

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2007  
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING  
AT 5.35 - 8.25 PM**

**Members Present:** S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, K Chana, Mrs H Harding, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs P K Rush, J Wyatt and Mrs M Carter (Epping Forest Tenants and Leasholders Federation)

**Other members present:**

**Apologies for Absence:** Mrs P Brooks

**Officers Present** A Hall (Director of Housing), R Wilson (Assistant Head of Housing Services (Operations)), S Devine (Environmental Health Officer), Mrs S Lindsay (Housing Resources Manager), S Stranders (Principal Team Leader), L Swan (PSH Policy & CARE Manager), H Thorpe (Housing Assets Manager) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

**Also in attendance:**

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

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

**2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

The Panel noted that there were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING - 30 APRIL 2007**

The minutes from the last meeting were noted and agreed.

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

The Terms of Reference and the Work Programme were noted.

The Director of Housing amended item 3 of the work programme, the progress report on Decent Homes was to be given at the March 2008 meeting and not the 2007 meeting. The meeting also noted that it was thought appropriate that the Review of the Careline Service be considered by this Panel before it went to the Portfolio Holder, this would be brought to the Panel at a later date.

**5. PRESENTATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLANS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING AND EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGIES**

The Principal Team Leader from Environmental Services introduced the presentation on the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and the Empty Property Strategy 2007-09. The presentation was given in turn by the Principal Team Leader, the

Environmental Health Officer and the Private Sector Housing Policy and CARE Manager. A copy of their presentation is attached to these minutes along with the Empty Property Action Plan and the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2007-09 Action Plan.

The Panel noted that the Cabinet agreed to the adoption of the strategies but that their full implementation be delayed until the views of the Housing Scrutiny Panel on the detailed Housing Assistance Policy be sought and pending a review of available resources.

The Environmental Health Officer was asked about compulsory purchase orders, and what would happen to someone living in that property when the order is made. She replied that if they were not lawful tenants they would be treated under the same rules as homeless people.

Asked about houses left vacant for 6 months or more, even though the owners might be in a protracted moving-in situation, the officer replied that under the scheme the house was technically empty, but really only houses left vacant for about two years or so would be considered.

**RESOLVED:**

The Panel thanked the officers for their informative presentation.

**6. HOUSING SERVICES STRATEGY ON RENT ARREARS**

The Assistant Head of Housing introduced the Housing Service Strategy on Rent Arrears. It was noted that:

- The Housing Portfolio Holder has still to approve the strategy;
- Item 4.6(d) – it was queried if the Council specified what ‘other steps’ would be taken to recover the debt incurred. The Assistant Head of Housing said that they did specify before hand (in writing) what the steps were. The ultimate sanction being to take restraint action, but they have never yet had to resort to this;
- Item 8.2 (b) mentions ‘older people’, the Panel would like a definition of what exactly an ‘older’ person is, it was know that they in fact fall into various categories and the Panel would like this definition included;
- Items 8.8 and 8.10 spoke of annual and quarterly rent statements. This was for people in arrears of £100 and over;
- Item 8.16 – housing staff now liased with housing benefit staff (once the applicant has signed a release form);
- Item 8.29 - the Panel were concerned that a three day notification period was too short – it was agreed that this period be reconsidered and extended appropriately.

**ACTION:**

- (1) To define the term ‘Older Person’.
- (2) Item 8.29 - that a three day notification period be reconsidered and extended appropriately.

The Assistant Head of Housing was asked if a tenant withheld some of their rent because they thought that they were getting an incomplete service, would the Council insist that they pay it regardless. He replied that they would investigate the circumstances and if the service was not being delivered that they would amend their demands accordingly, however if the service was being delivered then they would treat it as arrears.

Asked whether they could pay back any arrears by instalments, the Assistant Head of Housing said yes they could, they were very flexible about it.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered and endorsed the Housing Service Strategy and Rent Arrears.

**7. HOUSING SERVICES STRATEGY ON ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

The Assistant Head of Housing introduced Housing Service Strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour. It was noted that:

- There were some changes to be made in respect of changing references to the Head of Housing Services to the Director of Housing;
- Item 8.51 – graffiti removal only refers to Council properties and that this should be clarified.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered and endorsed the Housing Service Strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour.

**8. HOUSING SERVICES STRATEGY ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

The Assistant Housing Maintenance Manager introduced Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency. It was noted that:

- The Government is committed to energy efficiency in housing and so is the Council;
- Council homes must meet the thermal comfort and heating criteria in the Decent Homes Standards by 2010;
- Currently the Council is focusing on the following improvements: Low energy lights, increase in loft insulation to 300mm, cavity wall insulation, boilers changed to grade 'A' rated ones and to install double glazing for all windows;
- Currently the Council is in 'Band D' of the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) Rating and the aim is to increase its rating;
- The Council will be trialing Solar power on one of it's rural properties that has no access to mains gas;
- The Council is not currently trialing wind turbines as there is currently no government funding for this;
- Item 10.5 – noted that home energy packs are now mandatory for four bedroom properties.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered and endorsed the Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency.

**9. HOUSING STRATEGIES ON TENANT PARTICIPATION AND HOUSING INFORMATION**

The Housing Resources Manager introduced the Housing Service Strategies on the Tenant Participation service and on Housing Information. These were to replace the existing strategies and take the Council up to 2010. She went through the strategies pointing out the updated sections to that Panel.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered and endorsed the Housing Service Strategy on Tenant Participation Services and on Housing Information.

**10. HOUSING SERVICE STANDARDS 2007/08**

The Director of Housing introduced the report on Housing Service Standards for 2007/08. This document brings together all the Housing Service Standards, producing a set of proposed Housing Service Standards that includes associated performance data for 2006/07 where applicable and available. Also attached to the report was the recently reviewed Housing Charter, no changes were proposed.

It was noted that:

- The final standards would be published in a booklet format;
- The Housing Charter (Appendix 2) has been previously published and recently at the behest of the Housing Scrutiny Panel, a working group had been set up to update that original document;
- Appendix 3 set out the proposed delivery of standards;
- It was suggested and agreed that the standards were reviewed by the Panel at their July meeting each year;
- Some of the standards were not measured as not all the standards needed to be.
- Item G5 (b) the performance number should be 9;
- Item G5 (c) the performance number should be changed from 0 to 1;
- Private Sector Housing Standards to be reviewed next year;
- Item HM10 – the wording to be altered to read “Remove clearly abandoned and potentially dangerous vehicles from...”;
- Item HM13 – to replace ‘X days’ with ‘two weeks’;
- Item HM15 is still to have figures put into the performance column;
- A further service standard be added to read something like “Housing Inspectors to randomly inspect work carried out by our contractors”;
- Item S1 – the nil figures relate to numbers not tested – the wording to be amended to make this clearer;

- Item S9 – Performance figures to be altered to read – Weekly 45, Fortnightly 71 and Monthly to 532;
- Item HS4 – standard to have ‘10 weeks’ inserted where ‘x’ is at present;
- The last bullet point on Appendix 2 to be extended and to check out if the CRE exists as a separate entity anymore;
- The full standards be brought the secretaries attention of the Tenant’s Association and all EFDC Councillors.

**ACTION:** To check out if the CRE exists as a separate entity anymore

**RESOLVED:**

That the Panel considered and endorsed the draft report to the Housing Portfolio Holder and the accompanying Housing Service Standards, the Housing Charter and the proposed ways of publicity, subject to the comments/amendments noted above.

## 11. REVIEW OF THE ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

The Assistant Head of Housing introduced the report on the Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme. 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 it.

The Panel considered a report on proposed changes to the Allocations Scheme to take effect from 1 April 2008.

It was noted that:

- Under Appendix 1 reference number 8.5 the ‘increase of the amounts of household income plus assets (including savings and property equity) of £200,000’ and not £198,000 as stated;
- The survey of incentives offered by neighbouring authorities was undertaken;
- The CAB and the Tenants Federation had been consulted;
- The Panel requested that the scheme be expanded to enable it to be offered to anyone who wished to downsize to any size of property, providing the downsized property is in accordance with their needs;
- The scheme to be publicised more and to write to prospective applicants explaining the incentives;
- A summary of what a S21 Notice is, be added to the reason for changes of Band 1 (c);
- The scheme to be amended to incorporate new DCLG draft changes once they become law.

The Panel wished to express their appreciation to the Assistant Head of Housing for his recent presentation given to all councillors on this scheme.

**RESOLVED:**

(1) That the Scheme be expanded to enable it to be offered to anyone who wished to downsize to any size of property, providing the downsized property is in accordance with their needs; and

(2) That the Scrutiny endorses the Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme report prior to consultation with registered social landlords operating in the District.

**12. UPDATE ON THE CHOICE BASED LETTING SCHEME**

The Assistant Head of Housing updated the meeting on the Choice Based Letting Scheme. He informed the Panel that the scheme should go live week beginning 19 November 2007. All Members will be sent a copy of the housing pack, which will include a scheme user guide. During October and November they are carrying out a lot of consultation work (next week they are due to meet with the CAB). They are due to provide quarterly update on the Harlow Scheme, which has been running the scheme for about three years. There has been an average of 132 expressions of interest per property, 89.2% of which came from the Internet.

They were aware of the need not to exclude vulnerable people from the scheme. There will be a quarterly information bulletin set up that will be copied to all members.

**RESOLVED:**

That the updating report was noted, and that further updating reports on the Choice Based Letting Scheme be brought to future meetings.

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

The Chairman agreed to report briefly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee all the reports considered at this meeting.

**14. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Panel agreed to change the date of the 21 April 2008 meeting to 18 March 2008.

# **Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy Empty Property Strategy 2007-2009**



# **Implementation and Action Plans**

# Background

## *Cabinet report - 18 December 2006*

### **Recommended**

That the Private Sector Housing and the Empty Property Strategies be adopted but their **full implementation be delayed**: until

- The views of the Housing Scrutiny Panel on the detailed Housing Assistance Policy be sought; and
- Pending a review of available resources.

The Housing Assistance Policy is a detailed statement of what financial assistance will be available and the conditions that will apply and forms Appendix A of the Private Sector Housing Strategy.

The Housing Assistance Policy was presented to the HSSP on 30/1/07.



# Background

***Cabinet report - 12 March 2007***

## ***Recommended***

- That the Housing Assistance Policy be adopted as part of the Private Sector Housing Strategy; and that a progress report be presented to the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel 12 months from the date of implementation of the Policy or a lesser period if significant amendments to the Policy are considered necessary.

***Both strategies contain an action plan – copies of which you should have in front of you.***



## **Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy**

| Objective   | Work to be done  | Target Date                                     |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Adequate levels of appropriately trained staff | Recruitment and training to be carried out. All staff to be competent in new Housing Act 2004 procedures | July 2007<br>Training in HA 2004 to be on going |

**Achieved:**

- New EHO recruited March 2007 to deal with mandatory HMO licensing (subject of previous growth bid);
- All existing staff trained with regard to the Decent Home Standard and the new Housing Hazard Safety Rating System – training on going;
- 2 members of staff left – new officers now in post.

**Not Achieved:**

- The recruitment of a Private Sector Housing Officer (growth bid secured in order to implement only the *key components* of the strategy and secure the use of the specific funding from Go-East in respect of attaining the Decent Homes Standard and moving forward with dealing with empty homes) - advert out this week.

| Objective  | Work to be done   | Target Date   |
|--|---|---|
| 2. Review of licensing system for high risk Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) | <p>Licensing system in place</p> <p>Review after 3 - 6 months to ensure effective operation, and thereafter annually</p> <p>Advertise again after 6 months to ensure that all potential licensable properties are covered</p> | <p>June 2007</p> <p>September 2007</p> <p>December 2007</p> |

**Achieved:**

- Licensing system is in place;
- Forms have been sent to all 'known' licensable HMOs;
- Inspections have commenced on other HMOs - identified either through complaints or as part of the HMO licensing regime.

### **Not Achieved:**

- Unable to review licensing system as target suggests due to insufficient timescale and poor responses;
- Have not advertised licensing requirement to date – this is in hand - aiming to advertise before the end of 2007.

### **Comments:**

- Application forms are not being returned;
- Approx 1/3 of landlords have informed the Council that they will change the use of the property so that it falls outside the mandatory licensing requirements;
- Many properties we believed to be licensable are not – but are still considered to be high risk HMOs – legislation requires comprehensive inspections to be carried out, this is a very time consuming exercise.

| Objective  | Work to be done   | Target Date |
|--|---|-------------|
| 3. A new systematic approach to inspection and enforcement in the private sector | Introduce proactive inspections in addition to reactive inspections, focusing first on high risk HMOs and Park Home sites. Introduce procedures to ensure rigorous response to complaints on private sector housing issues. | April 2007  |

### What we have done

- Inspections of high risk HMOs – implemented in part but currently facing resource issue due to sheer amount of work required at the initial stage and complex nature of new inspection regime;
- Inspections of Park Home sites - implemented in part – new model licensing standard still awaited from Government;
- Officers working with Essex Fire and Rescue Service on free Home Fire Safety Check Scheme (Park Home sites only);
- Officers working with the HSE and other Essex LAs to set up Caravan Working Party with regard to Health & Safety on these sites;

- No written procedures per se but all complaints are being processed under the requirements of the Housing Act 2004 e.g. inspection and enforcement under the new Housing Health and Safety Rating System

| Objective                    | Work to be done   | Target Date |
|------------------------------|---|-------------|
| 4. Introduce Landlords Forum | Contact known landlords and representatives, advertise intention to set up Landlords Forum, hold initial meeting to agree aims & objectives and constitution. | April 2007  |

**Not Achieved:**

- Landlords Forum - had planned to hold initial meeting in September but this will slip into 2008 – most probably post April 2008 when the restructuring finalised.

**What we have done to engaged with the private rented sector:**

- Sent out questionnaires to all Letting Agents and formulated a list of Estate Agents and Letting Agents;
- In conjunction with Housing Services met with Letting Agents re RDGS and informed forum of the requirements of Housing Act 2004/HHSRS;
- Attended an E15 Acting School open day - produced a comprehensive document for students, their parents and landlords entitled ‘What to expect from your landlord’.



| Objective  | Work to be done  | Target Date   |
|--|--|---|
| <p>5. An accreditation system in partnership with local landlords linked with Deposit Guarantee Scheme</p> | <p>Formalise links with Epping Forest Housing Aid. Discuss with representatives of local landlords and voluntary agencies agreed standards of accommodation and management. Establish procedures for self assessment/ inspection. Publish advice to landlords and prospective tenants. Link with Deposit Guarantee Scheme.</p> | <p>Consult &amp; develop scheme July 2007, implement September 2007</p> |

- **Not completed all the work**

**but**

- **Working procedure established with Epping Forest Housing Aid - joint visit to ensure property meets the Decent Homes Standard before occupation. If not then EHO recommends works/amenities required in order to meet the standard.**

| Objective                     | Work to be done  | Target Date   |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| 6. Adopt Empty Homes Strategy | Format for Strategy has already been approved. Formal Strategy to be approved and all measures implemented | Adoption - December 2006<br>Majority of measures implemented - March 2007 |

**Achieved:**

- **Sally to follow with our progress to date and update you with regard to the PLACE Scheme.**



## **Empty Property Strategy**

# 1. Nominate a lead officer for Empty Homes

- Achieved – but officer taken off other private sector duties

## **2. Information to be posted on the Council website and published in the Forester magazine**

- Website
- Forester magazine
- Other publicity : National Week of Action
- Council Tax leaflet

### **3a. Relevant non Environmental Health staff to report empty homes**

- All Council staff have been e-mailed to advise on the issue of empties and procedure for reporting
- **Propose annual reminder**
- All council staff are informed of issues as they arise e.g.. National Week of Action

## 3b. Finders Fee Scheme

- £5000 in this years budget to fund a Finders Fee Scheme
- An owner receives a non-refundable premium of £1000 for letting his property to a family nominated by the Homeless Prevention team
- **To Qualify:**
- 6 months empty
- Preferable 2 and 3 bed properties
- Offer AST for 12 months minimum
- Property to be in safe and lettable condition
- **The situation to date**
- Almost ready
- Information literature drafted
- Notification about the scheme will be in the next Forester

## 4. Go-East funded initiative to renovate sub standard empty homes

- PLACE – Private Leasing Agreements Converting Empties
- £700,000 – target to bring 20 long term empty properties in EFDC back into use
- It is a private sector leasing scheme offering high level grant to funding
- Situation to date
- Contracts have been signed by all partners
- Information leaflets with printing
- Notification in the next edition of the Forester
- Some interested owners



## **5. Council tax reduction to 50% after 6 months empty; no reduction after 12 months**

- **Implemented April 2007**

## 6. Empty Homes Grant

- Property has been empty at least 1 year
- A significant hazard exists
- All works are carried out to bring the property to the Decent Homes Standard
- Maximum grant of £10,000 to owner occupiers
- 50% of the cost of works up to a maximum of £10,000 for landlords
- Conditions-owners to occupy for 10 years
  - - landlords to let for 5 years
- **Situation to date**
- Procedures set up and ready to go
- Publicised by leaflet
- Notified in the Forester

## 7. Increased enforcement options

- **Compulsory purchase orders (CPO)**
  - 8/8a Sun Street, Waltham Abbey
- **Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)**
- **Situation to date**
  - First CPO has been made, no objections and await confirmation by GO-East
  - Issue of EDMO's remains outstanding

## So where are we at?

- We have visited nearly 400 properties from the council tax empty property list
- We have reported back to council tax those found not to be empty
- We have written to the owners of all empty properties
- We are giving information and advice and are starting to promote the schemes and incentives

## Some data

|                 | Total<br>empty | >12months<br>empty | <12 months<br>empty |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| October<br>2006 | 483            |                    |                     |
| March<br>2007   | 431            | 303                | 128                 |
| October<br>2007 | 375            | 218                | 157                 |

## And to do next....

- Set up a partnership with a Residential Social Landlord to manage EDMO's
- **Prioritise for action- depending on:**
  1. Length of time empty
  2. Whether subject of complaint
  3. Condition and effect on the community
  4. Suitability to meet a housing need
  5. Suitability for PLACE
  6. **Develop website and council tax leaflet**



## **Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy**

## 2003 POLICY

Renovation Grants

Large means tested grants for older people to address multiple defects in properties that fall below the statutory standard for housing conditions.

Home Repairs Assistance

Small grants for older people on low incomes to address single defects and provide thermal insulation.

Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

Means tested grants for registered disabled home-owners to top-up mandatory DFGs.

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

Means tested grants for registered disabled home-owners to provide essential facilities or access to essential facilities.



| 2003 POLICY   | 2007 POLICY   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Renovation Grants</li> <li>➤ Home Repairs Assistance</li> <li>➤ Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Decent Homes Assistance</li> <li>➤ Small Works Assistance</li> <li>➤ Thermal Comfort Grants</li> <li>➤ Discretionary DFGs</li> <li>➤ Relocation Grants</li> <li>➤ Empty Homes Grants</li> <li>➤ Conversion Grants</li> </ul> |
| Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)   | Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)   |

# 2007 POLICY

- Decent Homes Assistance
- Small Works Assistance
- Thermal Comfort Grants
- Discretionary DFGs
- Relocation Grants
- Empty Homes Grants
- Conversion Grants

Large **repayable** grants for **vulnerable people** to address multiple defects in properties that fall below the **statutory standard** for housing conditions.

Small grants for **vulnerable people** to address single defects.

Small grants to improve the thermal comfort of homes for vulnerable people **and landlords**.

Means tested grants for registered disabled homeowners to top-up mandatory DFGs.

Means tested grants for registered disabled homeowners to pay for relocation costs.

Grants to bring empty residential properties back into use.

Grants to convert redundant space in existing buildings into rented accommodation.

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

## 2007 POLICY

- Decent Homes Assistance
- Small Works Assistance
- Thermal Comfort Grants
- Discretionary DFGs
- Relocation Grants
- Empty Homes Grants
- Conversion Grants

Limited interest but uptake has been slow.

Good uptake.

Good uptake. Difficulties sometimes experienced where grants are given to top-up Warm Front Scheme.

No change.

One application being processed.

Enquiries and some interest.

No enquiries to date.

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

# ISSUES

- Increased emphasis on enforcing standards on owner-occupiers.
- The Decent Homes Standard.
- The PSA 7 target.
- Encouraging people to release equity.

# TOOLS

**E**ncouragement

**M**onitor and **R**eview

**T**ime

**P**ublicity



## A Simple Guide to the HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating System)

The HHSRS is a system of assessing the condition of dwellings. Its principle is that a dwelling, including its structure, means of access, any associated outbuildings and gardens, should provide a safe and healthy environment for the occupants and any visitors.

To satisfy this principle a dwelling should be free from unnecessary and avoidable hazards. Based on statistics collected nationally on the causes of accidents within the home and their outcomes, the HHSRS gives a rating to any hazards. If an accident is very likely to occur and the outcome is likely to be serious or severe (e.g. death or a major or fatal injury) then its rating will be high and it may be considered to be a category 1 hazard. If this is the case the Council has a duty to take action. Further details are included in the question and answer section at the end of this leaflet.

Of course there are some hazards which can't be eliminated, sleep stairs for example, but any risk of suffering harm by falling could be reduced by the correct positioning of banisters and handrails.

Twenty nine hazards are identified in the HHSRS and the risk of harm from some is relatively minimal. However, there are some which because of the frequency with which they occur and the severity of the potential outcome, are of major significance and could be considered to be 'Key Hazards'. These are summarised over the page.



## A Simple Guide to the Decent Homes Standard

A Decent Home is one which is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities.

The government has set targets to reduce the numbers of vulnerable families living in non-Decent Homes. Vulnerable families are those who are in receipt of at least one of the main means tested or disability related benefits.

There are four parts to the Decent Homes Standard which are described in the over the page. A property must meet all four of them to be considered Decent.



## In summary

- Too early in the process to say if amendments to the Housing Assistance Policy are considered necessary;
- New grants regime and inspection and enforcement requirements of the Housing Act 2004 have had significant impact on the way in which we work and on available resources;
- Due to various delays we have only just advertised for the new grants officer - this has slowed the grants process down, other staff resources have been used to try and plug the gap and we have been unable to fully 'sell' our new regime;
- HMO licensing very slow;
- Private Sector Housing Strategies and supporting documents need to be finalised, amalgamated and placed on the council's website;
- Procedures need to be formalised;
- Need to improve our systems for monitoring compliance with the Decent Homes Standard;
- Greater engagement in the private sector required.



## In summary

- P.L.A.C.E. contract now signed up by all parties with EFDC playing a significant part in the process
- Up to date database on Empty Properties and vast improvement on meeting our BVPI;
- Greater understanding of our Empty Properties and associated problems;
- Most objectives met on the Empty Property Strategy and good progress with others;
- New grant regime has been introduced;
- Leaflets and procedures available for all the new types of grants;
- The new range of grants (despite the potential need for some amendments in the future) are meeting the needs of our residents;
- Inspections are being carried out on Park Homes, Officers are working with the Fire Authority on Free Home Safety checks, and with the HSE/LAs re Caravan Working Party;
- All inspections being carried out under the new more complex HHSRS;
- Our HMOs are being brought up to standard – guidance produced for tenants of HMOs;

# In Summary

*Reminder – That the Private Sector Housing and the Empty Property Strategies be adopted but their **full implementation be delayed** pending a review of available resources.*

The implementation of the new grants regime, the PLACE initiative and other work on empty properties, the introduction of the requirements of the Housing Act 2004, including the mandatory licensing of HMOs and the new system of inspection and enforcement has been exciting and challenging but, as predicted, is currently stretching existing staff resources. There is still a lot of work to be done and other private sector housing issues to be addressed.

My thanks to both Lyndsay and Sally who have worked exceptionally hard in implementing the Strategies and the necessary changes to the way in which we work in order to meet the new provisions of the Housing Act 2004.

A review of the work carried out to date, other outstanding private sector housing matters and available resources is required. The team looks forward to working with Alan and other officers of Housing Services next year with a view to continuing the good work that has been achieved so far and to improve our private sector housing functions.



## **Empty Properties:**

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# Empty Property Strategy 2007 – 2009 Action Plan

| Objective  | Priority      | Work to be Done  | Resources Required  | Target Date                 | Indicator(s) of Outcome Achieved/Performance Measure     |
|--|---------------|--|---|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. Nominated Lead Officer for Empty Homes  | High          | Recruit additional staff to Environmental Health group.  | Additional staffing costs £19,000.  | December 2006               | Additional staff in place and Lead Officer nominated.    |
| 2. Information to be posted on Council website and published in the Forester magazine                                  | High          | Draft web page and links.<br>Draft article for Forester magazine.  | Time input from Principal Team Leader Environmental Protection, Residential Control Unit /IT staff.                                 | December 2006<br>March 2007 | Web pages accessible and article published.              |
| 3. Relevant non Environmental Health staff to report empty homes   | High          | All relevant staff to be informed of new Strategy and importance of reporting problem empty homes. Reporting arrangements to be clear.   | Time input from Principal Team Leader, Environmental Protection, Residential Control Unit.  | February 2007               | All staff notified.                                      |
| 3. Finder's Fee Scheme   | Medium        | New procedures including validation of letting period, publicising scheme  | £5,000 per annum starting 2006/07, time from Environmental Health group staff and Housing staff.                                    | April 2007                  | Finder's Fee Scheme procedures in place and publicised.  |
| 4. GO-East funded initiative for renovation of substandard empty homes (in partnership with 4 other local authorities) | Medium / Long | Complete tendering for contractors to carry out renovation works, agree working arrangements with partners, agree leasing and nomination arrangements, select and renovate first properties. | Capital funding provided by successful bid to GO-East.<br>Time input from Principal Team Leader and Residential Control Unit staff. | December 2007               | First properties renovated and let to nominated tenants. |
| 5 Council Tax reduction to 50% after 6 months empty, reduced to 0% after 12 months empty.                              | Medium        | Alteration of procedures, publicity for changed arrangements, Council tax demands for revised amounts from April 2007.   | Time input from Finance staff.  | April 2007                  | New discount arrangements in place.                      |

| Objective                        | Priority | Work to be Done  | Resources Required  | Target Date | Indicator(s) of Outcome Achieved/Performance Measure  |
|----------------------------------|----------|--|---|-------------|---|
| 6. Empty Homes Grants            | High     | Introduce procedures and documentation to implement new grant. Publicise availability. | Time input from Principal Team Leader and Residential Control Unit. | April 2007  | Grant procedures, documentation and leaflets introduced.  |
| 7. Increased enforcement options | High     | Guidelines and procedures developed for additional enforcement options (part done)     | Time input from Principal Team Leader.                              | April 2007  | New guidance and procedures in place, staff able to use additional options in appropriate circumstances (part in place) |

# Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2007 – 2009 Action Plan

| Objective  | Priority | Links to Other Strategies / Legislation  | Work to be Done  | Resources Required  | Target Date   | Indicator(s) of Outcome Achieved/Performance Measure  |
|--|----------|--|--|---|---|---|
| <b>INSPECTION AND ENFORCEMENT</b>  |          |  |  |   |   |   |
| 1. Adequate levels of appropriately trained staff.                               | High     | Corporate BVPP<br>Private Sector Housing Strategy  | Recruitment and training to be carried out. All staff to be competent in new Housing Act 2004 procedures.  | Time input from Principal Team Leader. Provision for the cost of additional post (s). | July 2007<br>Training in Housing Act 2004 duties to be on going | Satisfactory performance of the Council's private sector housing responsibilities (enforcement and delivery of financial assistance)<br>Unit staffed to new establishment. Staff effectively trained. |
| 2. Review of licensing system for high risk HMOs                                 | High     | National Housing Act 2004, Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation Regulations 2006<br>Corporate Housing Strategy | Licensing system in place. Review after three months and six months to ensure effective operation, and thereafter annually. Advertise again after six months to ensure that all potential licensable properties are covered. | Time input from Principal Team Leader Residential Control Unit                        | June 2007<br>September 2007<br>December 2007                    | All higher risk HMOs are licensed and all statutory obligations met<br>Licensable HMOs regularly monitored  |
| 3. A new systematic approach to inspection and enforcement in the private sector | Medium   | National Housing Act 2004<br>Regional<br>Regional Housing Policy<br>Corporate Housing Strategy                       | Introduce proactive inspections in addition to reactive inspections, focusing first on high risk HMOs and park home sites. Introduce procedures to ensure rigorous response to complaints on private sector housing issues.  | Time input from Residential Control Unit  | April 2007  | Inspection regime established and operating including planned inspection programme park home sites  |

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|---|----------|--|--|--|--|---|
| 4. Introduce Landlords Forum  | Medium   | National Housing Act 2004<br>Corporate Housing Strategy<br>Homelessness Strategy   | Contact known landlords and representatives, advertise intention to set up Landlords Forum, hold initial meeting to agree aims & objectives and constitution.  | Time input from Principal Team Leader Residential Control Unit. Servicing costs.   | April 2007   | Landlords Forum established and operating satisfactorily  |
| 5. An accreditation system in partnership with local landlords linked with Deposit Guarantee Scheme | Medium   | National DCLG Guidance<br>Corporate Housing Strategy<br>Homelessness Strategy  | Formalise links with Epping Forest Housing Aid. Discuss with representatives of local landlords and voluntary agencies agreed standards of accommodation and management. Establish procedures for self assessment/inspection. Publish advice to landlords and prospective tenants. Link with Deposit Guarantee Scheme. | Time input from Principal Team Leader & Residential Control Unit. Servicing costs  | Consult & develop scheme July 2007<br>Implement September 2007       | Launch. Advice leaflets available for prospective tenants. Standards for HMO and non-HMO accommodation established and agreed. Procedures in place for inspection / assessment, advising prospective tenants and links with Deposit Guarantee Scheme. |
| 6. Adopt Empty Homes Strategy   | High     | National Housing Act 2004, DCLG Guidance<br>Regional Housing Strategy<br>Corporate<br>Corporate plan<br>Housing Strategy<br>Homelessness Strategy<br>BVPI 64 | Format for Strategy has already been approved. Formal Strategy to be approved and all measures implemented   | Time input from Principal Team Leader & Residential Control Unit. Continuing commitment from capital programme to Empty Homes Loans (included in allocation in 9 below.) | Adoption - December 2006<br>Majority of measures impl'd - March 2007 | Empty Homes Strategy published and working procedures developed.<br>Target number of properties identified for first year.  |



| Objective   | Priority | Links to Other Strategies / Legislation  | Work to be Done  | Resources Required   | Target Date | Indicator(s) of Outcome Achieved/Performance Measure   |
|---|----------|--|--|--|-------------|--|
| <b>FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE</b>   |          |  |  |  |             |  |
| 7. Changes to Home Repair Assistance, Renovation Grants and Discretionary DFGs  | High     | National DCLG Guidance<br>Regional Housing Strategy<br>Corporate Housing Strategy  | Amend existing grant procedures and documentation to implement revised grant system.   | Increased capital allocation of £100k. Time input from Principal Team Leader & Residential Control Unit.                                       | April 2007  | Grant procedures, documentation and leaflets adapted to reflect revised grants. Changes notified publicly. |
| 8. Introduce Thermal Comfort Grants, Empty Homes Grants and Conversion Grants   | High     | National Housing Act 2004<br>Regional Housing Strategy<br>Corporate BVPP, Community Strategy<br>Housing Strategy<br>Homelessness Strategy                            | Introduce procedures and documentation to implement new grant structure  | Annual capital allocation of £150k. Input of time from Principal Team Leader Residential Control Unit.   | April 2007  | Grant procedures, documentation and leaflets introduced. Changes notified publicly.                        |
| 9. Formulate an agreement with a specialist financial provider to offer a range of equity release and similar financial packages. | Medium   | National DCLG Guidance, Foundations Review<br>Regional Housing Strategy<br>Sub regional Housing Strategy<br>Supporting People Strategy<br>Corporate Housing Strategy | To be developed with other London Commuter Belt Sub Region authorities or other partner authorities.<br>Undertake negotiations with specialist agencies over financial product availability and investment required. Negotiate and finalise agreement. | Resources to be identified in future capital programmes for Council contribution to financial provider. Time input from Principal Team Leader. | Mid 2008    | Resources identified in capital programmes.<br>Agreement with specialist financial provider in place.      |

| Objective  | Priority | Links to Other Strategies / Legislation  | Work to be Done   | Resources Required  | Target Date | Indicator(s) of Outcome Achieved/Performance Measure   |
|--|----------|--|---|---|-------------|--|
| 10. Develop and bring into use procedures for facilitating equity release.                           | Medium   | National DCLG Guidance<br>Regional<br>Regional Housing Strategy<br>Supporting People Strategy<br>Corporate<br>Housing Strategy<br>Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy | Development of principles and procedures for the new approach to giving financial assistance undertaken in consultation with all stakeholders.            | Resources to be identified in future capital programmes for Council contribution to equity release scheme.<br>Time input from Principal Team Leader | Late 2008   | Resources identified in capital programmes. Principles and procedures for equity release scheme established and service agreements in place with all agencies. Working procedures, documentation and leaflets for equity release scheme completed.<br><br>Changes notified publicly. |
| <b>GENERAL</b>   |          |  |   |   |             |  |
| 10.1. Increase awareness of both new approaches to enforcement and to offering financial assistance. | High     | National DCLG Guidance<br>Regional<br>Regional Housing Strategy<br>Corporate<br>Housing Strategy<br>BVPP   | Prepare new information leaflets and distribute to Council offices and to voluntary agencies. Update website. Advise Landlords Forum. Make press release. | Time input from Principal Team Leader & Residential Control Unit<br>Cost of publicity materials.  | June 2007   | New leaflets distributed, website updated, press release made and Landlords Forum advised.   |