. This allows prospective tenants the opportunity to have an input into the extent of repairs undertaken. It also reduces the empty property turnaround period, since many applicants are happy for some works to be left to themselves. For example, it may be their intention to replace the kitchen - so there is little point in the Council replacing one kitchen cupboard.

8.12 If, at the accompanied viewing of the property, the selected applicant is not interested in taking the tenancy, the HRO immediately telephones the Housing Needs Section, to minimise delay in finding a replacement tenant. Even so, there is generally insufficient time to arrange a further viewing before the authorised repairs are completed and, in such instances, arrangements are made for the prospective tenant to view the property at the same time as they are made a formal offer of the tenancy.

8.13 Internal decoration is a tenant's responsibility, but the Council gives Homebase redecorating vouchers to incoming tenants, as a contribution towards the cost of buying paint or wallpaper and decorating essentials, such as brushes. This approach is taken, as an alternative to the Council undertaking the redecoration for incoming tenants, in order to reduce the turnaround time. The value of the vouchers to be issued is calculated by the HRO, by reference to the decorative condition of the property and a Redecoration Allowance Room Schedule. The Room Schedule is reviewed by the Housing Portfolio annually. The vouchers are not issued directly by the HRO but by Finance Services' cashiers, after the tenant has signed up for the tenancy and on production by them of a pro-forma completed and authorised by the HRO.

8.14 In order to further reduce delay, since 2004, no post-repair inspections are completed by Housing Services. However, the Building Maintenance Section undertakes its own inspections, in accordance with its own Performance Management Policy; the incoming tenants also advise the Council of any defects found when they move into the property.

8.15 Once essential repairs that need to be undertaken prior to occupation have been completed, Housing Needs staff issue a formal offer of tenancy and make arrangements for the prospective tenant to attend the Civic Offices and sign them up to the tenancy. If a housing applicant has difficulty getting to the Civic Offices because of a disability, alternative arrangements are made through one of the Area Housing Managers.

8.16 Generally, for properties becoming ready for letting on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the tenancy start date will be the following Monday. For properties becoming ready for letting on Thursdays or Fridays the tenancy start date will be the second Monday following.

8.17 One type of property that is consistently difficult to let is bedsits in sheltered housing schemes, especially with shared bathrooms. This is because older applicants are looking to move from larger, self-contained, accommodation and, understandably, are not prepared to move to significantly smaller, inferior, accommodation. As a result, the Council has undertaken a number of major improvement/conversion schemes at sheltered housing schemes to convert bedsits into self-contained flats. The last two such schemes have been facilitated through a stock transfer of the building and tenants to a housing association, following financial appraisals that established that such an approach would be more cost effective to the Council than undertaking the conversion itself. In addition, when the opportunity arises, the Council has converted three adjacent vacant bedsits in sheltered housing schemes into two self contained flats.

8.18 The Council will continue to identify potential conversion schemes for its sheltered housing, and appraise whether it would be more cost effective for the Council to undertake the improvements, or for a housing association through a stock transfer.

9. Action Plan

9.1 The following specific actions are planned by the Council relating to empty Council properties:

Action	Lead Officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Introduce generic working by the current housing repairs officers and voids officers	Housing Repairs Manager	By 31.12.06	Within existing
Consider the introduction of property enhancements and incentives for difficult-to-let properties	Asst Head of Housing Services (Property & Resources)	By 31.3.07	Within existing
Consider the use of multiple viewings for difficult-to-let properties	Asst Head of Housing Services (Property & Resources)	By 31.3.07	Within existing
Identify and implement any required changes to the accompanied viewing process as a result of introducing choice based lettings	Asst Head of Housing Services (Operations)	By 30.6.07	Within existing
Review the effect on empty property turnaround times of introducing choice based lettings	Asst Head of Housing Services (Operations)	Between 1.6.07 and 31.12.07	Within existing
Complete the feasibility of re-modelling the difficult-to-let sheltered housing scheme at Marden Close, Chigwell Row for general needs housing	Head of Housing Services	By 31.03.07	Within the Capital Feasibilities Budget. Any re-modelling will require budget provision (unquantified at present)

10. Resourcing the Strategy

10.1 Separate budget heads exist for capital and revenue repairs completed to empty properties and for the redecoration vouchers that are given to new tenants who undertake the decoration of property. The sums allowed for 2006/07 are as follows:

Revenue repairs	£644,000
Capital repairs	£259,000
Redecoration allowances	£100,000

10.2 Housing Services' staff resources are shown below;

	Staff Resource Projection			
	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10
Av. no. staff to provide service (FTE p/a)	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9

Total Staff Resource Breakdown – 2006/7	
Posts	FTE
Housing Repairs Manager	0.1
Housing Needs Manager	0.1
Asst Housing Needs Manager (Allocations)	0.6
Asst Housing Repairs Manager	0.1
Housing Officer (Voids)	2.0
Total	2.9

11. Key Targets and Performance Monitoring

The table below provides details of past performance and current targets:

Performance and Targets				
Performance Indicator	Actuals		Performance	
	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Average time to re-let vacant properties (from tenancy termination to tenancy commencement)	55 (calendar) days	46 (calendar) days	42 (calendar) days	42 (calendar) days
% rent loss from empty properties	1.1 %	0.8 %	< 2%	< 2%
Average time for Works Unit to complete repairs	13 (calendar) days	12.5 (calendar) days	14 (calendar) days	14 (calendar) days
Average re-let time after becoming available to let	26 (working) days	15 (working) days	15 (working) days	15 (working) days
% properties vacant as a % of total housing stock	1.2 %	0.8 %	< 1 %	< 1 %

12. Reviewing the Strategy

12.1. This Strategy will be reviewed, in consultation with the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders' Federation by October 2009.

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 31 October 2006

Portfolio: Housing

**Subject: Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy 2006-2010
Six-month Progress Report (October 2006)**

**Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall, Head of Housing Services
Committee Secretary: A Hendry, ext.4246**



Recommendations:

That the Six-month Progress Report for the Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy 2006-2010, attached as an appendix, be considered, with any comments passed onto the Local Supporting People Core Strategy Group.

Background

1. At its meeting held on 3 March 2006, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered the Draft Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy 2006-2010, and recommended its endorsement by the Housing Portfolio Holder, which was subsequently given.
2. "Supporting People" is a major Government initiative, which introduced a new policy and funding framework for supported housing and ancillary welfare services in April 2003. It brought together a range of national and local funding regimes and consolidated them into a cash-limited "single pot", administered by a Commissioning Body at the County level.
3. Supported housing includes the provision of accommodation for the elderly, physically disabled, people with learning disabilities, the mentally ill, young people with drug and alcohol problems etc.
4. As the "administering body" for Supporting People in Essex (excluding Southend and Thurrock), Essex County Council is responsible for producing an Essex Supporting People Strategy. However, in view of the importance of supported housing in the District, fairly uniquely, the District's Supporting People Core Strategy Group (which comprises agencies involved with supported housing in the District) produces an annual Local Supporting People Strategy in liaison with the District Council. The Local Strategy sets out the local planning and delivering of high quality housing-related support services to vulnerable people.
5. Local providers and user representatives involved in supported housing were consulted on the Local Strategy through the Epping Forest Inclusive Forum, which comprises such representatives, prior to consideration by the Committee.

Six-month Progress Report on the Key Action Plan

6. An important part of the Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy, endorsed by the Housing Portfolio Holder, is the Key Action Plan, which comprises all the separate tasks required to develop supported housing in the District. Having formulated the Action Plan, it is clearly important to monitor progress. Therefore, in accordance with good practice, a Six-month Progress Report on the Key Action Plan has been produced. Consideration of the Six-month Progress Report is included within the Housing Scrutiny Panel's Terms of Reference, and is therefore attached as an appendix for consideration by the Panel.

Future Approach

7. The Local Supporting People Core Strategy Group has recently agreed that, instead of producing a new Local Supporting People Strategy each year - which requires extensive input from all the organisations involved – in future, the Strategy should be fully revised every three years, following consultation with partners, providers, users and user representatives. However, the Core Strategy Group also agreed that the Key Action Plan should continue to be updated annually (following consultation) and submitted to the Council for endorsement, followed by consideration of a progress report after six months in accordance with the present practice.

**Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy 2006-2010
Six Monthly Progress Report on Key Action Plan
(As at 1 October 2006)**

Task	Target Date	Lead Organisation	Current Position
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General Strategic			
1. Re-introduce the new Supported Housing Needs Index to identify and assess applicants for supported housing.	July 2007	Epping Forest District Council	No Longer Being Pursued - It has been established that most other councils in Essex are not using the revised SHNI and that it does not easily fit with EFDC's Allocations Scheme. EFDC also intends to implement choice based lettings from July 2007.
2. Ensure that at least 4 meetings of the Epping Forest Supporting People Core Strategy Group are held every year.	Ongoing	Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council SP Team	On Target – The Core Strategy Group has met twice within the 6 months since adopting the Strategy.
3. Hold an Inclusive Forum meeting to comment on the next draft version of the Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy.	February 2007	Epping Forest District Council and Epping Forest Core Strategy Group	Amended - The decision was made by the LCSG to update the Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy every three years rather than annually. The Inclusive Forum meeting will then also be held every three years. The Epping Forest Local Supporting People Action Plan will still be reviewed and updated annually and will be sent out for consultation.
Older People			
4. Transfer the Council's sheltered housing scheme at Wickfields, Chigwell to Warden Housing to enable a major improvement programme to be undertaken.	December 2006	EFDC	Achieved – Formal tenant consultation was successfully completed in Summer 2006. The application for consent to transfer has been submitted to the Secretary of State. DCLG officials have confirmed that the application is in order and consent can be given. Legal agreements are being finalised and transfer is planned for mid-October 2006, with improvement scheme commencing by the end of October 2006.

**Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy 2006-2010
Six Monthly Progress Report on Key Action Plan
(As at 1 October 2006)**

Task	Target Date	Lead Organisation	Current Position
5. Seek funding through the Local Delivery Plan 2005/6 for a Mental Health Liaison Post to support inpatient areas, Intermediate Care, A&E Diversion and NHS Funded Nursing Care.	September 2006	EF PCT	Achieved - The funding has been secured, the job description is completed. The Mental Health Trust are recruiting on behalf of the PCT.
6. Ensure the successful implementation of the Case Finding Initiative across Epping Forest to reduce unnecessary hospital admission.	Completed	EF PCT	Achieved - The implementation of the case finding initiative/case managers has been successful. The Audit is showing positive changes in the community regarding hospital admissions and discharges. The PCT are now in the process of recruiting Associate Practitioners to support the Case Managers.
7. Implementation of the Local Trades Scheme through the production of a list of contact details for local tradesmen that have undergone a number of safety checks.	Ongoing	Epping Forest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership	Ongoing – A working group has been formed and a process and body of people for vetting traders has been developed and agreed.
8. Consider the outcome of the Sheltered Housing / Community Support Service for Older People pilot in Harlow, undertaken by Harlow DC and in Springfield, undertaken by Chelmer Housing Partnership (CHP).	Ongoing	EFDC and ECC SP Team	Not yet due – The pilots have not yet been completed or assessed by the pilot organisations.
9. Review the Council's Grants Policy in light of the 2005 Private Sector House Condition Survey.	December 2006	Epping Forest District Council C.A.R.E.	In progress - The draft Housing Assistance Policy 2006-2010 is to be presented at Cabinet in October with a view to being implemented in December 2006. The Policy includes the replacement of Home Repairs Assistance with Small Works Assistance and Renovation Grants with Decent Homes Assistance which extends the repayment period from 5 to 20 years. The Policy also includes some new types of Assistance; Thermal Comfort Grants, Empty Homes Grants, Conversion Grants and Relocation Grants.

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			It is envisaged that this Policy will remain in force while negotiations take place on the introduction of systems of assistance based on Equity Release and/or loans.
Home Improvement Agency			
10. Work with the Supporting People Team to ensure cross-boundary collaboration where appropriate.	Ongoing	Epping Forest District Council Essex County Council SP Team Other Essex HIAs Other Essex Authorities	In progress - Working on an Essex Strategy for HIAs in order to reflect the position post 2010 when there will have been another round of re-commissioning and further changes in ECC and the PCTs.
11. Assist in the review of the Council's Grants Policy, in relation to the assistance that can be provided to HIA clients.	December 2006	Epping Forest District Council	In progress - The draft Housing Assistance Policy 2006-2010 is to be presented at Cabinet in October with a view to being implemented in December 2006. This includes the replacement of Home Repairs Assistance with Small Works Assistance and Renovation Grants with Decent Homes Assistance which extends the repayment period from 5 to 20 years. The Policy also includes some new types of Assistance; Thermal Comfort Grants, Empty Homes Grants, Conversion Grants and Relocation Grants. It is envisaged that this Policy will remain in force while negotiations take place on the introduction of systems of assistance based on Equity Release and/or loans.
12. To consider ways of attracting client contributions to the Handyperson Service.	Ongoing	Epping Forest District Council C.A.R.E. Advisory Panel	Ongoing - A voluntary contributions scheme has been devised but it is felt that this may not be cost effective. Additional funding of £3,000 was made available by the Council for 2006/2007 which made the issue less pressing but it is still under consideration.

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<p>13. Particularly in the light of the uncertainty over funding for C.A.R.E after March 2005, maximise existing funding and consider ways of attracting additional funding in order to meet market demand.</p>	Ongoing	Epping Forest District Council Essex County Council Supporting People Epping Forest PCT	<p>Ongoing - A five year SLA has been signed with Essex County Council for the Handyperson service and a three plus two year SLA for the Core Service. The consideration of ways to maximise existing funding is an ongoing exercise. The increase in demand for Disabled Facilities Grants has resulted in an increase in fee income.</p>
<p>14. To consider ways in which the Small Loans Scheme can be reinstated.</p>	Achieved	EFDC and C.A.R.E Advisory Panel	<p>Achieved - Council has agreed the terms for the Small Loans Scheme and this will be implemented early in 2007.</p>
Mental Health			
<p>15. Improve the discharge arrangements for people in hospital due to mental illness. Through: - Tenancy retention for people who are placed in hospital. - Crisis resolution - Early intervention - Alternatives to hospital admission, including rehab for people who do not need to be in an acute ward. - Crisis housing.</p>		North Essex Mental Health Partnership Trust and Epping Forest PCT	<p>In progress - Crisis resolution and home treatment services, and early intervention for psychosis services are now in place across Epping Forest and will help early discharge from and prevent admission to hospital. Closer working with housing helps tenancy retention for people in hospital. Changes in management structure in NEMHPT earlier this year mean that the associate director for Epping and Uttlesford also has Trust wide responsibilities for rehabilitation, which will lead to a more streamlined approach across the area.</p>
<p>16. Review the future use and purpose of the residential rehabilitation and longer-term care unit at Regent Road, Epping following its closure. Carry out an option appraisal.</p>	Ongoing	North Essex Mental Health Partnership Trust	<p>Ongoing - A review of NEMHPT services across West Essex will be starting shortly. This will include Regent Rd, and the nature of it's future use as part of the MH services in the area</p>

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<p>17. Await news from Supporting People regarding the expression of interest for the expansion of the floating support service from 12 to 18 units and the additional part-time floating support worker.</p>	<p>April 2007</p>	<p>Swan Housing Association And Essex County Council SP Team</p>	<p>Ongoing - This has been incorporated into the Value Improvement Programme (VIP) for Floating Support which will reconfigure floating support services across Essex.</p>
<p>18. Continue to increase and improve mental health services for older people through: - Joined up working and improved communication between the Community Mental Health Team for Older People, the Primary Health Service (PCT) and Social Care Teams. - The Single Assessment Process (SAP), which, promotes and encourages multidisciplinary working.</p>	<p>In progress</p>	<p>Community Mental Health Team for Older People, Epping Forest PCT and Social Care Teams</p>	<p>In progress - The CMHT for older people now includes a senior social work practitioner and support worker employed by Essex County Council. There are regular meetings between the team managers of the hospital and community social work teams and the CMHT manager, both on a formal and informal basis to facilitate joined up working. Recruitment to the PCT funded post mentioned in point 5 is underway. The post holder will be based in the CMHT for older people and provide a very valuable practice and educational link between the PCT and MH services, ensuring the MH needs of older people are addressed in a variety of settings. The CPASAP process has been linked and piloted throughout the CMHTs for older people in North Essex and will be operational shortly.</p>
Learning Disabilities			
<p>19. Complete the construction of six, eco-friendly, self-contained flats and the provision of 24-hour support for people with learning disabilities on District Council-owned land at Cripsey Avenue, Ongar, with capital funding allocated by the Housing Corporation.</p>	<p>Achieved</p>	<p>East Living</p>	<p>Achieved – The construction was completed in Summer 2006. All but one of the properties are occupied. A difficulty has arisen with the letting of the last property, since Essex Adult Social Care has been unable, in the light of their budgetary difficulties, to nominate a suitable applicant from the Epping Forest District, whose care needs cost less than their current care. Essex Social Care and the Housing Association are therefore seeking</p>

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			to allocate the property to a person with learning difficulties from outside the Epping Forest District. This is being strongly resisted by EFDC's Housing Services.
Physical Disabilities			
<p>20. In the light of the reduction in the DCLG contribution towards the Disabled Facilities Grants, reconsider the priorities in the Council's Grants Policy.</p>	Ongoing	Epping Forest District Council	<p>In progress - The Council agreed to increase the DFG budget by £200,000 in 2005/2006 to take account of the additional demand and a request has been made to the Council for this level of funding to be sustained. Changes in legislation and government targets have also made the reconsideration of priorities essential. GO-East have made available an additional £445,000 in 2006/2007 and £223,000 in 2007/2008 to help meet the Decent Homes (PSA 7) target. See above.</p>
<p>21. Hold a public enquiry on the proposed alterations to the Local Plan to include the development of 100% lifetime homes.</p>	Completed	Epping Forest District Council	<p>Completed with Partial Achievement - The proposal was included within the Council's proposed Alterations to the Local Plan. However, following the Public Inquiry, the Planning Inspector reduced the requirement to at least 10% of homes on developments comprising 10 or more properties must be built to the Lifetime Homes Standard.</p>
<p>22. Seek capital funding from the Housing Corporation to commence the construction of 3-4 self-contained flats for people with physical disabilities, on land primarily owned by the District Council at Mason Way, Waltham Abbey.</p>	Autumn 2006	Ability Housing Association	<p>Achieved – Capital funding was sought for 5 bungalows and successfully allocated by the Housing Corporation. The lease between EFDC and Ability Housing Association has been completed and the development of 5 bungalows is planned for Autumn 2006.</p>

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<p>23. Liaise with the Essex Supporting People Team to re-configure the residential support provided at Lakeside Close, Chigwell to floating support across the two schemes.</p>	<p>Completed</p>	<p>Ability Housing Association and Essex County Council SP Team</p>	<p>Agreed - Supporting People have agreed to the reconfiguration of support across the 2 schemes. This will be budget neutral.</p>
Single Homelessness			
<p>24. Review the possibility of an additional part time Homelessness Prevention Officer in light of the successful bid to the DCLG's Homelessness Innovation Fund for additional funding.</p>	<p>Completed</p>	<p>Epping Forest District Council</p>	<p>Achieved – The Council has appointed a new full-time Senior Homelessness Prevention Officer, with the funding received from the DCLG (previously the ODPM)</p>
<p>25. Increase the number of properties leased to East Thames under the Epping Forest Fresh START Scheme from 10-20 to accommodate homeless people, including single applicants.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>East Thames</p>	<p>In Progress – Nearly all of the additional 10 properties have been identified and leased by East Thames.</p>
<p>26. If the planning application is approved for the development of the two former Hostel Managers' flats at Leader Lodge, North Weald, investigate the best from of procuring the development needs to be investigated.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Epping Forest District Council</p>	<p>Not Achieved – Despite an planning officer recommendation for approval, the Council's Area Plans Sub-Committee refused planning permission. Consideration is therefore currently being given to the most appropriate way forward.</p>
<p>27. Investigate the feasibility and cost of additional chalets at Norway House</p>	<p>On hold</p>	<p>Epping Forest District Council</p>	<p>No Progress – It is not intended to progress this until the future of Leader Lodge (see above) is determined.</p>

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<p>28. With the introduction of Choice Based Lettings, investigate the need for issuing priority cards for bidding, as a way of achieving a quota of vacancies for single applicants.</p>	Ongoing	Epping Forest District Council	<p>In Progress – A draft specification for the implementation and operation of a choice based lettings scheme by the Council has been produced. EFDC officers are intending to recommend an amendment to the Allocation Scheme to give homeless families in supervised homeless accommodation priority for a specified “bidding” period when the choice based lettings scheme is introduced.</p>
<p>29. Continue negotiations between EFDC and Kings Church Brentwood Furniture Exchange on the lease of the Town Mead Depot, Waltham Abbey as the base for the Kings Church Brentwood Furniture Exchange in Epping Forest.</p>	Completed	Lighthouse Furniture Project and Epping Forest District Council VAEF	<p>Achieved – EFDC entered into a lease with the Lighthouse Project for accommodation at Town Mead Depot in September 2006.</p>
<p>30. Produce a business plan setting out the need and proposed provision for a foyer in the District, providing accommodation and employment for young people.</p>	Abandoned	Epping Forest Foyer Project and YMCA	<p>No Longer Being Pursued – A feasibility exercise undertaken by East Thames has established that a foyer would need to provide in excess of 100 properties for it to be financially viable and attract supporting people funding. However, there is not this extent of need in the District. Therefore, it has been decided not to pursue the foyer project any further.</p>
<p>31. Identify a suitable site for the possible development of a foyer within the Epping Forest District.</p>	Abandoned	Epping Forest Foyer Project and YMCA	<p>No Longer Being Pursued – See above</p>

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People with Drug and Alcohol Problems			
32. Await news from Supporting People regarding the expression of interest for the expansion of the floating support service from 12 to 18 units and the additional part-time floating support worker.	April 2007	Cygnet Housing Association And Essex County Council SP Team	In progress - This has been incorporated into the Value Improvement Programme (VIP) for Floating Support which will reconfigure floating support services across Essex.
Ex-Offenders			
33. Develop target measurement and risk measurement systems in relation to the provision of accommodation for ex-offenders.		Probation Service - Essex	No progress.
Women at Risk Of Domestic Violence			
34. Investigate the need for a Sanctuary Scheme in Epping Forest to provide a security measure to the homes of domestic violence victims, as an alternative to the provision of temporary accommodation.	Ongoing	EFDC and Essex Police.	Limited Progress – EFDC officers are currently reviewing the operation and success of schemes introduced by other local authorities.

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Teenage Parents			
<p>35. Investigate with Brentwood Borough Council and Uttlesford District Council the possible introduction of a cross-boundary young parent scheme, comprising 8-10 self contained flats with access to some communal facilities, together with associated support. Seek capital funding from the Housing Corporation and revenue funding from Essex Social Care and the Essex Commissioning Body.</p>	Ongoing	Epping Forest District Council, Essex Social Services, Essex County Council SP Team, Epping Forest PCT, Estuary Housing Association.	<p>In Progress – Extreme difficulties have been experienced identifying a site, resulting in a capital allocation allocated by the Housing Corporation having to be returned. A potential site has now been identified and East Thames is in discussions with the landowner.</p>

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups			
<p>36. Work in partnership with the Essex Housing Officers Group, to progress the Facing the Facts action plan for the Essex Equality and Diversity Project (EEDP), through The BME Action Group and recently appointed Development Worker.</p>	Ongoing	Essex Housing Officers Group	<p>In progress - The Development worker is currently working towards the tasks in the action plan. Work to date includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing an Essex wide BME Citizens Panel. There will be 3 launches, 1 covering each housing sub region. The first launch is for the LCB on the 3rd October and will be held in Harlow. - A database of BME Groups in Essex has been set up. - Work is being carried out on updating the EEDP website <p>Informal advocacy work relating to housing issues is also being provided.</p>

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Service Monitoring and Reviews			
37. Complete all service reviews in line with DCLG requirements.	Completed	Essex County Council SP Team	Completed - All service reviews were completed and outcome reports sent out by the end of March 2006.

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