

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 27 APRIL 2006  
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING  
AT 5.00 - 6.52 PM**

<b>Members Present:</b>	S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, R Chidley, P Gode, Mrs A Grigg (Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder), Mrs S Perry, T Richardson and Mrs J H Whitehouse
<b>Other members present:</b>	(none)
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	Mrs J Lea and L Martin
<b>Officers Present</b>	A Hall (Head of Housing Services), P Pledger (Assistant Head of Housing Services (Property and Resources)), S Stranders (Environmental Services), L Swan (Environmental Services), H Thorpe (Housing Assets Manager) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)
<b>Also in attendance:</b>	E Diment (PPS plc) and A Shakleton (PPS plc.)

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**56. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

**57. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

The Panel noted that there were no declarations of interest.

**58. NOTES OF LAST MEETING - 3 MARCH 2006**

Noted.

**59. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME**

Noted that paragraph 3(v) should be deleted from the Terms of Reference. It was also noted that most items in the Work Programme had been achieved and that only a few things were to be carried over into the new year.

**60. PRESENTATION ON THE FINDINGS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSE CONDITION SURVEY**

The Scrutiny Panel received a presentation on the findings of the Private Sector House Condition Survey by Ed Diment (Projects Manager (Regeneration and Housing)) and Andrew Shakleton of the Professional Partnership Services Group (PPS plc.).

The purpose of the report and presentation was to inform the Housing Scrutiny Panel of the findings of the House Condition Survey undertaken in the latter part of 2005.

The findings of the report are to be used to inform the revised Private Sector Housing Strategy.

The 2005 Epping Forest House Condition Survey (HCS) was conducted to examine to current condition of private sector dwellings with the District boundaries.

The Housing Act 2004 and Government guidance require local authorities to keep under review housing conditions in their area. The aims of the survey were to collect information on the physical condition and energy efficiency of private sector dwellings and also on the social characteristics of the occupiers.

The information gathered will assist this Council in formulating its Private Sector Housing Strategy and in targeting resources to the areas of greatest need. The latter point is of particular importance as, under the new Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, local authorities now have much greater freedom to set their own framework for giving financial assistance to tackle unsatisfactory housing having regard to the local circumstances, needs and resources.

The survey was conducted during Autumn 2005 and covered a sample of 761 randomly selected dwellings drawn from the owner-occupied, privately rented and housing association stock (total properties 43,970). The 6,800 local authority properties were not included in the survey.

Noted that:

- The total private sector housing stock of Epping Forest is an estimated 43,970 dwellings.
- Public Service Agreement 7 (PSA 7) requires that at least 65% of vulnerable occupiers in the private sector must be living in homes that meet the Decent Homes Standards by 2006/07. This target will increase to 70% for 2010.
- The majority of private sector dwellings (79% of all stock) are owner occupied.
- There are an estimated 890 houses in multiple occupation (2% of the stock, lower than the national average of 2.6%).
- There are an estimated 1,250 vacant dwellings (2.8% of the stock) of which 490 are long term vacant (more than 6 months). The number of vacant properties and the proportion of long term empties are both lower than national averages.

#### Decent Home Targets:

The Decent Homes Standard requires that a dwelling meets the following 4 criteria:

- (A) should not be unfit (or as of April 2006 not have Category 1 hazard);
- (B) should be in a reasonable state of repair;
- (C) should have adequate modern facilities (kitchens, bathrooms etc); and
- (D) should provide adequate thermal comfort (heating and insulation)

Overall 10,100 dwellings (22.9%) in Epping Forest District did not meet the Decent Homes Standard using the Housing Fitness Standard for Criterion A. This compares with the national figure of 30.1%.

A copy of the full presentation is attached to these minutes.

Q and A Session:

After Mr Diment finished his presentation, the Panel put the following questions to him:

**Q:** Was this just a survey of older properties and not the new ones?

**A:** Just the existing private sector housing stock.

**Q:** I was one of the houses that were surveyed – I have an old cottage with steep, narrow stairs that I could easily fall down – as it's a listed building I presume there is not a lot that could be done about this?

**A:** This will up to the Council to decide if this is a priority and a serious hazard. A more serious hazard to an old property would be fire.

**Q:** I fully support the initiative but it comes with a big price tag, some of the costs will fall on the Council. Are there any significant funding streams that come with this?

**A:** Susan Stranders replied that there is a £167,000 grant just received from GO East; in total there is about £440,000 available. She was not sure if they have to spend it in this financial year or not. Environmental Services do not have the staff currently to spend this money. The survey confirmed that the District is equity rich. We could look to utilise this through equity release mechanisms. This would allow us to extend our eligibility criteria to include other vulnerable households. Environmental Services needs to look at how they can effectively spend it – there are lots of options open to us.

Mr Diment added that this was new funding available at a regional level to be distributed by bids. This would put local authorities in competition with each other.

**Q:** As this was a statistical survey do we now have to identify the individual properties?

**A:** Yes, this is something that EFDC need to do, but first we need to secure some resources to enable us to do this.

**Q:** Using this statistical survey, will our staff draw up the bid for extra monies?

**A:** Yes, we will work with PPS plc to draw up the bid.

**Q:** This is a standard that householders will have to meet – how will they be informed about it?

**A:** The Council will need to make householders aware of their remedial needs, and, in theory, the Local Authority can carry out enforcements on private sector householders.

It was noted that there was an Executive Summary and a full report available. Copies of which could be put in the Members Room, published on the website, or put into the Members Bulletin.

Next steps

The 2005 Epping Forest House Condition Survey was carried out to conduct a review of private sector housing condition in the District and also to inform the future Private Sector Housing Strategy, in particular the Private Sector Renewal Strategy, which is shortly to be redrafted. It is planned to submit the draft Private Sector Renewal Strategy to the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel on 25 July 2006.

**61. BEST VALUE SERVICE REVIEW OF HOUSING SERVICES**

The Head of Housing Services introduced his report on the Six Monthly Progress Report on the Housing Service Development Plan. The Panel noted that 83% of improvements had been achieved and nearly 90% of the highest priority achievements had been completed.

It was noted that the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation had considered the progress report and had no comments to make.

It was agreed that in the view of there only being a small number of outstanding tasks, no further progress reports need to be considered by this Scrutiny Panel.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the fourth six-monthly Progress Report on the Housing Service Development Plan be noted.
2. That no further progress reports are to be considered by this Scrutiny Panel, and that the completion of the remaining tasks are to be monitored by the Head of Housing Services through the Housing Services Special Projects Plan, which is updated bi-monthly.

**62. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2006**

The Head of Housing Services introduced the HRA Business Plan 2006, incorporating the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan 2006. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) requires that all local authorities produce annual Business Plans for their Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs). The ODPM's intention is to ensure that local authority housing is used and maintained to maximum effect. HRA Business Plans deal with councils' plans and performance for the delivery, performance and quality of its housing services to its tenants.

Apart from the usual updating of statistical and other information, the main changes from last year's Business Plan are:

- The deletion of references to housing benefits, since these are no longer accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account;
- Updated sections on key achievements in 2005/6 and key priorities for 2006/7 (Sections 3.5 and 3.6);
- Reference to the proposed small scale stock transfer of Wickfields sheltered housing scheme, Chigwell (Section 6.9(c));
- An updated Financial Plan (Chapter 8);
- A new Key Action Plan (Chapter 10);
- An updated Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan (Appendix 1).

The meeting noted that the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation had considered the draft Business Plan at its last meeting and wished to reiterate its comments from last year, but to delete the comment on welcoming the inclusion of the Chapter on Risk Management and amend the following comment to read:

"They are pleased that the revised Financial Plan does not identify a deficit on the Housing Revenue Account for 21 years."

The Head of Housing Services was asked about the Mobility Scheme on page 35 of the report and why no one had applied for it? He explained that it was run by an outside agency (Move UK) who were presently experiencing problems. This is also done on a reciprocal basis and the Council is currently in credit. Another reason is that, after the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002, anyone, anywhere in the country can register to move anywhere in the country.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked if the LAWN Scheme was still being promoted? The Head of Housing Services replied that it was not, but EFDC had asked Move UK if it could join this scheme, but they are not ready as yet.

The Chairman asked if the Council would meet our Decent Home Standard by 2010. The Head of Housing Services replied that the Council was on target.

Councillor Mrs Grigg asked why is the HRA shown to fall into deficit by Year 21? The Head of Housing Services said last year we were projected to go into deficit by Year 27, but due to a number of complex factors, e.g. the subsidy rules had changed, the rent restructuring rules had changed, it was now projected to be Year 21. We are legally not allowed to go into deficit.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked if she could have the list of prepared estate enhancements if available. Paul Pledger (Assistant Head of Housing) said that Highways carried out off street parking schemes, until they were moved to Essex CC – this work has now been taken over by Housing Services who are still putting in procedures. Some of the procedures were considered by a Task and Finish Panel who recommended a certain order that the assessments had to be carried out in; officers are taking this into account as they write the procedures. Ward members will also be notified; the Chairman pointed out that this had its dangers as sometimes the ward members were notified, but the work did not take place.

**RESOLVED:**

That the HRA Business Plan 2006 be recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder for adoption.

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

Executive Summary Report on the findings of the Private Sector House Condition Survey 2005;  
Progress with the Housing Service Development Plan; and  
The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2006.

**64. FUTURE MEETINGS**

As this was the last meeting of this municipal year the Chairman thanked the officers, members and the vice chairman for their help and contributions over the last year.

In turn the Chairman was also thanked for his leadership and the contributions he brought to the Panel over the last year.

The next meeting of the Housing Standing Panel is to be held on 27 July 2006.

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Epping Forest

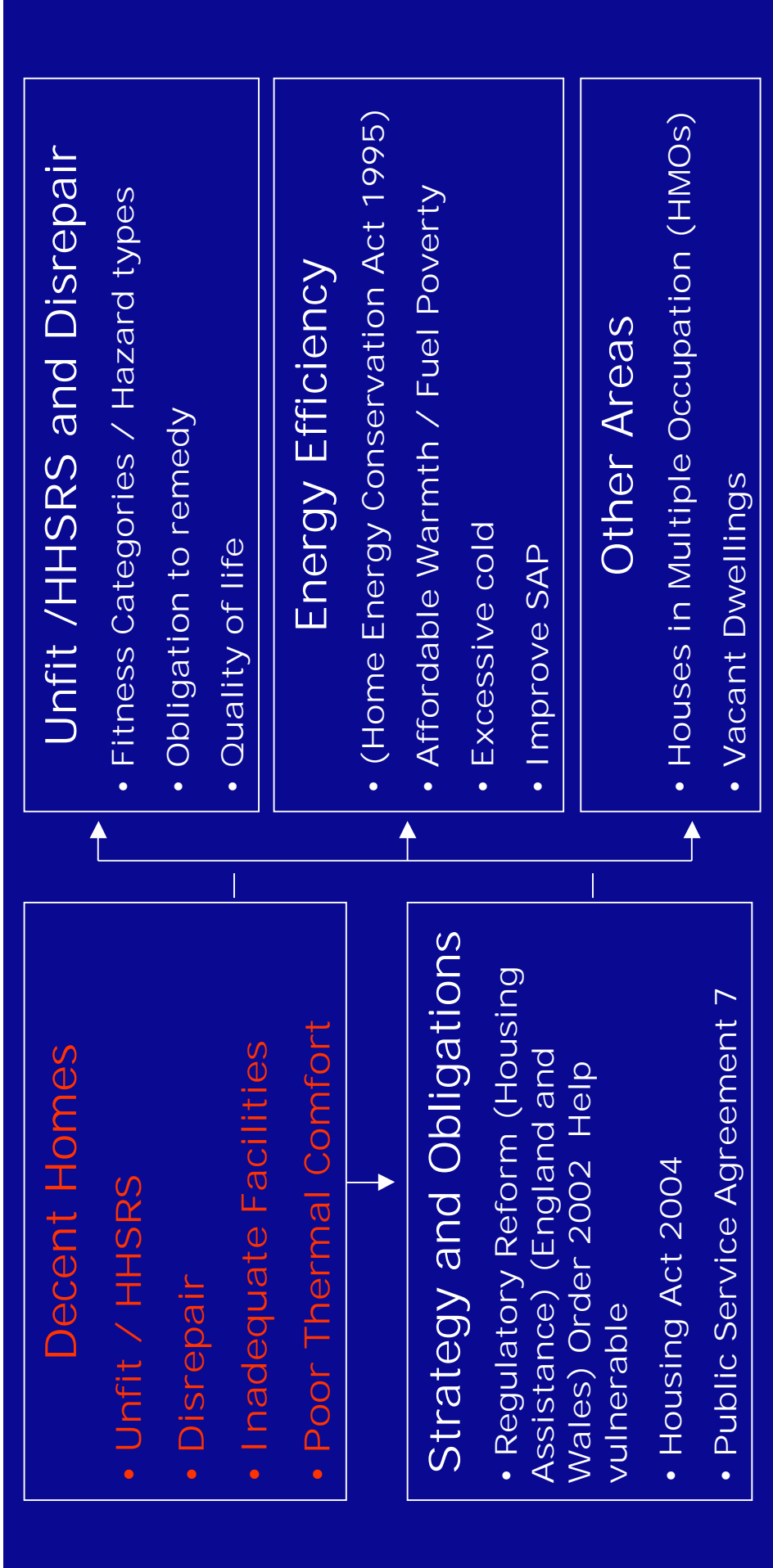
Presentation To:

House Condition Survey 2005

- Epping Forest District Council

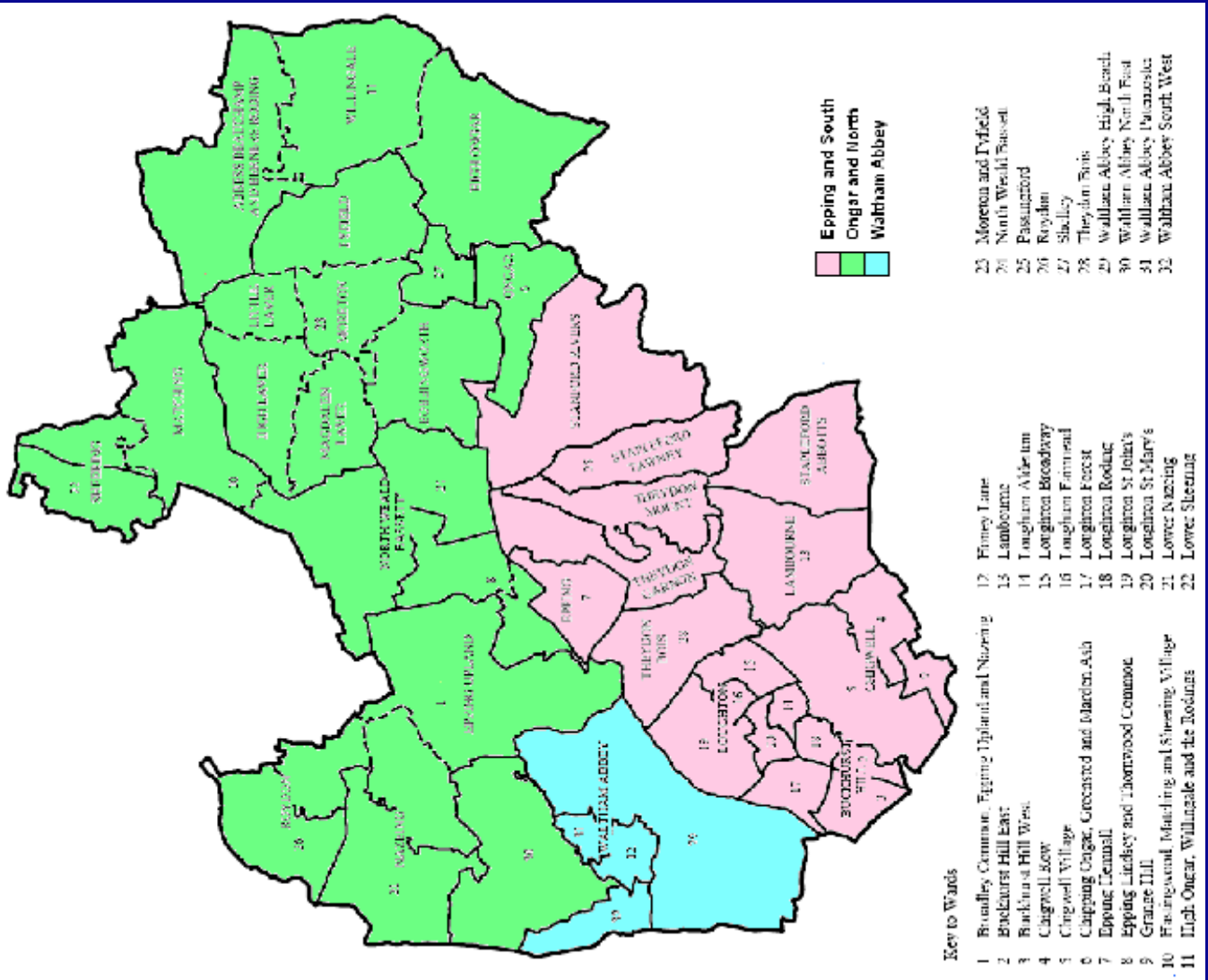
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# Why carry out a stock condition survey?



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# Tenure distribution



Tenure	Epping Forest 2005			EHCS 2001
	Total Stock	% Total Stock	% Private Sector	
Owner occupied	40,240	79%	91%	70%
Housing association (RSL)	1,260	3%	3%	7%
Privately rented	2,470	5%	6%	10%
Local Authority*	6,820	13%	-	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,790</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Epping Forest Private Sector House Condition Survey 2005

\* National local authority figures are shown here for comparative purposes. Figures given generally throughout the report are in relation to the private sector only.



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## Predominant features

- Small social sector and private rented sector.
- More modern stock, but slightly more pre 1919 also.
- Large number of detached, semi-detached houses and purpose built flats, but very few converted flats of any kind.
- More residents over the age of 60 than average, and more over the age of 75.
- More traditional families and couples than average.
- Above average income, but unevenly distributed.
- Significant level of benefit receipt over 20%.



## The Decent Homes Standard

- Decency above national average
- Predominantly relating to thermal comfort
- Has become a far greater problem from April 2006

Sub Area	Private non decent dwellings	Per cent non decent	Shortfall for vulnerable households (70%)
Epping and South	2,700	55.6%	700
Ongar and North	1,300	60.0%	210
Waltham Abbey	1,000	63.0%	110



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1,260 Publicly Rented Dwellings (Housing Association)

42,710 Private Sector Dwellings

The ODPM PSA7 targets in respect of decent homes relate to owner occupied and privately rented dwellings only

8,500 vulnerable households (in receipt of benefits) in private sector homes

10,430 non decent private sector homes (owner occupied and privately rented only)

Number of dwellings which are non decent & which are occupied by vulnerable households

3,580

Reduction needed by 2010

1,020

Cost to make all of these decent at an average cost of £4,800 = £4.9 million



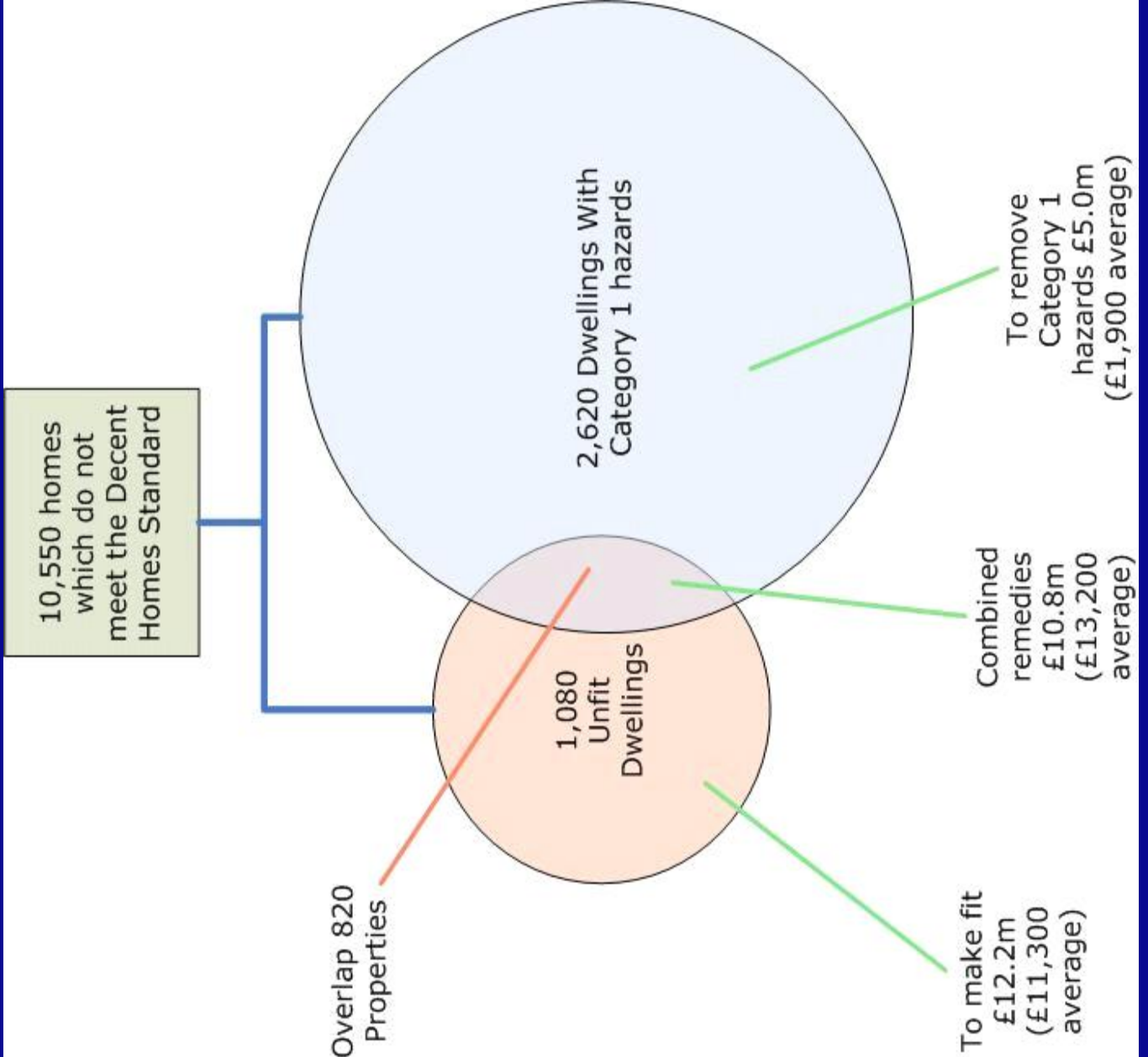
## Impact of Housing Act 2004



- Change from fitness to Housing Health and Safety Rating System 1,900 (4.3%) to 3,400 (7.4%)
- There is only a 23.8% overlap between the two
- Nearly 900 HMOs, a significant number, with between 55 and 60 falling under mandatory licensing
- Powers to grant EDMOs and deal with empty properties better
- 1,250 vacant, with 36% vacant for over 6 months

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## Category 1 hazards



- Local authority required to take action where a category 1 hazard has been identified (as with unfitness)
- Shift from unfit to category 1 hazard dwellings is a huge shift – implications for training and resources
- Primary hazard failures Excessive Cold 50.3% and Falls on Stairs 38.9%
- Strongly associated with the same characteristics as unfitness – older dwellings, the privately rented sector and converted flats
- Dwellings mostly occupied by those on lower incomes and benefit receipt

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## Other significant stock issues

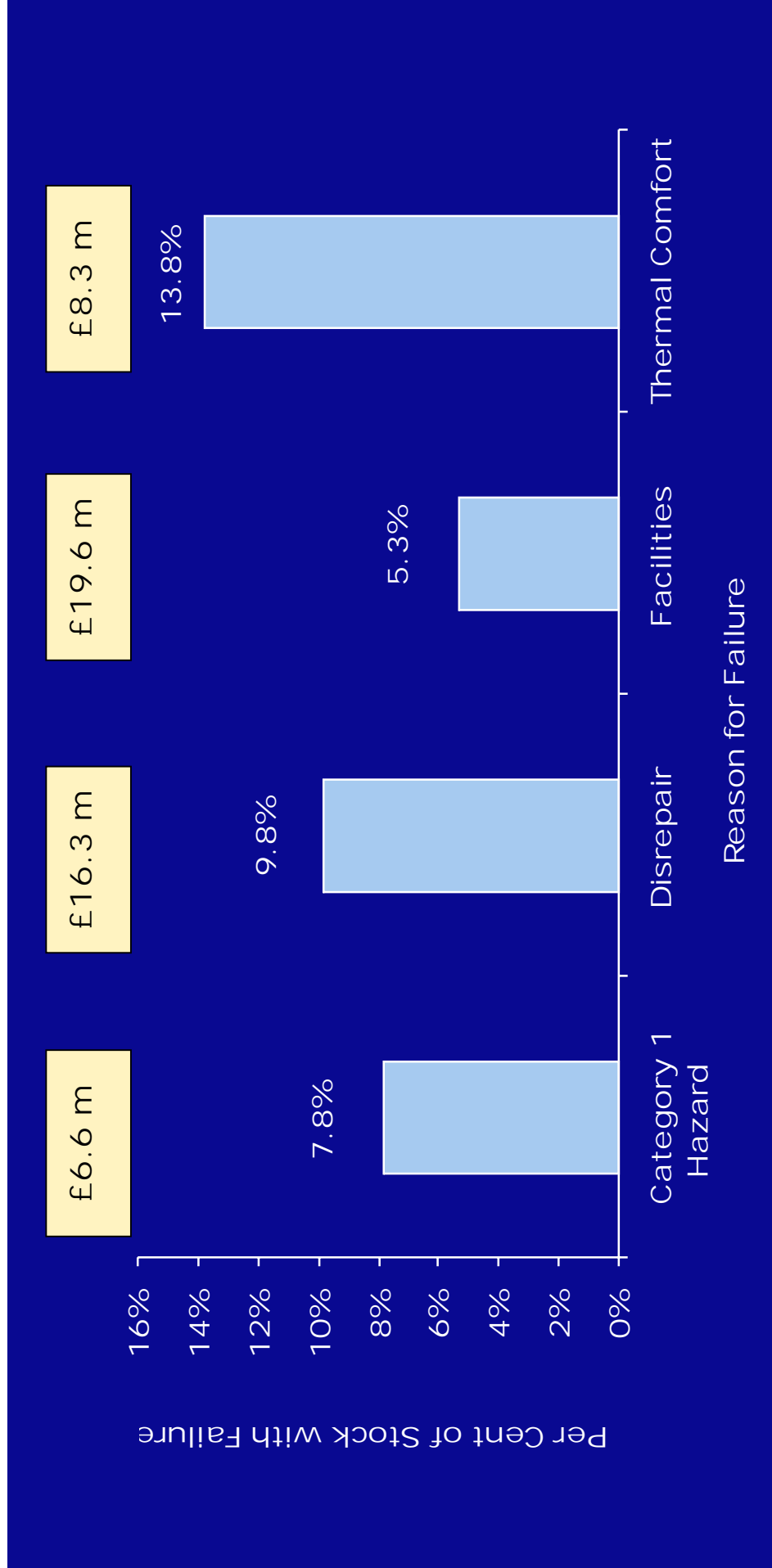


- 1,800 (4.1%) of dwellings are in fuel poverty. Elimination of fuel poverty key to a number of required targets.
- 6,100 (13.8%) dwellings fail the thermal comfort criterion. Most need better insulation, but 1,400 need new heating.
- There is an issue with equity rich cash poor. Average house prices are high but there are many low income older households.
- Vulnerability is defined under the Decent Homes Standard as households in receipt of means tested benefits.

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# Cost implications for repair and improvement



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## Energy Efficiency and thermal comfort



- Cost to remedy fuel poverty £2.2 million, 1,800 dwellings.
- Mean SAP (58) same as the EHCS, pockets of poor energy efficient dwellings (Private rented, Rural properties).
- Improving energy efficiency useful in a wide number of policy areas.
- Problem of cold hazards and the prevention of excess winter deaths is particularly an issue given an aging population in Epping Forest
- Hard to heat homes, gas supply to rural dwellings and purpose built flats

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## Action thus far



- Empty homes strategy now largely developed, with policy tools for bringing vacant dwellings back into use
- HMO inspections ongoing, this should result in a definitive list of current, licensable HMOs. In addition, providing information on compliance and enforcement needed
- Revised and much expanded private sector housing strategy now being written



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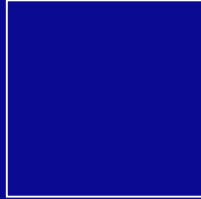
## What of the future?



- Staff resources – there are a significant number of shortfalls and problems in the stock
- Financial resources – meeting the targets will cost money, the evidence suggests a lot may not afford this
- PSA7, Vacant dwellings, Licensable HMOs and Fuel poverty are **OBLIGATORY** or **MANDATORY** issues
- Rapid movement toward sub-regional working, use of housing strategies and joined up housing policy

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pps plc

Thank You

