

## Scrutiny Standing Panel Agenda



### **Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel Tuesday, 22nd January, 2008**

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

**Time:** 5.30 pm

**Democratic Services Officer:** Adrian Hendry, Research and Democratic Services  
Tel. 01992 564246; email: ahendry@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

**Members:**

Councillors S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, Mrs P Brooks, K Chana, Mrs H Harding, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs P K Rush, Mrs L Wagland and J Wyatt

**Epping Forest Tenants & Leaseholders Federation:** Mrs M Carter

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS TO ATTEND**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

(Assistant to the Chief Executive) To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

**3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

(Assistant to the Chief Executive). 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. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING - 25 OCTOBER 2007 (Pages 3 - 52)**

To note the minutes of the last meeting held on 25 October 2007.

**5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 53 - 58)**

(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 REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2007/08 (Pages 59 - 70)**

(Director of Housing) to consider the attached report.

**7. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS - UPDATE (Pages 71 - 76)**

(Director of Housing) to consider the attached report.

**8. 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.

**9. FUTURE MEETINGS**

To consider the forward programme of meeting dates for the Panel. The next and last scheduled meeting of this Panel, for this municipal year, is on 18 March 2008.

**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) to £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 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 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 empty	>12months empty	<12 months empty
October 2006	483		
March 2007	431	303	128
October 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 home-owners to top-up mandatory DFGs.

Means tested grants for registered disabled home-owners 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 statistics 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 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. Draft article for Forester magazine.	Time input from Principal Team Leader Environmental Protection, Residential Control Unit /IT staff.	December 2006 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. 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 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 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) 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 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 September 2007 December 2007	All higher risk HMOs are licensed and all statutory obligations met Licensable HMOs regularly monitored
3. A new systematic approach to inspection and enforcement in the private sector	Medium	National Housing Act 2004 Regional Regional Housing Policy 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

Objective	Priority	Links to Other Strategies / Legislation	Work to be Done	Resources Required	Target Date	Indicator(s) of Outcome Achieved/Performance Measure
4. Introduce Landlords Forum	Medium	National Housing Act 2004 Corporate Housing Strategy 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 Corporate Housing Strategy 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 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 Regional Housing Strategy Corporate Corporate plan Housing Strategy Homelessness Strategy 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 Majority of measures impl'd - March 2007	Empty Homes Strategy published and working procedures developed. 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 Regional Regional Housing Strategy 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 Regional Regional Housing Strategy Corporate BVPP, Community Strategy Housing Strategy 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 Regional Regional Housing Strategy Sub regional Housing Strategy Supporting People Strategy Corporate Housing Strategy	To be developed with other London Commuter Belt Sub Region authorities or other partner authorities. 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. 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 Regional Regional Housing Strategy Supporting People Strategy Corporate Housing Strategy 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. 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. Changes notified publicly.
<b>GENERAL</b>						
11. Increase awareness of both new approaches to enforcement and to offering financial assistance.	High	National DCLG Guidance Regional Regional Housing Strategy Corporate Housing Strategy 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 Cost of publicity materials.	June 2007	New leaflets distributed, website updated, press release made and Landlords Forum advised.

## 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.

**Chairman:** Cllr Stephen Murray

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## **Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2008**



**Subject: Housing Scrutiny Panel Work Programme 2007/8 – Progress Report**

**Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall, Director of Housing**

**Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, ext.4246**

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### **Recommendations:**

**That the Progress Report on the Panel's Work Programme 2007/8, attached as an Appendix, be noted.**

### **Report**

1. Attached as an Appendix is the current position with regard to each of the tasks assigned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Panel for its Work Programme in 2007/8, which also includes some additional tasks.

Housing Scrutiny Panel  
Work Programme 2007/8

**WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT**

Item	Priority	Original Report Deadline	Current Position
<b>Issues Within the Original Work Programme</b>			
(1) Implementation of Choice Based Lettings	High	Ongoing in 2007/8	<b>Completed</b> – The Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme was successfully introduced in November 2007. A report on the introduction is being reported to this meeting of the Scrutiny Panel. The Scrutiny Panel will also undertake a formal six-month review of the implementation.
(2) Private Sector Housing Strategy Action Plan	High	Ongoing in 2007/2008	<b>Completed</b> – A presentation on progress being made with the Action Plan was given at the Scrutiny Panel's meeting in October 2007
(3) Progress on meeting PSA7 target on Decent Homes	High	Ongoing in 2007/2008	<b>Not yet required</b> – Progress report to be given to the March 2008 meeting
(4) Implementation of Housing Assistance Policy 2007	High	August 2007	<b>In progress</b> – An update on implementation was given to the Scrutiny Panel in October 2007, as part of the presentation on the Private Sector Housing Strategy Action Plan. A more detailed update will be given in July 2008
(5) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants	Medium	July 2007	<b>Completed</b> – At the April 2007 meeting of the Panel
(6) Draft Housing Strategy Statement & Strategic Housing Action Plan	High	October 2007	<b>Limited progress</b> – A committee of the London Commuter Belt Housing Sub Region is considering how local housing strategies should be linked to the sub regional housing strategy. It should be possible to make progress on this issue in the next few months.
(7) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	High	October 2007	<b>Completed</b> – At the October 2007 meeting of the Panel



(8) Review of Incentives for Tenants to move to Smaller Accommodation	Medium	October 2007	<b>Completed</b> – As part of the Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme in October 2007
(9) Six-monthly Progress Report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan	Medium	January 2008	<b>To be considered at this meeting</b> – 22 January 2008
(10) Six-monthly Progress Report on Strategic Housing Action Plan	Medium	April 2008, now March	<b>Not yet required</b>
(11) Updated draft HRA Business Plan	High	April 2008, now March	<b>To be reported to the next meeting</b> – 18 <sup>th</sup> March 2008
<b>Issues Added to Original Work Programme During the Year</b>			
(12) Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency	Medium	October 2007	<b>Completed</b> – At the October 2007 meeting of the Panel
(13) Housing Service Strategy on Housing Information	Medium	October 2007	<b>Completed</b> – At the October 2007 meeting of the Panel
(14) Housing Service Strategy on Tenant Participation	Medium	October 2007	<b>Completed</b> – At the October 2007 meeting of the Panel
(15) Housing Service Strategy on Rent Arrears	Medium	October 2007	<b>Completed</b> – At the October 2007 meeting of the Panel
(15) Housing Service Strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour	Medium	October 2007	<b>Completed</b> – At the October 2007 meeting of the Panel
(16) Housing Service Standards and Housing Charter	Medium	October 2007	<b>Completed</b> – At the October 2007 meeting of the Panel
(17) Review of Careline Service	Medium	January 2008	<b>Not yet ready</b> – It is envisaged that this will be reported to the Scrutiny Panel's next meeting in March 2008

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## **Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2008**

**Portfolio: Housing – Cllr D. Stallan**



**Subject: Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2007/8 (Key Action Plan)  
– Progress Report**

**Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall, Director of Housing**

**Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, ext.4246**

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### **Recommendations:**

**That the Panel considers the Progress Report for the Key Action Plan contained within the HRA Business Plan 2007/8 and provides any feedback to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing accordingly.**

### **Report**

1. In April 2007, the Council's latest Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan (2007/8) was produced, incorporating the Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan. This document sets out the Council's objectives, strategies and plans as landlord, in relation to the management and maintenance of its own housing stock.
2. An important section of the HRA Business Plan is the Key Action Plan. This sets out the proposed action the Council will take over the following 1-3 years. Having included the Key Action Plan within the Business Plan, it is good practice that the progress made with the stated actions is monitored; one of the Scrutiny Panel's Terms of Reference is to review progress during the year.
3. A Progress Report (as at 1 January 2008) has therefore been produced and is attached as an appendix to this report.
4. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the Progress Report and to feed back to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing any comments it considers appropriate.
5. The HRA Business Plan will shortly be revised and updated, and considered by the Scrutiny Panel at its next meeting in March 2008 to cover 2008/9.

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HRA Business Plan 2007/8  
ACTION PLAN – SIX MONTH PROGRESS REPORT  
(As at 1 January 2008)

Action	Corporate Housing Objective	Responsibility for Achievement	Target Date	Progress Report
<b>Housing General</b>				
Analyse the information obtained from the census of Council tenants undertaken in Spring 2007	HO 2	Principal Housing Officer (Information/Strategy)	Sept 2007	<b>In Progress</b> – All the census forms have now been collected. The next stage is to input the data from the census into the Housing OHMS database, following which the data can be analysed.
Complete the implementation of the few outstanding initiatives within the Service Development Plan, formulated following the Best Value Service Review of Housing Services	HO 1	Director of Housing	March 2008	<b>Achieved</b> – All the initiatives that can be implemented have been.
Obtain the Cabinet Office's Charter Mark for Customer Service Excellence for a further three years	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4	Asst Head of Housing Services (Operations)	Nov 2007	<b>Achieved</b> – The Charter Mark was awarded to Housing for a further three years from August 2007
Undertake a Customer Perspective Programme for the whole of Housing Services, examining the all interfaces between Housing Services and customers	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5	Director of Housing	Feb 2008	<b>In progress</b> – The Programme has commenced, a Review Programme has been formulated and a Project Group established, which has met three times. The first service to have its customer interfaces reviewed by the Group is the Housing Options Section. Reviews of the interfaces in Housing Management will follow from February 2008.
Formulate, implement and monitor a Housing Excellence Plan, identifying the actions required to achieve the excellent level for each of the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry on Housing	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5	Director of Housing / Asst Heads of Housing Services / Housing Managers	April 2008	<b>Slow Progress</b> – A number of actions for the Housing Excellence Plan have been formulated, and some completed, but progress has generally been slow due to other commitments and the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOESs) changing. There is a need to bring all identified actions into one Action Plan.

Housing Management						
Introduce the Leasehold Services module of the integrated housing IT system	HO 1 / 2	Housing Resources Manager	April 2008	<b>No Progress</b> – The Corporate ICT Service was unable to take on this major implementation in 2007. Discussions are taking place as to when implementation can be scheduled, taking account of other ICT priorities.		
Introduce the Estate Management module for the housing IT system	HO 2	Asst Head of Housing Services (Operations)	April 2008	<b>In Progress</b> – Demonstrations by the supplier (Anite) have been held and a site visit to another local authority using the system has been undertaken. A decision to introduce the system has been made in principle.		
Implement the choice based lettings scheme, in conjunction with the five neighbouring councils.	HO 2	Asst Head of Housing Services (Operations) / Housing Needs Manager	Oct 2007	<b>Achieved</b> – HomeOption, the Council's choice based lettings scheme, was successfully introduced in November 2007 along with two other councils. The remaining three councils in the Consortium will go live in 2008.		
Review the success and any required changes to the choice based lettings scheme, six months after introduction	HO 2	Asst Head of Housing Services (Operations)	April 2008	<b>Not yet required</b> – This will be undertaken by the Housing Scrutiny Panel around July 2008		
Undertake a review of the success of the Introductory Tenancy Scheme (giving new tenants a non-secure tenancy for 12 months) after one year's operation.	HO 2	Asst Head of Housing Services (Operations)	Sept 2007	<b>Achieved</b> – The Housing Scrutiny Panel reviewed the Scheme in April 2007. In the first 12 months, 311 Introductory Tenancies were granted, with 16 Notices of Possession Proceedings being served, all on grounds of rent arrears.		
Introduce a facility for tenants to apply for the Housing Register on-line	HO 2	Housing Options Manager	April 2008	<b>Slow Progress</b> – It has been established that the Council's website is technically unable to host such a complex facility. Consideration is therefore being given to other options. In the meantime, the facility for applicants to download Housing Application Forms has been provided.		
Meet and sign-up to the Government's Respect Standard for Housing Management	HO 2	Asst Head of Housing Services (Operations)	Dec 2007	<b>Achieved</b> – The Respect Standard was achieved, and signed up to, in July 2007		

Introduce a computerised rent accounting system for the Council's Homeless Persons Hostel (Norway House) and for homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation	HO 1/ 2 / 5	Housing Resources Manager	Sept 2007	<b>Partly Achieved</b> – A project to administer rent accounts for Norway House on the Housing OHMS computer system was successfully completed in September 2007, saving time for housing benefit officers, who no longer have to assess claims manually. However, the Project Team has established that it is not possible to administer bed and breakfast charges on the OHMS system, which will have to continue to be administered through the sundry debtor system.
Undertake a review of heating charge levels at the Homeless Persons Hostel	HO 5	Housing Resources Manager	Jan 2008	<b>Achieved</b> – The review was completed and reported to the Finance & Performance Management Cabinet Committee in November 2007. The Cabinet Committee agreed a phased increase in charges, with a further review in November 2008.
<b>Tenant Participation</b>				
Facilitate the formation of two additional recognised tenants associations within the District	HO 4	Tenant Participation Officer	April 2008	<b>Partly Achieved</b> – A recognised Debden Tenants Panel has been established, which has representatives on the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. Good progress has been made in facilitating tenants associations at Romelands and Ninefields, Waltham Abbey, but they have not yet agreed a Constitution and are not yet formally recognised
Develop the newly introduced Rural Tenants Forum (comprising representatives in rural locations that have no recognisable estates and where formal associations are difficult to establish) into a successful, sustainable body.	HO 4	Tenant Participation Officer	Oct 2007	<b>Achieved</b> – The Rural Tenants Forum has developed very successfully. Representatives from 12 different rural villages/parishes have been "recruited" and the Forum meets four times each year. The Forum also has representation on the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.
Undertake a more detailed and focussed survey on tenant participation, as a follow-up to the Tenant Satisfaction Survey, ensuring that surveyed tenants are properly informed of the current arrangements	HO 4	Principal Housing Officer (Information / Strategy)	April 2008	<b>In Progress</b> – The survey is scheduled to be undertaken in January 2008.

Investigate the publication of a calendar for tenants, promoting the activities of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation	HO 4	Tenant Participation Officer	Dec 2007	<b>Deferred</b> – In consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, it was agreed to defer the publication until Winter 2008.
Investigate the possible introduction of "Tenant Talkback Panels", to provide qualitative feedback on housing services	HO 2 / 3 / 4	Tenant Participation Officer	April 2008	<b>In Progress</b> – The interest of tenants in joining Tenant Talkback Panels will be established through the survey of tenant participation referred to above.
<b>Supporting People and Supported Housing</b>				
Provide a comprehensive telecare service from the Council's Careline Control Service to residents of the Epping Forest and other districts, following telecare assessments by trained EFDC staff.	HO 1 / 2	Housing Manager (Older People's Services)	Dec 2007	<b>Achieved</b> – Staff have been trained to assess clients for a range of Telecare products. As at November 2007, 166 packages had been installed or were due for installation.
Review the viability and future of the Council's Careline Service	HO 1 / 2	Asst Head of Housing Services (Operations)	April 2008	<b>In Progress</b> – Officers are currently considering the issues and intend to report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel at its meeting in March 2008.
Seek accreditation of the Council's Careline Service from the Telecare Services Association (TSA)	HO 2	Housing Manager (Older People's Services)	Dec 2007	<b>In Progress</b> – Good progress has been made to meet the TSA's requirements for accreditation. Accreditation should take place during 2008.
<b>Housing Repairs and Maintenance</b>				
Implement programme for repairs and maintenance expenditure over 5 and 30 years	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager / Asst Head of Housing Services (Prop & Res)	On going	<b>In Progress</b> – Good progress is being made through a range of planned maintenance contracts and framework agreements. Stock Condition Surveys are ongoing, which will help to form future programmes of work.
Implement upgrade to latest version of Codeman software	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	July 2007	<b>Delayed</b> – Delay due to Anite system upgrade that is required before the Codeman upgrade can take place. Anite version 39 upgrade took place in November 2007. Codeman upgrade now planned for April 2008.



Publish clear service standards for planned maintenance, Decent Homes, repairs, Right to Repairs and leaseholder responsibilities, which are available in printed leaflet form and on the web site.	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	July 2007	<b>In Progress</b> – Following consideration by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, a number of Customer Service Standards have been agreed relating to repairs and maintenance. These are currently in the process of being produced in leaflet form and will then be distributed to customers.
Publish the Voids standards on the Web site and to issue a copy to all tenants in advance of them undertaking an accompanied viewing or a void offer.	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	Dec 2007	<b>In Progress</b> – Following consideration by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, a number of Customer Service Standards have been agreed relating to repairs and maintenance. These are currently in the process of being produced in leaflet form and will then be distributed to customers.
Undertake a review of the repairs responsibilities to ensure they dovetail with other service strategies ie ASBO, introductory tenancies, demoted tenancies.	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	Dec 2007	<b>In Progress</b> - This is being incorporated in the review, exploring the incorporation of the Building Maintenance Section of the Works Unit within the new Housing Directorate.
Timetable at least one meeting each year with the Tenants Federation to discuss the repairs and maintenance expenditure programme.	HO 3	Asst Head of Housing Services (Prop & Res) / Housing Repairs Manager	On going	<b>Completed</b> – The Tenant and Leaseholders Federation was consulted at its meeting in March 2007.
Investigate option to merge Housing Maintenance Works Unit with Housing Services	HO 3	Director of Housing / Chief Works Officer / Asst Head of Housing Services (Prop & Res)	April 2008	<b>In Progress</b> – Phase 1 of the Top Management Restructure agreed that a review of the Works Unit should be undertaken, prior to the retirement of the Chief Works Officer in April 2008. One of the options being explored is the incorporation of the Building Maintenance Section of the Works Unit within the new Housing Directorate.
Introduce Asbestos record cards in all properties, and maintain the records for contactors and tenants use.	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	July 2007	<b>Slow Progress</b> – This was deferred due to the departure of the Housing Repairs Manager in June 2007. This will now be incorporated in the Works Unit Review.
Undertake periodic reviews of the outcome of difficult to let properties and seek ways of enhancing the services provided to these dwellings.	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	Dec 2007	<b>In Progress</b> – This is currently being monitored since the introduction of Choice Based Lettings in November 2007. This action may not be required, subject to the success of the scheme to tackle difficult to let properties.

Explore options whereby emphasis is put on "fix first time" for responsive repairs	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	April 2008	<b>In Progress</b> - This is being incorporated in the Works Unit Review.
Seek through the Essex Hub a framework agreement with specialist contractors for ad-hoc repairs	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager	April 2008	<b>In Progress</b> – 11 Framework agreements are already in place for various aspects of the planned maintenance programme of works. Further frameworks are to be incorporated as part of the Works Unit Review.
Undertake a feasibility study into alternative fuel sources for properties in rural communities where mains gas is not available.	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager	Oct 2007	<b>In Progress</b> – Carbon Emission Reduction Target (CERT) Grant funding mechanisms for alternative fuel sources are not due to be announced by the Government until January 2008. However, the use of solar panels in Council properties are planned to be trialled in a rural location in February 2008.
Review all projects with a contract value in excess of £1m on completion to identify any lessons learnt.	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager Housing Repairs Manager	On-going	<b>On-going</b> – This applies where contracts reach their conclusion, and a report is submitted to the Cabinet on the outcome of the contract. A report was considered by the Cabinet in February 2007 for the former Kitchen and Bathroom replacement contract.
Undertake tenant satisfaction surveys for all void properties let and all accompanied viewings.	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	Apr 2007	<b>On-going</b> – Surveys were introduced in November 2007 and the results are monitored by senior housing management on a quarterly basis.
Hold training sessions at empty properties to enable officers to gain a common understanding of specification requirements.	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	Apr 2008	<b>Completed</b> – This was undertaken in November 2007.
Seek to reduce the target response times for routine non-urgent repairs from 8-weeks to 6-weeks	HO 3	Chief Works Officer	Oct 2007	<b>In Progress</b> - This is being incorporated in the Works Unit Review
Identify the need to run training events / DIY courses for residents on issues that fall within their own responsibility.	HO 3	Chief Works Officer Housing Repairs Manager	Oct 2007	<b>In Progress</b> - This will follow on from the Works Unit Review
Introduce 3-day job ticket	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	Dec 2007	<b>Completed</b> – 3-day "Right to Repair" works category were introduced in November 2007.

Introduce generic repairs and voids officers.	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	Dec 2007	<b>In Progress</b> - This is being incorporated in the Works Unit Review.
Implement mobile working for the Housing Repairs Section	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	Apr 2008	<b>In Progress</b> - This is being incorporated in the Works Unit Review.
Hold site visits at blocks of flats with Tenant Representatives to monitor repairs to, and condition of, communal areas	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager	Apr 2008	<b>In Progress</b> - This will follow on from the Works Unit Review.
Seek to set up a benchmark group for Repairs and Maintenance with other Local Authorities and RSL's, with a view to sharing good practice and exploring collective procurement	HO 3	Asst Head of Housing Services (Prop & Res)	Oct 2007	<b>No progress</b> – This has been deferred, pending the Works Unit Review.
Explore the benefits of gaining Chartered Construction Client Status	HO 3	Asst Head of Housing Services (Prop & Res)	Oct 2007	<b>Deleted</b> – This scheme is only available to Main Contractors through the Considerate Contractors Scheme.
Review the Accompanied viewing process in light "Choice Based Lettings"	HO 3	Housing Repairs Manager / Housing Options Manager	Oct 2007	<b>In progress</b> – A Voids Project Team was set up in November 2007, comprising Housing Repairs and Needs Officers and Building Maintenance Division staff.
(a) Recommend to the Housing Portfolio Holder that a Tenants' Repairs Scheme be introduced after the application of job evaluation to the Building Maintenance DSO, but that the scheme be suspended (or eligibility restricted to just elderly and disabled people) at any time when the scheme would detrimentally affect the Council's Repairs Service.	HO 3	Chief Works Officer	Dec 2007	<b>No Progress</b> – Recruitment and retention of tradesmen continues to be a problem, and it is likely that the introduction of a scheme at the present time would have a detrimental effect on the repairs service to the Council's tenants. However, the ability to provide this scheme will be re-visited after the Works Unit Review has been completed.
(b) Produce and publicise a leaflet on the scheme when it is introduced.			Dec 2007	
(c) Consider extending the scheme to cover leaseholders at a later date.			April 2008	

Make more information available about disabled adaptations to residents, setting out the responsibilities of the Council, procedures, targets, contacts in the form of a leaflet.	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager	May 2008	<b>Completed</b> – The leaflet was produced in July 2007
Explore the feasibility of an OT being jointly employed between Housing Services, Environmental Services and Social Services to oversee all disabled adaptation and DFG requests within the District, subject to the approval of funding	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager	April 2008	<b>No progress</b> – This has been deferred, pending the incorporation of Private Sector Housing within the new Housing Directorate, which is due to take place around April 2008.
Retain register of all Council properties receiving substantial major adaptations and where possible allocate them to applicants from the Housing Register with similar disabilities, in order to avoid the removal of the adaptations already provided	HO 3	Housing Needs Manager	Oct 2007	<b>Completed</b> – The register was produced and updated by the Housing Officer (Disabled Adaptations) and issued to Housing Options Manager. This action is however no longer relevant since the introduction of Choice Based Lettings, where the allocation of properties is based on expressions of interest from applicants based on their banding position.

<p><b>Key to Corporate Housing Objectives</b></p> <p>HO 1 - Value for Money  HO 2 - Housing Management  HO 3 - Repairs and Maintenance  HO 4 - Tenant Participation  HO 5 - Housing Finance</p>
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## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2008**

**Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D Stallan**

**Subject: Choice Based Lettings – Update**

**Officer contact for further information: Roger Wilson ext. 4419**

**Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, ext.4246**

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### **Recommendations:**

**That the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the progress made on the Choice Based Lettings Scheme since its implementation on 19 November 2007.**

### **Report**

1. On 19 November 2007, Housing introduced its new Choice Based Lettings Scheme, which was necessary to meet the requirements of Government that such a scheme be in place by 2010 at the latest. The implementation of the scheme proved very successful with the Council being in a position to go live in the first phase. Staff worked closely with the external Choice Based Lettings Agency Locata to ensure that the first editions of the free-sheets and Scheme User Guides were produced to a high standard and the Website was fully operational.

2. Under the scheme, all vacant social rented properties are now advertised to applicants on the Housing Register in a two-weekly publication, website, and other media giving details of location, type, rent, service charge, council tax band and landlord of the available accommodation. Applicants would apply for a property by “expressing an interest” in up to a maximum of three properties for which they have an assessed need, either in person, by post, telephone, text, email or Internet.

3. At the end of the two weekly cycle, the Council analyses the “expressions of interests” received and allocates each property following a prioritisation and selection process in accordance with its own Allocations Scheme. In general terms, the property would be offered to the applicant in the highest band, who has been registered the longest, who had “expressed an interest” for the specific vacancy. The results of the “expressions of interest” on each property advertised is then published in the next periodic 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, as each applicant would be able to clearly understand how the scheme works.

4. The Council is working in partnership with the following five authorities:

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

5. Two other partner authorities being Uttlesford District Council and Brentwood Borough Council also implemented their schemes in the first phase on 19 November 2007. We will be joined by the remaining three Councils in the second phase in 2008.

6. Arrangements are being made for a press launch including the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Director of Housing being photographed handing over the property keys to the first applicant being allocated a property through the scheme.

7. At the time of writing the report, three two-weekly cycles have been completed. An Information Bulletin for the period 19 November 2007 to 11 January 2008 is attached as an appendix to the report.

8. As can be seen, 132 advertisements were placed in the free-sheets (with some properties being advertised on more than one occasion) with 3,593 expressions of interest being made, being an average of around 27 expressions of interest for each property advertised. Some smaller properties attracted low interest with larger properties attracting up to 130 expressions of interest. Almost 90% of applicants expressing an interest in properties did so over the Internet. The Information Bulletin also shows the number of expressions of interest made by applicants in each priority Band. The total number of applicants participation in the scheme during the first three cycles was 588 being 16% of all applicants on the Housing Register.

9. The Panel are asked to note the planned improvements to the Choice Based Lettings Scheme which are set out in the following table.

<b>Planned Improvements</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
Chelmsford Borough Council and East Herts District Council joining the scheme	April 2008
Broxbourne District Council joining the scheme	July 2008
Undertaking a survey of all applicants who have not yet participated in the scheme to determine the reason and in particular to ensure that vulnerable applicants are not being disadvantaged	March 2008
The Housing Scrutiny Panel to undertake a six month review of the scheme	June 2008
To explore the possibility with the external Choice Based Lettings Agency Locata, of introducing a facility whereby applicants can make automated expressions of interest	March 2008

10. All Scheme Managers have been given lists of all older residents who are on the Housing Register. When visiting these residents they will ensure they fully understand how to participate in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme.



## **Consultation**

11. No consultation undertaken.

## **Resource implications:**

Budget provision: £40,000 per annum

Personnel: Within existing resources

Land: None

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1985 and 1996

Background papers: Cabinet and Portfolio Holder reports on request

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

Key Decision reference: N/A

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## APPENDIX ONE

### HomeOption – Information Bulletin

( 19 November 2007 – 11 January 2008 HomeOptions Freesheet Editions 1 – 3)

Number of adverts for properties during the period	132
Number of expressions of interest during the period	3,593
Method of expressing an interest	Internet 89.56% Coupon 4.56% Phone 3.7% Text 2.12% Staff Help 0.06%
Properties advertised by type	Flat 102 House 12 Maisonette 12 Bungalow 6
Properties advertised by bedroom number	Studio 9 One 95 Two 16 Three 6 Four or more 6

<b>Expressions of Interest by Priority Band</b>		
<b>Band</b>	<b>Expressions of Interest</b>	<b>Number of Applicants</b>
One	18	199
Two	1	26
Three	145	426
Four	216	1273
Five	118	671
Six	90	1096