

Scrutiny Standing Panel Agenda



Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel Thursday, 8th January, 2009

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

Time: 5.30 pm

Democratic Services Officer: M Jenkins - The Office of the Chief Executive
Tel: 01992 56 4607 Email: mjenkins@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), D Bateman, Mrs R Brookes, J Collier, K Chana, D Dodeja, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs L Wagland, Mrs J H Whitehouse and J Wyatt

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. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING (Pages 3 - 8)

To agree the notes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 9 October 2008.

4. 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.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 9 - 12)

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

6. TENANT'S SATISFACTION SURVEY (Pages 13 - 26)

(Director of Housing Services). To consider the attached report.

7. HOUSING SERVICE STRATEGIES ON HOME OWNERSHIP AND RENT COLLECTION (Pages 27 - 54)

(Director of Housing Services). To consider the attached report.

8. DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY (Pages 55 - 134)

(Director of Housing Services). To consider the attached report.

9. 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.

10. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next programmed meeting of the Panel will be held on 26 March 2009 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1.

**EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2008
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 5.30 - 7.00 PM**

Members Present:	S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Brookes, D Dodeja, R Frankel, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P Richardson and J Wyatt
Other members present:	Mrs C Pond, B Rolfe and D Stallan
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs R Gadsby, D Bateman, Mrs L Wagland and Mrs J H Whitehouse
Officers Present	R Wilson (Assistant Director Operations (Housing)) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)
Also in attendance:	Mrs M Carter (Epping Forest Tenants and Leasholders Federation)

13. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

With the agreement of the Panel, Councillor J Wyatt was appointed Vice Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That, Councillor J Wyatt be appointed Vice Chairman for the meeting.

14. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

Noted that Councillor R Frankel was attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor Mrs J Whitehouse.

15. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 3 JULY 2008

The minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel from 18 March 2008 had not been agreed and were tabled at this meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That, the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel of 18 March 2008 be agreed; and
- (b) That, the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel of 3 July 2008 be agreed, subject to the substitution of the words "the 6 metre rule should be doubled," for "the 6 metre rule should not be doubled," in paragraph 8 of minute 8.

16. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations made pursuant to the Member's Code of Conduct.

17. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

This item was noted.

18. PARKING ENFORCEMENT ON HOUSING ESTATES

The Assistant Director of Housing Services, presented a report to the Panel regarding Parking Enforcement on Housing Estates.

At its last meeting in July 2008, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered a report on options to resolve the problems with parking and congestion on housing estates. The Housing Portfolio Holder and the Panel had agreed that the following recommendations should be made to the Cabinet at its September 2008 meeting.

(1) That the maximum amount of grassed verge to be removed in order to construct a vehicular crossover to allow residents to park their vehicles in their front garden be increased from 6 metres to 12 metres in length; and

(2) That the additional £300,000 budget available in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme from 2009/2010 be made available to fund further off-street parking schemes match funded from the General Fund.

It had further been agreed that where any vehicular crossover had removed between 6 and 12 metres of grass verge in length, ward members should be consulted as well as neighbours.

The Panel had also considered the increase in complaints from the public about unauthorised parking. The complaints were from residents unhappy that more vehicles were being parked on grass verges causing damage to the open green spaces. In response, when enforcement action was taken by the Council, other residents had complained about having nowhere to park with cars being displaced into already heavily congested side streets. There had been mixed responses from elected members, some had asked that action be taken to prevent vehicles from parking on the grassed verges, while other members had asked officers not to take action as it displaced vehicles and caused problems inside streets.

A policy had been drafted on the recommendation of officers, on the approach to be taken on unauthorised parking. The draft had been attached to the agenda.

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation were consulted on the report at their meeting in September 2008. Their comments were as follows:

(a) Any policy could prove to be inconsistent and costly should any car owners be taken to court for continually parking on grassed verges without permission; and

(b) More clarification should be given within the policy on matters relating to safety, including sight lines, etc; and

(c) Parking on grass verges should not be allowed where damage could be caused to underground utilities; and

(d) Consideration could be given to parking permits.

Although the above comments on the policy had been put forward the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, by a majority of 5 to 2, had concluded that unauthorised

parking on housing-owned grass verges, should generally not be permitted across the district.

The two Area Housing Managers responsible for housing management in the north and south of the district had been consulted on the draft enforcement policy. They had asked that the Panel consider their concerns which were:

(i) Any enforcement policy would be difficult to apply, as it was always going to be unclear and difficult to interpret; and

(ii) An enforcement policy would likely be subjective in its application and difficult decisions would need to be made, which with the current arrangement, some would be in favour of and others against; and

(iii) When a decision was made, the Council may have difficulty explaining to residents why it was allowed in one area and not another; and

(iv) We would not allow cars to cause an obstruction, or damage grass verges in the winter which would result in high cost re-instatement work. Installing "grasscrete" on areas where enforcement action was not taken may not be the answer, as it implied that parking was encouraged.

Councillor R Frankel suggested to the Panel that the best scheme for parking enforcement was for the District Council to sell parking licenses, the scheme would be self funding and could possibly be £100.00per annum per licensee. However, members were sceptical about this proposal, as it would be an extra financial cost to residents. This would be expensive and time consuming.

It was suggested that persistent parking offenders could be forced to pay for any damage they had caused. Mr R Wilson reminded the Panel that lorries or commercial vehicles were not allowed to park in housing estates, the tenancy agreements stipulated that this was prohibited. Councillor J Wyatt suggested that pavement parking should be prohibited except where an exemption was made. A sign could be attached to a lamp post to signify that pavement parking was allowed.

Councillor Mrs C Pond suggested adding more points to the draft policy, these were:

- Paragraph 2 after "residents in the area are unable to park within the immediate vicinity of their home", add within a five minute walk.
- Paragraph 3 add "When one or more can apply."
- Bullet point 1, under paragraph 3, replace "particular important amenity value," with "common sense."
- Extra bullet point – "Other than clamping."

These amendments were agreed at the meeting.

Some members were in favour of a voucher scheme for visitors or writing to households with more than one car concerning a change in policy. The Assistant Director of Housing, Mr R Wilson, advised the Panel that any voucher or letter notification of residents should not overlook the potential cost. There were only two Housing Management Officers responsible for between 700-800 properties each

within the district. They had tasks to perform such as dealing with rent arrears. They only spent 10% of their time on enforcement. Any extra work would need more staff which in turn would require Cabinet approval.

Councillor Mrs J Lea thought that pro-active Councillors reporting parking problems more frequently would help facilitate better enforcement. The Chairman said that there was not the staff currently available for enforcement and it was unlikely that the Cabinet would agree to extra staff. Problem areas needed to be identified.

The Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor D Stallan expressed his gratitude to the Panel and the Tenants and Leaseholder's Federation for their comments. He felt there was a need for a clearly defined policy. He was against a license system for residents saying it would impose an extra burden on top of their household costs. He felt that the main parking problems in the District were around places like Debden which had lots of commuters parking there. He stated that the Cabinet would not employ extra staff to cover enforcement. He was in favour of a trial period in one area for a year, residents should be forewarned beforehand.

The Chairman advised that information could be put in The Forester and the Housing News for residents as to where enforcement action is being taken. Councillor D Stallan was unsure about publication deadlines for The Forester and the Housing News, and how this would tie in with a future Cabinet report. However the Chairman requested that a trial period should be initiated, it would not change any previous actions taken by officers.

RESOLVED:

That the Parking Enforcement on Housing Estates draft policy be recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder for Cabinet approval, with the amendments as stated in the above text.

19. ALLOCATION SCHEME REPORT 2008

The Assistant Director of Housing, Mr R Wilson, presented a report for Cabinet approval to the Panel for comment. It concerned a Review of the Allocations Scheme 2008.

The Review of the Allocations Scheme was legally required for the Council. It set out the procedures for allocating its housing accommodation and making nominations to Registered Social Landlords. Each year the Cabinet considered the Council's Allocations Scheme and reviewed changes following detailed consideration by this Panel. Mr R Wilson briefly outlined the amendments to the Panel.

There was a tabled amendment to Appendix One regarding Band One (c) of the Housing Allocations Scheme which concerned homeless applications. If no successful expressions of interest had been made by a homeseeker, the Council would then express an interest in a maximum of three suitable properties for a further 4 weeks (two cycles) on behalf of the homeseeker, if the homeseeker was still unsuccessful then the Council would make one offer of suitable, secure accommodation.

This amendment had been designed to deter some homeless applicants from not expressing an interest in suitable properties during the 8 week (4 cycles) period and waiting for a direct offer of a house. This additional period proposed would ensure that homeless applicants were prioritised along with other homeseekers, allowing

them to compete for the more desirable properties which would ensure a fairer process.

RESOLVED:

That, the Housing Allocations Scheme, with tabled amendments, be recommended to the Cabinet.

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

It was reported that there were no reports going to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

21. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meetings of the Panel were noted as follows:

8 January 2009; and
26 March 2009

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TERMS OF REFERENCE - STANDING PANEL

Title: Housing

Status: Standing Panel

Terms of Reference:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(8) In relation to Traveller issues to consider and monitor: **(NEW)**

- (a) the position regarding tolerated sites and;
- (b) the management of travellers who enter onto land within the district with a view to unauthorised encampments, with particular reference to the legal remedies available, interactions with other agencies such as Essex Police and Essex County

Council and the provision of emergency and/or transit sites within the district;

(c) Government's guidance on the needs of travellers in the context of the Council's review of its District Local Plan and the Essex Housing Needs Assessment;

(d) the results of the Commission for Racial Equality's study on traveller issues in which this Council participated, once published;

(9) To report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Council and the Cabinet with recommendations on matters allocated to the Panel as appropriate.

Chairman: Cllr Stephen Murray

Housing Scrutiny Panel
Work Programme 2008/9

WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

Item	Priority	Original Report Deadline	Current Position
(1) Implementation of Choice Based Lettings – 6 Month Review	Medium	July 2008	Completed
(2) Review of Careline Service	Medium	July 2008	Completed
(3) Approach to “De-designating” Properties for Older People	Low	July 2008	Completed
(4) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	High	October 2008	Completed – Cabinet report 15 December 2008
(5) Results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey	High	January 2009	Results of the two-yearly Tenant Satisfaction Survey
(6) Draft Housing Strategy	High	January 2009	A new Housing Strategy is being drafted to a template agreed across the Housing Sub Region. Scrutiny Panel to agree the Consultation Draft.
(7) Policy on Unauthorised Parking	Medium	March 2009	Not yet required. Referred back to the Panel for further consideration at the Pre Cabinet meeting in December 2008
(8) Housing Service Strategy on Older Peoples Housing Services	Low	March 2009	Not yet required.
(9) Housing Service Strategy on Housing Management	Low	March 2009	Not yet required.
(10) Six-monthly Progress Report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan	Medium	March 2009	Not yet required

(11) Housing Service Strategy on Under-occupation	Low	March 2009	Not yet required.
(12) Updated draft HRA Business Plan	High	March 2009	Not yet required
(13) Housing Service Strategy on Home Ownership	Low	March 2009	Not yet required.
(14) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants	High	July 2009	Not yet required
(15) Review of Housing Performance Indicators	High	July 2009	Not yet required
(16) Six-monthly Progress Report on Housing Strategy Action Plan	Medium	July 2009	Not yet required
(17) Private Sector Housing Strategy	Medium	July 2009	Not yet required
(18) Review of Parking Enforcement Policy	Medium	May 2010	Not yet required

Report to: Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 8 January 2009

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr D. Stallan

Subject: Report on the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2008

Officer contact for further information: Lyndsay Swan (Ext. 4146)

Democratic Services Officer: Mark Jenkins (Ext. 4607)



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Recommendations:

That the National Housing Federation's (NHF's) report on the results of the Council's biennial Tenant Satisfaction Survey be considered and that the Panel provides any comments on the results of the Satisfaction Survey to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing Services as appropriate.

Report:

1. Having previously been required to carry out a detailed Tenant Satisfaction survey every three years, the Council is now required by government to undertake a survey every two years. The last two surveys have been carried out by Feedback Services Ltd, a company part-owned by the National Housing Federation (NHF) that specialises in conducting surveys and related activities for social landlords.

2. The survey approach is based on STATUS, the industry-standard questionnaires, as developed originally by the NHF Feedback Service for local authorities and housing associations. A standard satisfaction form is used nationally in order to compare results amongst landlords.

3. New guidance was published for the 2008 Tenant Satisfaction Survey and, therefore, a number of the standard questions were re-written. Significantly, local authorities were required to exclude tenants living in sheltered housing accommodation. As a result, the 2008 survey was a sample survey of the only Council's general needs tenants, while the previous survey in 2006 used a sample of all tenants including those in supported accommodation. Due to the new methodology, Feedback Services is not yet in the position to compare any results nationally. However, a 'peer group' of 9 landlords has been selected, all closely resembling this Council in terms of area of operation and the number and type of properties managed. Comparison with previous results, and with other landlords, have been possible where questions are similar to the former standard STATUS survey.

4. A copy of the NHF's draft executive summary on the results is attached, and an item will be placed in the Members' Bulletin after the Panel's meeting with a copy of the full report being available in the member's Room. The full report has been provided to both the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of the Panel.

5. Approximately 1,500 of all the Council's tenants, 25%, were randomly selected by the NHF to be surveyed. The response was 53%, a good response for a postal survey. The overall findings are reliable to within a statistical accuracy of a +/- 3.16% margin of error at the 95% confidence level. This means that if the Council surveyed all of its tenants, there is a 95% certainty that the results for all the questions would be somewhere between 3% less and 3% more than the results from the sample survey.

6. Based on their findings, the NHF concluded that:

“The Council and its staff have every right to be pleased to learn that, overall tenant satisfaction with the landlord service that the Council provides remains high and significantly above that reported by most other landlords. Key driver analysis showed that satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service and satisfaction with the outcome of their contacts with staff have the greatest impact on overall tenant satisfaction. Importantly, the survey identified that the Councils’ repairs service and the customer service provided by its staff are both particularly strong aspects of the Council’s overall service. The high level of tenant satisfaction with these two key services underpins the unusually high level of overall satisfaction amongst Epping Forest District Council’s tenants.”

7. As can be seen from the Executive Summary, overall satisfaction with the Housing Directorate remains consistently high, at 84% compared to 85% in 2006. When considering the exclusion of sheltered housing tenants, who generally receive a higher level of support from Scheme Managers etc. and are therefore more likely to express higher levels of satisfaction, a reduction of 1% in overall satisfaction levels is considered to be an excellent outcome. 86% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service (12% above the peer group average of 74%.) Impressively, the Council ranked a strong first in its peer group for all 6 aspects of the repairs and maintenance service measured.

8. In terms of quality of contact with the Council, as many as 12% more Epping Forest District Council tenants said that it was easy to get hold of the right person (compared to the peer group averages). Overall, 75% of the Council’s tenants were satisfied with the final outcome of their contacts - 10% higher than the rest of the peer group.

9. In relation to tenant participation and consultation, 62% were satisfied that their views are being taken into account by the landlord. This is a very positive response showing an improvement of 14% compared to responses to the 2006 survey. It should be noted that this question has replaced a question seeking opinion on satisfaction with opportunities for involvement in management.

10. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the NHF’s report and provide any comments on the results to the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Director of Housing as appropriate.

Feedback - The tenant satisfaction
survey service for social landlords

Epping Forest District Council

DRAFT

Tenant Survey Report

November 2008

(Executive Summary)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The survey was a sample postal survey using the newly revised standard STATUS questionnaire plus the same additional questions used in the Council's previous survey in 2006. The fieldwork took place during August and September 2008. Questionnaires were sent to 1,563 general needs tenants and the findings are based on responses from 829 tenants; a valid response rate of 53.0%. This level of response meant that the survey findings are significantly more reliable than CLG and Housing Corporation guideline levels. The overall findings are reliable to within a statistical accuracy of a +/- 3.16% margin of error at the 95% confidence level.

1. Main Findings

84% of the survey respondents said they were satisfied with the overall service provided by the Council as their landlord and half of those that were satisfied said they were 'very satisfied'. This is an unusually high level of satisfaction although it actually represented a not significant 1% decrease compared to the 85% of general needs respondents that said they were satisfied with the Council's landlord service in its 2006 survey. The survey also recorded continuing high levels of tenant satisfaction with many specific aspects of their homes and Epping Forest DC's services:-

- 88% of respondents were satisfied with the overall quality of their homes – *unchanged¹ compared to the percentage that said they were satisfied with their accommodation in 2006*
- 82% were satisfied with the value for money for their rent – *unchanged compared to 2006*
- 82% were satisfied with the general condition of their homes – *up 1% compared to 2006*
- 83% were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live – *up 3% compared to 2006*

86% of respondents said that they were satisfied with the Council's repairs and maintenance service – *up 2% compared to 2006.*

¹ 'Unchanged' here means any recorded change that was less than 1 percentage point.

Of those tenants that said they had had repair work completed during the last 12 months:-

- 88% rated the information provided to them as to when workers would call as good – *unchanged compared to 2006*
- 86% rated the time taken for work to start as good – *up 3% compared to 2006*
- 92% said the speed with which work was completed was good – *unchanged compared to 2006*
- 93% rated the attitude of the workers as good – *down 2% compared to 2006*
- 91% were pleased with the way dirt and mess were kept to a minimum – *down 1% compared to 2006.*
- 88% said the overall quality of the work was good – *unchanged compared to 2006.*

79% of respondents (*down 5% compared to 2006*) said that Epping Forest DC was good at keeping them informed about things that affected them as tenants. Writing is by far the most popular method by which tenants would like the Council to consult with them.

62% of respondents said that they were satisfied that the Council took account of tenants' views and only 7% said they were dissatisfied.

When asked about 5 aspects of the Council's housing management services, tenants - as usually found by this question - recorded their highest levels of satisfaction with the two most commonly used services - 'advice on rent payments', (74% satisfied) and 'how enquiries are dealt with generally' (79% satisfied). Far fewer tenants, less than 45%, indicated that they were satisfied with the other 3 listed services (support for new tenants, support for vulnerable tenants, advice on moving home) but, importantly, 28~29% of respondents gave a 'no opinion' response to these 3 services and only 6~9% of said they were actually dissatisfied with them.

78% of the tenants that took part in the survey said that they had contacted the Council in the last 12 months; 82% had done this by phone and 63% of contacts were about repairs. Most tenants said they had been happy with the contact that they had had with the Council's staff, although, as usually found by STATUS surveys, they were slightly less likely to be satisfied with the outcome of their contact than with other aspects. The Council will be pleased to learn that the percentage of respondents that reported that they had been happy with their contact experience increased for all four contact indicators. An increase of 5% was recorded in the percentage that said that staff had been helpful and 6% more respondents than in 2006 said that it had been easy to get hold of the right person.

Chart 1 at the end of this summary compares Epping Forest DC's survey findings with the findings from its 2006 tenant survey.

2. Comparative Findings

The ability to make comparisons over time and with other landlords has been affected by the changes made to the standard STATUS questionnaire in 2007; some questions have been altered, some dropped and some new questions added. The details of these changes are outlined in appendix 2 of the report. The recent changes to the STATUS questionnaire mean that Feedback has not yet been able to build up a very large body of data from landlords that have completed surveys using the new STATUS questionnaire. In view of this, Epping Forest DC's findings have been compared not only with all the landlords in the Feedback database that have completed new STATUS surveys but also with all the landlords in the database that completed old style surveys in the 5 year period 2003 to 2007. In addition a comparison has been made for all the questions that have not changed with a 'peer group' of 9 landlords selected from the database that have completed surveys since 2004. The peers landlords that have been used were agreed with Epping Forest DC because they most closely resembled Epping Forest DC in terms of area of operation and the number and type of homes managed. Of the 9 peers, 1 is a local authority landlord, 5 are stock transfer landlords and 3 are standard housing associations.

The comparative analysis found that the overall satisfaction level of Epping Forest DC's tenants with the Council's landlord service is around 3-5% above national average levels. In addition the Council's tenants recorded satisfaction levels for specific service aspects that ranged from close to average to well above the average satisfaction levels recorded by other landlords. Most especially, the Council's tenants were noticeably more satisfied than is usually found by STATUS surveys with all aspects of the Council's repairs and maintenance service and also with all aspects of their contact with staff. Around 11% more Epping Forest DC tenants said they were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service than would be typical, around 12% more than usual said they found it easy to get hold of the right person when the contacted the Council, and around 12% more than usual said they had been satisfied with the outcome of their contact. The only service area where the survey recorded below average satisfaction levels concerned 'keeping tenants informed about things that affected them'; Epping Forest DC's tenants were a marginal 3% less satisfied with this one service aspect than might have been expected.

Chart 2 at the end of this summary details the overall comparative strength of Epping Forest DC's survey findings. It compares these with the peer group averages and with Feedback's new STATUS and 2003-07 national averages.

3. Other Findings

The Council's tenants recorded below average levels of concern about most neighbourhood problems. However, there was one exception; Epping Forest DC's tenants were much more likely to identify car parking as a problem than was typical of tenants elsewhere, 53% of the Council's respondents identified this as a problem compared to a new STATUS average of only 34%.

Tenants with transfer/exchange or neighbour/neighbourhood problems usually tend to be less satisfied with their contact experiences and especially with the final outcome than those with repair or rent/HB problems. The Epping Forest DC survey was true to this pattern with regard to transfer/exchanges and neighbours/neighbourhood issues but tenants who had contacted the Council about a garden or communal area problem also recorded similarly weak responses and this is not so often the case - although the small number of contacts about garden/communal areas means that this finding cannot be relied upon. Also the Council should note that the position with regard to transfers and exchanges has improved considerably and for neighbours/neighbourhood issues slightly compared to 2006.

Only 8% of the tenants that responded said that they had reported anti-social behaviour (ASB) to the Council during the last 12 months. The survey found that just under two-thirds of the respondents that had contacted Epping Forest DC about ASB said that it had been easy to get hold of the right person. A similar percentage said they had found that staff had been helpful. Slightly fewer (48%) said that staff had been able to deal with their problem. In response to the general question about how satisfied they were with how their report was dealt with, 55% said they were satisfied compared to 23% that said they were dissatisfied. In comparative terms this was a relatively strong finding.

In line with tenants nearly everywhere, Epping Forest DC's tenants identified the repairs and maintenance service as the single most important service and the overall quality of their homes as the second most important service from a standard range of 5 services. However, the Council's tenants were slightly more likely to identify the 'neighbourhood as a place to live' as important than tenants of other landlords.

Just as in 2006, around 4 out of 5 respondents rated Epping Forest DC's Tenants Handbook and newsletter 'Housing News' as good.

Only 12% of the survey respondents said that they had heard of Epping Forest DC's Tenant Participation Compact. This percentage was noticeably lower than the 27% recorded in 2006. 71% of those respondents that had heard of the Compact said they were satisfied with it and no respondents at all said they were dissatisfied with it.

35% of Epping Forest DC's tenant households now have access to the internet, up from 26% in 2006. There have been increases in access levels for all household types except 1-parent families with child/ren. Although they are still the least likely to have access to the internet, access amongst over 60 households has doubled over the last two years. On-line repairs reporting remains the internet service tenants would most like; 70% of respondents said they would like to use the internet to report repairs, which was exactly the same percentage as in 2006.

A little less than 7% of respondents to the survey said they had made a complaint to the Council during the last year, which was over 2% lower than the 9% that said they had made a complaint in the 12 months preceding the 2006 survey. 55% of respondents said they were satisfied with how their complaint had been dealt with, which was as much as 10% higher than in 2006. However, only 36% of respondents said they were satisfied with the final outcome from their complaint. This represented a step back from the position recorded in 2006 when 47% said they had been satisfied.

4. Demographic Findings

Despite the fact that the survey excluded sheltered tenants, it found that close to half (49%) of respondents were over 60 years old and as many as 22% were over 75. In contrast only 14% of tenants said they were under 35 years old.

41% of the Council's general needs households are single tenants and most of these are single tenants over 60 (30%). In addition, nearly a quarter (24%) of households consist of couples, with, once again, over 60s (17%) strongly outnumbering under 60s (6%). Only a quarter of households identified themselves as families with child/ren - although this was 3 percentage points up on the 2006 survey - and the survey recorded a very modest level of child density of just 0.5 children per household. This household mix means that the average (mean) size of Epping Forest DC's general needs households remains relatively small at only 2.2 persons.

A high proportion of the Council's tenants, said that they had at least one household member with a long-term illness or disability which limited their daily activities, with 48% of households reporting that this was the case.

65% of all respondents said they were long term tenants who had been tenants of the Council for 11 years or more and as many as 44% said they had been tenants for 21 years or more. The survey data suggests that over the last 5 years or so, the Council has been able to consistently grant around 25-30% of its lettings to transfers.

As previously recorded by the Council's tenant surveys, the very great majority of Epping Forest DC tenants classified themselves as white-British. 95% of respondents classified themselves as white-British and a further 2% as white-Irish or white-other. Less than 4% of respondents said they were from an Asian, black or mixed ethnic origin.

In view of the relatively high proportion of tenants over 60 years old, it is perhaps hardly surprising that only a third of principal tenants said that they were working - although a noticeably higher 48% of tenants' partners said that they worked. 37% of respondents said that they were retired, 11% said they were permanently sick or disabled and 12% that they were at home/ looking after family. The survey found that although the incomes of most of Epping Forest DC's tenants remain modest, there has been an increase in income levels since 2006. 58% of households reported net household incomes of less than £200 per week but this was down 6% on the 21% of general needs households with this level of income two years ago.

As usually reported by tenant surveys, satisfaction levels were highest amongst older tenants and lowest amongst younger tenants. Tenants under 35 years of age were the least satisfied with all service aspects. They had significantly below average satisfaction levels with the quality and condition of their homes, and were much less likely than other tenants to feel that the Council kept them informed about things that affected them.

Families with child/ren also tended to be less satisfied than other tenants. This was most noticeably the case with satisfaction with the quality (13% below average) and condition of their homes (12% below average) and with the outcome of their contacts with the Housing Department (14% below average).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The Council and its staff have every right to be pleased to learn that overall tenant satisfaction with the landlord service that the Council provides remains high and significantly above that reported by most other landlords.

Key driver analysis showed that satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service and satisfaction with the outcome of their contacts with staff have the greatest impact on overall tenant satisfaction.

Importantly, the survey identified that the Councils' repairs service and the customer service provided by its staff are both particularly strong aspects of the Council's overall service. The high level of tenant satisfaction with these two key services underpins the unusually high level of overall satisfaction amongst Epping Forest DC's tenants.

The level of tenant satisfaction with the Council's repairs service has improved further from the high level recorded by the 2006 survey and is now exceptionally high. The Council will also be pleased to learn that tenants now appear to find it even easier to contact the right person when they contact the Housing Department - building on a similar level of improvement recorded by the 2006 survey - and that higher percentages also report that staff are helpful and are satisfied with the outcome of their contacts.

No service areas were identified as particularly weak but the Council's tenants were marginally less likely than tenants elsewhere to feel that the Council was good at keeping them informed about things that affected them as tenants. In addition, unlike all other aspects of the Council's service, the trend line for this one service aspect appears to be downwards.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below have been provided to help Epping Forest DC use the survey findings to deliver further improvements to its housing services.

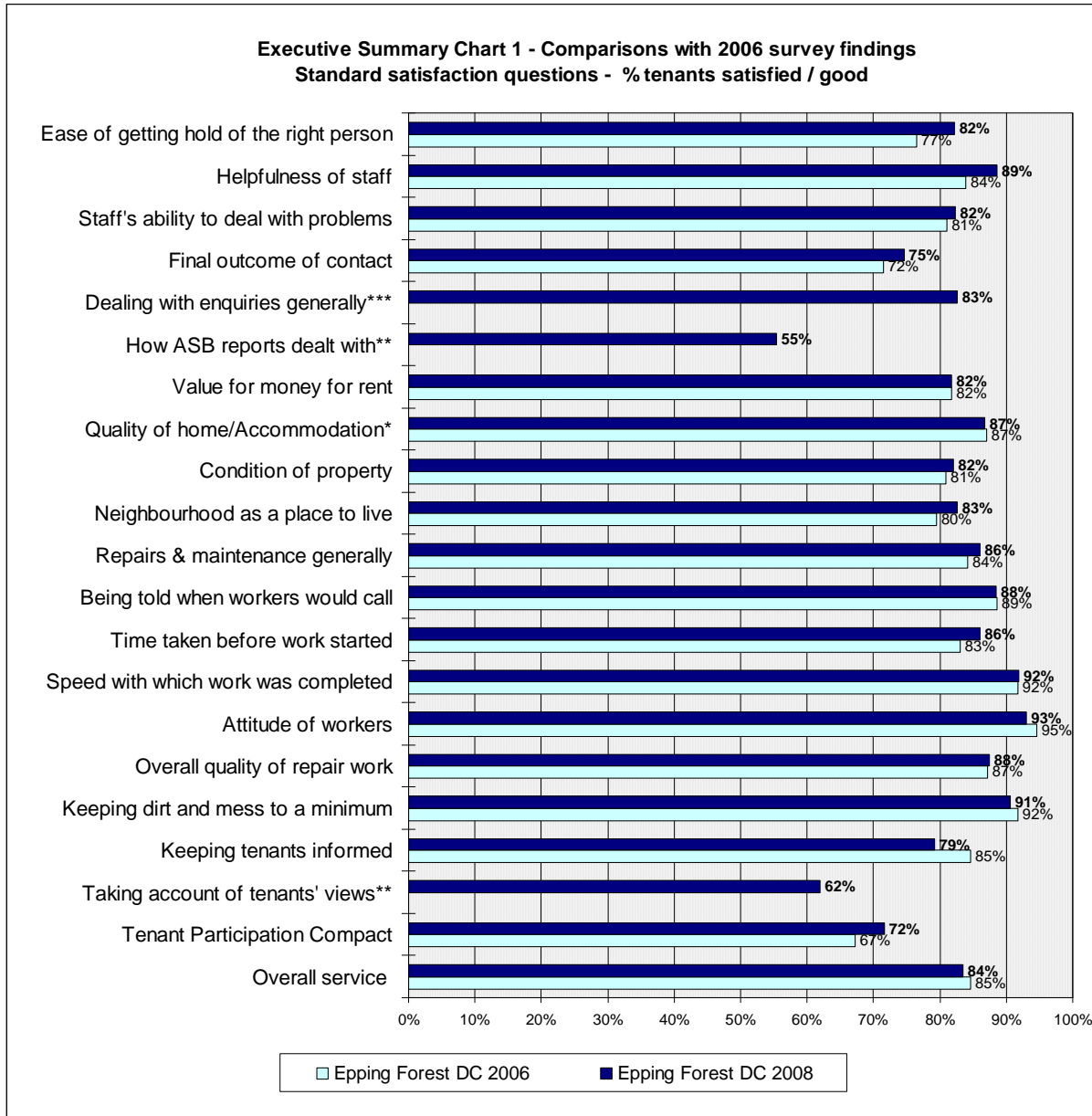
Providing information to its tenants was the one service area where Epping Forest DC's service showed up as relatively weak. The Council is therefore recommended to consult with its tenants through its tenant participation structures to try and discover why an increasing number of tenants do not appear to feel that the Council keeps them adequately informed.

Seventy percent of tenants with internet access said they would like to report repair requests on-line. Feedback understands that Epping Forest DC has offered an internet repairs reporting service to tenants for a number of years but, oddly in the light of this survey finding, relatively few tenants make use it – although it is understood that a larger number of tenants e-mail repair requests. It is recommended that the Council consults with its tenants groups to see if it can discover why the internet repairs service is not commonly used – for example there may be issues concerning ease of use or reliability. It is also understood that the Council is setting up a number of tenant talk back groups and one of these will be focussing on maintenance and repairs; this would make a good early topic for this group to give its views on.

Only a little over a quarter of the Council's tenants seem to be aware of the Council's tenants compact, which is a lower percentage than is usually found to be the case. It is understood that the Council is currently reviewing the compact. This process alone may increase the percentage of tenants that know about the compact. More importantly though, once this review has been completed, the Council is recommended to make sure that it re-launches the revised compact with maximum publicity to tenants.

The Council will probably be pleased to note that the survey findings suggested that the number of tenants making complaints is falling. Moreover, the percentage of tenants satisfied with how their complaint was dealt with appears to have risen since the Council's last survey in 2006. However, conversely, the percentage of tenants that said they were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint has fallen back to just 36% from 48% in 2006. It is recommended that the Council carries out a desktop analysis of the last year's complaints to see if it can discover the reasons behind this change – for example it may be found that a lower proportion of complaints are being upheld for one reason or another.

An unusually high percentage, over half of the survey respondents, said that car parking was a problem in their neighbourhoods. Feedback understands that the Council is aware that this is a cause of concern for a number of its tenants and has recently agreed a budget for a number of off-street parking schemes and improvements as well as making a decision to relax cross-over regulations so that more residents can adapt their front gardens for car parking use. These measures are clearly welcome but it is recommended that the Council also considers whether it can improve car parking control at estates with serious problems, such as where there are high levels of commuter parking, through additional security measures such as barriers or wheel clamping.

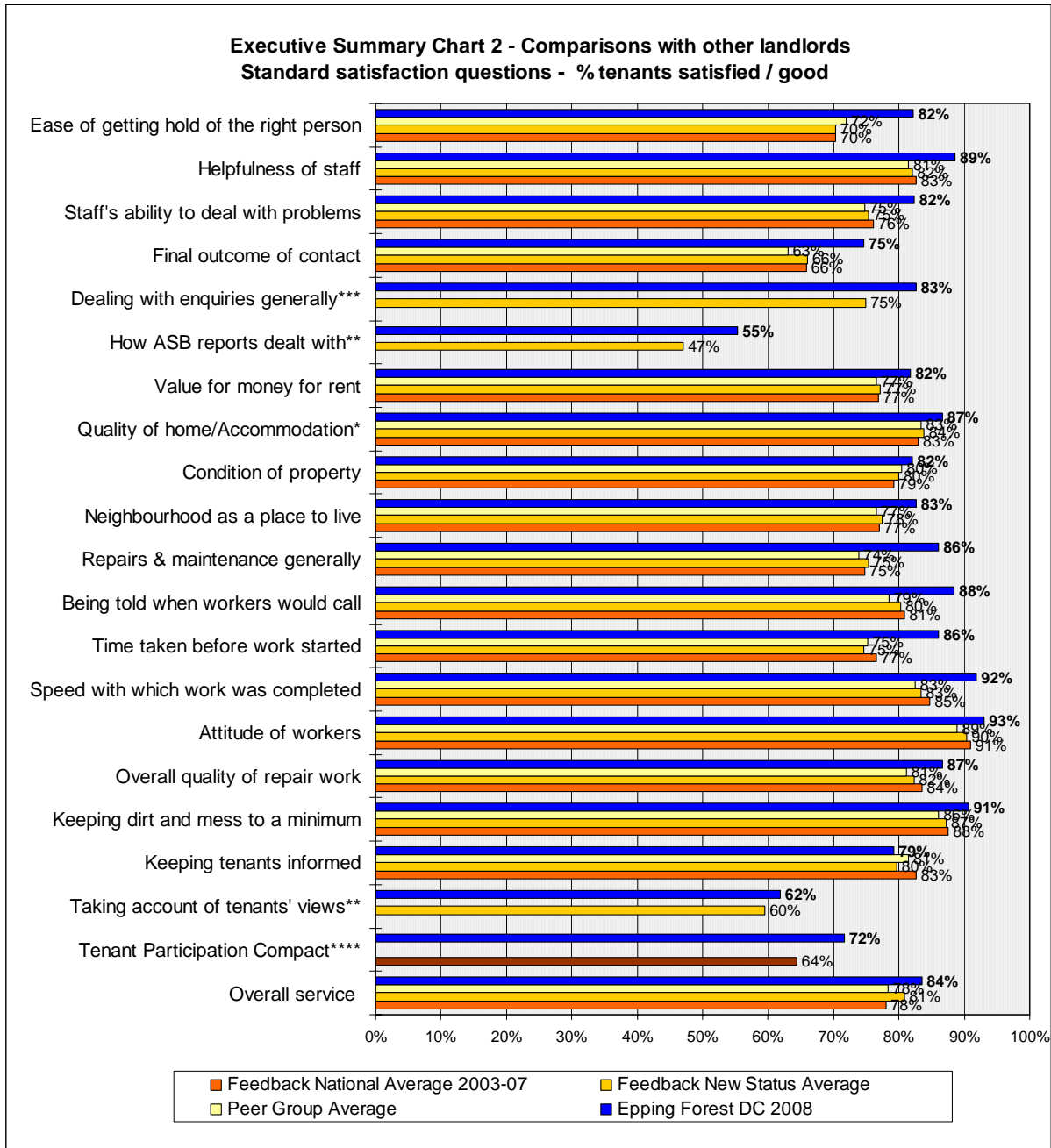


NOTES

*Wording of question significantly changed compared to the previous version of STATUS

**Question not included in previous version of STATUS

***Percentage rebased to exclude no opinion responses and not included in previous version of STATUS



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*Wording of question significantly changed compared to the previous version of STATUS

**Question not included in previous version of STATUS

***Percentage rebased to exclude no opinion responses and not included in previous version of STATUS

****Comparison is with Feedback 2006 LA average *not* 2003-07 average

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**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel
Report reference: E/ /2006
Date of meeting: 8 January 2008

Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D Stallan

Subject: Housing Service Strategies

Officer contact for further information: Sandy Lindsay (Ext 4035)

Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (Ext 4607)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers and endorses the Housing Service Strategies on Home Ownership and Rent Collection and Administration, attached as appendices, and provides any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder for incorporation.

Report

1. Housing Service Strategies were originally produced around 8 years ago in accordance with an agreed standard framework, and have since been updated. The Housing Service Strategies give more detail than the Council's main Housing Strategy on the various housing services provided. In total, 16 Housing Service Strategies have been produced to date, covering:

House Sales & Leasehold Services	Rent Arrears
Rent Collection and Administration	Homelessness
Under-occupation	Housing Information
Tenant Participation	Private Rented Sector
Housing Management Services	Older Peoples Housing Services
Housing Allocations	Housing Advice
Empty Properties	Energy Efficiency
Anti-Social Behaviour	Harassment

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

3. The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and endorse two updated Housing Service Strategies on Home Ownership and Rent Collection and Administration which are attached as an appendix to the report and provide any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder for incorporation.

Consultation

4. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will be consulted on both Strategies at their meeting in January 2009. In addition, the Leaseholders Association will be consulted on the Home Ownership Strategy at their next meeting.

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Housing Service Strategy HOME OWNERSHIP

1.Introduction

- 1.1 This Housing Directorate Strategy relates to the statutory obligation of local authorities to administer the “The Right to Buy” scheme available to all secure tenants and the management of residential leasehold properties.
- 1.2 In addition, this strategy encompasses the sale of small plots of land within the management of the Housing Directorate.
- 1.3 Legislation lays down clear time-scales within the Right to Buy procedure, which must be met. Failure to do so would leave the Council open to criticism and legal challenge. This work is therefore essential.
- 1.4 Staff within the Housing Directorate co-ordinate this function and draw upon the skills of colleagues within other Directorates, i.e. Corporate Support Services, Environmental Street Scene and Finance.
- 1.5 This Strategy was formulated in consultation with representatives of the Epping Forest Tenant and Leaseholder Federation together with the Epping Forest Leaseholder Association and the Housing Scrutiny Panel. It was approved by the Portfolio Holder on xxxxxxxxxxxx.
- 1.6 Housing Directorate has been awarded the international standard ISO 9001:2000 quality accreditation for all services (post restructure in 2008) including Home Ownership, for a further 3 years commencing June 2008.
- 1.7 The Council was awarded the “Investors in People” status during 2002 and was re-accredited again in 2008 for a further 3 years. This incorporates all the functions in the Housing Directorate, including Home Ownership.
- 1.8 In addition, the whole of Housing Services achieved a Charter-Mark Award in 2004 and was re-accredited in 2007 for a further three years.

2. Background to Service

- 2.1 The staffing resources comprise of one full time and two part time members of staff (2.5 FTE staff) in the Home Ownership Team of the Housing Resources Section in the Housing Directorate. They co-ordinate all activities involved with the sale of Council housing stock and small plots of Council land and the issuing of all accounts in respect of service charges for leasehold properties. This involves all initial liaison with the purchasers as well as being the main contact with other services in order to complete the transfer of dwellings to the applicants' ownership.
- 2.2 Between 1st April 1977 and 31st October 2008 the Council had received 11,542 applications to purchase Council stock under the Right to Buy legislation, from which 6,146 properties were sold up to the 31st October 2008. These figures also include properties that were sold on a voluntary basis over this period. However, this is no longer Council policy. Over the period November 2007 to October 2008, 37 applications were received, of which 11 went through to completion. The number of sales has declined significantly over recent years. This is mainly due to the significant rise in the market prices and the current financial climate together with the fact that the maximum discount allowance of £50,000 was reduced to £34,000 in 1998.
- 2.3 Of these dwellings, 993 were sold on a leasehold basis, where the Council still owns the freehold. This requires the ongoing provision of leasehold services, involving the calculation and collection of an annual service charge on a monthly basis and all associated queries relating to that issue. It also involves full consultation with leaseholders.
- 2.4 The government has introduced a number of changes over the years in order to protect leaseholders against high service charges and control the charges that can be passed onto leaseholders. The number of leaseholders has grown in recent years and in particular since 1997. A number of properties can be re-assigned two or three times in one financial year, which increases the workload. Although sales have declined the majority that complete are leasehold properties where the Council owns the freehold
- 2.5 This exercise is supported by staff within other directorates of the Council. Plans are produced by the Environmental Street Scene Directorate, valuations and conveyancing are undertaken by staff in the Corporate Services Directorate and financial checks being completed by the Finance Directorate.

3. Coverage

- 3.1 The majority of the Council's tenants have a legal right to submit an application to purchase their home two years after the commencement of their secure tenancy. There are a number of exceptions, but in the main this relates to those people occupying properties, which have been designated for the older people or temporary accommodation for the homeless. However, revised legislation in 2005 means that any secure tenancies, which commenced on or after 18th January 2005, will have to complete five years occupancy before they can purchase their property.
- 3.2 This Strategy deals with all aspects of any request to purchase. From initial enquiries, through the completion of formal applications, the identification of the actual property to be sold, its valuation, progressing to the completion of the sale and the transfer of ownership of the property to the former tenants, either on a freehold or leasehold basis.
- 3.3 The Strategy ensures that these processes flow smoothly and provides a responsive service to residents.
- 3.4 Legislation, detailed below, provides strict time limitations upon the processes, although the Council is committed to reducing any administrative time to the minimum.
- 3.5 Within the Housing Directorate, all processes are contained within the Housing Directorate Work Instructions. These are available to staff on the intranet and are subject to review in order to seek to achieve continual improvements.

4. Relationships to other documents

- 4.1 The provisions of the Council's Housing Charter apply directly to the provision of House Sales and Leasehold Services, as do the Council's Customer Charter. These relate to the form of service to the public, our customers, which must be a key factor in any strategy.
- 4.2 The Council's Standing Orders and delegated authority govern the powers of the Director of Housing to deal with the sale of small areas of land. These are built into the works instructions that staff can follow for sales under 50 square metres. Any land sales over 50 square metres are reported to the Housing Portfolio Holder for approval.
- 4.3 The CLG issue a number of forms and information booklets that the Council provide to those making enquiries or applications. The Council also provides the Tenants Handbook, which contains related information. These are effectively good practice guides for staff. In addition to this, the Council also provides an information leaflet to all new tenants and all prospective purchasers, which is also available on the Council's web site. This advises tenants of the implications of owning their own home.
- 4.4 The Housing Directorate Works Instructions are in place to ensure relevant staff have clear processes to follow. This is subject to continual review in order to achieve improvements.
- 4.5 The Council's Tenant Participation Agreement, Council Plan, Community Strategy for the District and HRA Business Plan are also relevant to this Strategy.
- 4.6 The Council's website incorporates a section on the Housing Directorate and is relative to this Strategy. The address is www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing.

5. Aims & Objectives

5.1 It is the aim of the Council's Housing Directorate Strategy on Home Ownership to:

“administer the sale of residential properties and housing land, and to manage the collection of leasehold service charges, in an efficient and effective manner”.

5.2 This aim will be achieved by:

- a) ensuring adequate procedures exist in order to fulfil all statutory and Council requirements,
- b) monitoring performance against those requirements,
- c) providing applicants with accurate information to aid their decision-making.
- d) following best practice relating to all aspects of the management of public services,
- e) ensuring that all activities relating to leasehold properties follow the terms of the lease and legislation,
- f) calculating service charges using accurate information and apportioning as necessary any charges fairly between the leaseholders and the Council,
- g) continually reviewing all aspects of the procedure and implement improvements wherever possible,
- h) responding promptly to any changes in legislation.
- i) maintaining ISO 9001:9002 quality systems
- j) increased consultation with customers and Epping Forest Leasehold Association.

6. Statutory Requirements

6.1 Right to Buy and leasehold legislation is contained within the Housing Act 1985, Part V, (sections 118 – 188 inclusive) as amended. The main provisions include:

- Right to Buy qualifying criteria
- Procedure and time scales for the service of statutory notices
- Valuation of properties
- Calculation of discounts
- Appeal procedures
- Long term leases of properties

6.2 Further leasehold legislation is contained in the Commonhold and leasehold Reform Act 2002 which deals principally with the rights of leaseholders

- Commonhold
- Leasehold Enfranchisement
- Right to Manage
- Changes to Consultation
- Demand for rent
- Forfeiture of Lease
- Service charge improvements
- Leasehold Valuation Tribunal Powers
- Consultation under Section 20 of the Housing Act 1985
- Long Term Contracts
- Major Works
- Service and Administration Charges, Leaseholders Rights and Obligations

6.3. Human Rights Act 1998 (Articles 6, 8 and 14)

- Appeal procedures.

6.4. Data Protection Act 1998.

- Protection of personal data held by the Council

6.5. Health and Safety at Work Act 1994

- Responsibilities of the Council as employees in respect of Health and Safety Issues

6.6. The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985

- Provisions relating to tenancies and leases

6.8 The Local Government Act 1999

- The Council's responsibilities in respect of the Best Value regime.

6.9 The Housing Act 2004

- Incorporated changes to the Right to Buy

6.10 Housing and Regeneration Act 2008

- Incorporated changes to the Right to Buy

7. Client Consultation, Information and Involvement

- 7.1 All leaseholders are included in the circulation of the Council's publication "Housing News". This is to ensure that they are kept up to date with regard to housing issues and also encourages their involvement within the Council's consultation process. Changes in legislation are also covered in this document and tenants are reminded annually of their right to buy their property if they meet the criteria.
- 7.2 The District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement sets out in detail the way in which leaseholders will be consulted on housing issues.
- 7.3 The Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation has established a Leaseholders Association to represent the views of leaseholders and with whom the Council can consult on leasehold issues. This is now well established and has 98 members representing a fair proportion of the leaseholders in the District.
- 7.4 A Tenant Participation Officer promotes the obligations set out in the Tenant Participation Agreement. The Council actively involves the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.
- 7.5 The Chairman of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation is a co-opted member of the Housing Scrutiny Panel, which considers housing issues in detail.
- 7.6 Statutory consultation procedures are adhered to when carrying out major repairs or improvements a block of flats/maisonettes where there are leasehold properties.
- 7.7 Various information is provided in the Tenant's Handbook issued to all tenants.
- 7.8 Every new leaseholder receives a Leasehold Handbook containing relevant information related to leasehold issues.
- 7.9 Every applicant for the Right to Buy receives the booklet provided by the CLG and right to buy information on the implications of purchasing a property.
- 7.10 A Service Review was undertaken on Housing Services in 2003, which incorporated the Right to Buy and Leasehold Services. Under this review a wider consultation exercise of all clients was carried out
- 7.11 A census survey has also been undertaken in 2008 and an analysis is now taking place to ensure the Council meets and understands the needs of the customers.
- 7.12 In addition to this a satisfaction survey is undertaken of every Right to Buy applicant. This is sent out with the offer notice in order to gauge satisfaction with the service provided and each completed return is carefully monitored. Also, a full-length survey of leaseholders has been undertaken and an analysis of the returns has been established in October 2008. This will be closely scrutinised in order to assess satisfaction and strive for continual improvement and any lessons to be learned from comments received. In addition to this the results will be compared with the Essex Leasehold Group who have adopted a similar survey so that comparisons can be undertaken.
- 7.13 The Council's web site, Housing Section www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk also holds relevant information.

8. General Principles

- 8.1. The Housing Directorate will continue to provide one full time member of staff and two part members (2.5FTE) dedicated to the activities covered by this Service Strategy. The two part time members concentrate on freehold sales, equating to (1FTE) and the rest, equivalent to one full time member of staff and one part time member deal with all activities relating to leasehold sales and ongoing service charges. Although the sales have decreased, there are still a significant number of applications and the number of leaseholders continues to increase.
- 8.2. In addition to this, this financial year a new cash incentive scheme was launched under the first time buyers initiative. This scheme offers five grants of £34,000 each to applicants who meet the Right to Buy criteria to purchase a property on the open market. The scheme has proved successful with all five grants being taken, which will in turn release these properties for letting.
- 8.3. The introduction of a computer module as part of the Council's integrated housing system on Right to Buy applications allows greater efficiencies and the provision of additional information both to purchasers, leaseholders, and to Council staff.
- 8.3. Introduction of a computer system in respect of leaseholders will allow a reduction in the amount of paperwork duplication. Staff from other sections within the Directorate will need to be involved in the implementation as the computer system is integrated throughout the Housing Directorate. This system will allow instant updating within all sections and also the rapid production of information for staff within other Directorates. The I.T. Strategy determines the priority placed on implementation of the leasehold module but this is also subject to the corporate I.C.T. implementation plan.
- 8.4. Staff will ensure that the prospective purchaser or leaseholder is responded to promptly and accurately.
- 8.5. In instances where an immediate response is not possible, staff will advise when they will be able to respond, or provide details of which service will be able to provide the necessary information.
- 8.6. The Council's Housing Directorate will, at all times, attempt to attain the targets set out under the legislation.
- 8.7. In addition, Housing Management staff provides some details relating to both property and the purchaser, and Housing Assets staff provide on-going information relating to properties sold on a leasehold basis. The Council continues to be responsible for any external or structural work related to leasehold dwellings and the details of the cost of that work must be passed to the leaseholder by Home Ownership staff.
- 8.8. By law, each leaseholder has to be fully consulted on all major works. Annual service charges are calculated on an estimated basis and charged each month. At the end of the financial year the actual charges are calculated and accounts raised accordingly. This section carefully monitors the calculation and collections of charges, in respect of the leaseholders.
- 8.9. Procedures will be monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure time-scales are met and targets achieved and to implement improvements, wherever possible. Also, to ensure that all procedures fulfil all statutory and Council requirements.
- 8.10. Tenant and Leaseholder consultations and satisfaction surveys will continue to be undertaken.

- 8.11. The achievement of ISO9001: 9002 accreditation for the Housing Directorate was achieved in 2001 and re-accredited in 2008 for a further three years and works instructions will be maintained and appropriate controls held in place for this to continue.
- 8.12. At all times it is essential to ensure accuracy of Right to Buy and leasehold calculations.
- 8.13. All land sales will be administered in accordance with Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and Corporate Policies will be complied with.
- 8.14. Throughout this process, staff are also mindful of the possibility of fraud, both with regard to the actual sale of the property and also fraud that may have been perpetuated in connection with Housing Benefits or Council Tax.
- 8.15. The section will also respond promptly to any changes in legislation.

- **9. Future Developments.**

9.1 The following “SWOT” analysis identifies the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the areas covered by this Service Strategy.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Knowledgeable and committed staff ❖ Policy and Work Instructions available to staff on Intranet ❖ ISO 9001:9002 Accreditation ❖ Good relationship with tenants and leaseholders ❖ Comprehensive performance monitoring ❖ Good procedures and time-scales ❖ Good tenant and Leaseholder consultation framework ❖ Charter-Mark for Housing Services ❖ Investors in People Accreditation ❖ Charter-Mark Accreditation 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Leasehold not on OHMS Integral System. ❖ Unable to provide facility for payment by Direct Debit to Leaseholders.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Action Plan to improve service provided. ❖ Leasehold Module of Integrated Computer System 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Major changes in legislation ❖ Loss or Damage to files. ❖ Reduction in RTB sales. ❖ Increasing Leasehold Properties.

10. Action Plan

Action	Lead Officer	Time-scale	Resource Implications
Maintain Quarterly Performance Management Meetings.	Housing Director and Asst. Housing Director	3 monthly	Existing Resources
Implementation of the Integrated Housing System for Leasehold Services.	Housing Director. Asst. Director of Finance in respect of ICT and Asst. Director of Housing	April 2010	Before implementation can take place adequate resources will need to be in place within Housing I.T. in order to project manage this implementation and maintain after implementation. ICT.support will also be required. Additional hours of working for staff during implementation.
Maintain systems and control to retain ISO 9001:9002 accreditation.	Housing Resources Manager	Ongoing	Existing resources
Provide all Leaseholders with Leasehold Handbook regardless of whether they have purchased through Right to Buy or on the open market where the Council owns the freehold	Home Ownership Officer	Leasehold Handbook Produced 2008 Ongoing	Existing Resources
Inform all new leaseholders, including those who have purchased on the open market about the Leasehold Association available for them to participate.	Housing Resources Manager. Tenant Participation Officer	Ongoing	Existing Resources
Inform Tenants annually of their RTB.	Housing Resources Manager. Principal Housing Officer (Information	Ongoing	Existing Resources

	and Strategy)		
Analyse the number of valuations undertaken each year compared to the number of re-determinations made to the DVO to ascertain if the tenants are satisfied that the Council is setting the correct valuations.	Home Ownership Officer	April 2009	Existing Resources
Review staffing resources within the Home Ownership Section and report to Cabinet, if necessary	Housing Resources Manager	April 2009	Existing Resources
Provide a clear summary of leaseholders rights and responsibilities with service charge bills.	Housing Resources Manager Home Ownership Officer	April 2009 Ongoing	Existing Resources
Provide a more detailed breakdown of costs and information on annual statements	Home Ownership Officer Housing I.T.	September 2008	Existing Resources
Review the annual statement for presentation and clarity	Home Ownership Officer Housing I.T.	September 2008	Existing Resources
Complete Impact Assessment on Leaseholders	Housing Resources Manager	April 2009	Existing Resources
Complete analysis of Leasehold Survey and seek to improve service where appropriate	Housing Resources Manager. Home Ownership Officer	April 2009	Existing Resources

11. Resourcing the Strategy

- 11.1 The number of staff resourcing this strategy equate to 2.5 full time staff within Housing Services (2.5 FTE). This excludes management of the service and time spent by other staff within the Housing Directorate. It also excludes staff from other services who provide additional support in respect of sales such as Estates and Valuations, Legal and Finance. The service appears to be at the minimum level that can be achieved in order to maintain the service effectively, especially due to the increase in land sales last year and the continuous increase in Leasehold properties.
- 11.4 The cost of administering the leasehold service is re-charged to the leaseholders. The cost of administering the Sale of Council Houses and land is met by the income generated from the capital receipt received.

Staff Resource Projections		
2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
2.5	2.5	3.00

Staff Resource Breakdown – 2008/2009			
Post(s)	Leasehold Services FTE	House Sales FTE	Total
Housing Resources Section	1.50	1.00	2.50
Total	1.50	1.00	2.50

12. Key Targets and Performance Monitoring

The key targets for the service are as follows:-

Key Targets & Performance					
Performance Monitoring	2004/05 Actual	2005/06 Actual	2007/08 Actual	2008/09 Target	2009/10 Target
Average time to respond to RTB1 (Leasehold, in days). (Acknowledge RTB). Target 7 Working Days	1.9	1.36	2.40	3.87	7.00
Average time to respond to RTB 1 (Freehold, in days) (Acknowledge RTB). Target 7 Working Days	2.0	1.25	1.84	4.0	7.0
Average time to accept RTB application (RTB 2) (Leasehold, in days) (Admit or Deny RTB) Legislative requirement - 28 Days	5.4	3.9	4.15.	5.53	14

Average time to accept RTB application (RTB 2) (Freehold, in days) (Admit or Deny RTB) Legislative requirement - 28 Days	4.1	3.0	3.06	6.47	14
Percentage of formal Right to Buy applications formally denied or admitted within statutory time-scales	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

13.1. In view of the legislative targets involved, continual monitoring is essential. The OHMS integrated computer system has allowed more detailed and frequent reports for the RTB, and will assist with Leasehold Service Charges, when this module is introduced. This should ensure that the provisions of this Strategy are always achieved.

13.2 Legislated changes, and indeed the rumour of changes can lead to uneven levels of demand which require management response to avoid the development of any backlog. Therefore, monitoring of workload is essential to ensure the customers demands are met and legislative timescales adhered to.

14. Reviewing the Strategy

14.1 This Housing Directorate Strategy will be reviewed in consultation with representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholder Federation and the Leasehold Association no later than April 2012. However, an earlier review will be undertaken if required especially in the light of any significant changes in legislation or Council policy.

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**Housing Directorate
Strategy
RENT ADMINISTRATION**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Housing Directorate Strategy relates to the rent administration and collection in respect of the Council's housing and garage stock.
- 1.2 A rent accounting system is necessary to provide clear audit trails in the administration and control of income. Legislation lays down clear time-scales that must be met on implementation of a rent increase. Failure to meet these criteria could result in loss of revenue to the Authority, criticism and legal challenge. The Council also has an obligation to its tenants to ensure the income is correctly administered and accountable.
- 1.3. Staff within the Housing Directorate co-ordinate this function and draw upon the skills of colleagues within other Directorates, i.e. Finance and Corporate Support Services.
- 1.4. This Strategy was formulated in consultation with the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and the Housing Scrutiny Panel, and agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder on xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
- 1.5 The Housing Directorate has been awarded the international ISO 9001:2000 quality accreditation for all its services (post restructure) including rent administration and collection for a further 3 years commencing June 2008.
- 1.6 The Council was awarded the "Investors in People" status during 2002 was re-accredited in 2008 for a further 3 years. This incorporates all the functions of the Housing Directorate, including rent administration and collection.
- 1.7 In addition to this the whole of the Housing Directorate also achieved a Charter Mark Award in 2004 and has been re-accredited for a further three years in 2007.

2. Background to Service

- 2.1. The Rent Accounting and Collection Team of the Housing Resources Section within the Housing Directorate co-ordinate all the activities involved with administering rent accounting and collection. This involves all notifications to tenants of their rent increases, issuing of rent swipe cards, standing orders and direct debits. The main role of this section is to balance and control the collectable debit and reconcile the income in respect of all the Council's residential HRA properties and garages.

2.2. In addition one member of staff (1FTE) was added to this Section in 2002/03 to assist with the additional workload as a result of the changes required to the rent accounts through supporting people and rent restructuring initiatives.

2.3. The Council's Housing stock as at 16th November 2008 is as follows: -

- 6516 residential properties
- 933 leasehold properties
- 2,809 garages
- 1 Homeless Persons Hostel comprising 38 rooms and 10 chalets

2.4. As at 16th November 2008 the stock was made up of:

	No.	%
• 326	Bedsits	5.00
• 2,324	1 Bedroom Properties	35.67
• 1,814	2 Bedroom Properties	27.84
• 1,890	3 Bedroom Properties	29.00
• 162	4/5 Bedroom Properties	2.49
• 6516	TOTAL	100%

2.5. The collectable rent debit in 2007/08 was £26,045,637 (including Norway House Hostel Debit). This is the total annual income collectable from every property and garage, irrespective of housing benefit. Rent is collected through a variety of methods. Due to the rural nature of the District, Post Offices and Pay Points are extensively used to enable tenants to pay their rent at any post office in the country or designated Pay Points within the District. The Council provides three cash desks based in Epping, Waltham Abbey and Loughton. Direct debits and standing orders are also offered to tenants together with text payments, 24 hour payment by telephone and internet payments.

2.6 The three staff (3 FTE) in the Rent Administration and Collection Team are responsible for controlling the overall collectable debit against the actual income received. They are also responsible for accounting for the income collected in respect of other charges such as heating and water rates. The rent accounting service maintains the database in Housing Directorate, which identifies all Council properties, the collectable debit and the income due. The service monitors all payments against the amount due and is heavily relied upon by housing management officers for information on the payment records of tenants and the calculation of individual and overall rent arrears. One member of staff (1FTE) carries out changes required under the rent reforms and reconciling significant financial claims from Essex County Council, in respect of Supporting People. This is covered in more detail in Section 3.

2.7. The section also administers all changes to individual tenants' rent accounts such as the amount charged, the various elements that make up the gross rent and any other changes to the tenant's account such as changes of name.

2.8 The section also updates the computer information for Housing Management Officers to undertake the collection of arrears. It provides the overall statistical information and balances of all accounts.

3. Coverage

- 3.1 This Strategy deals with all aspects of rent administration and collection to ensure that processes are in place to provide a structured and detailed account of the collectable and collected income to the Council.
- 3.2. Rent levels prior to 2003 generally mirrored the guideline base rent. However, the Government has brought rent setting by local authorities onto a common system based on relative property values and average earnings. The intention is that rents for local authorities and housing associations move towards comparable rents by 2012 using an approach which could be readily and easily understood. In March 2001, the Government issued the Guide to Social Rent Reforms which set out how the reforms would be achieved and detailed a standard methodology (or formula) for use by RSL's and local authorities for calculation of rents. The basis of the formula is as follows:-
- 30% of a property's rent should be based on relative property values compared to national property values;
 - 70% of a property's rent should be based on relative local earnings compared to national earning;
 - a bedroom factor so that, all other things being equal, smaller properties have lower rents.
- 3.3. Rents started to be recalculated in this way from April 2003 to produce a "target rent" for each property, which could be much higher or lower than the current rent. The actual rent tenants pay must then increase or decrease, to this target by April 2012.
- 3.4. On average, it was estimated that rents would need to increase by around 9% between 2003 and 2012 to reach these target rents. Around 70% of all tenants would have rent increases, and around 30% would have rent reductions. However, as a safeguard, rents cannot increase or decrease by more than £2 per week in any year, above inflation plus half percent.
- 3.5. All homes have been valued and target rents calculated. However, the government are proposing that the rent increase in respect of 2009/2010 is to be a flat rate increase only and this may continue for more than one year due to the current financial climate but this is still be confirmed.
- 3.6. The government also introduced 'Supporting People' initiative at the same time as rent restructuring but this is a separate regime designed to account for support costs outside of the HRA framework. Essentially, Supporting People removed the costs of care and support from the HRA and other funding streams as this is now funded by a Countywide 'pot'. Commissioners at a County level decide on the allocation of funding across all supporting people contracts in Essex.
- 3.7. The main impact on rent restructuring was that care and support charges (mainly in sheltered schemes) have been separated from rent accounts, to be accounted for through Supporting People charges. The issues are complex but, basically, whilst the total amount payable by existing tenants has not been increased, care and support costs have been separately identified within each

rent account. This had the effect of reducing the basic starting level for use in rent restructuring calculation for some properties and has had an impact on the Council's ability to achieve target rents.

- 3.10. All new tenants after 1st April 2003 not in receipt of housing benefit have to pay care and support charges in addition to current rent payments. All tenants resident before 1st April 2003 have "transitional protection" met by the Council, which means that they pay no more than they would have if the charge had not been introduced. After this date, only those in receipt of housing benefit will have their charges met by supporting people.
- 3.11 Changes to the supporting people distribution of funds could have a significant impact on the HRA.
- 3.12 This Strategy ensures that the processes flow smoothly and provide the information to maximise the income to the Authority. It also provides the information required by tenants and other users of the service.
- 3.13. Legislation, detailed in Section 6, provides strict time-scale limitations and stipulates the information that must be supplied to tenants, although the Council is committed to reduce administrative time to the minimum.

4. Relationships to other documents

- 4.1. The provisions of the Council's Housing Charter apply directly to rent administration and collection. These relate to the form of service to the public, which must be a key factor in any strategy.
- 4.2. Standing Orders and delegated authority govern the power of the Housing Directorate to deal with the ordering of rent swipe cards, which is the main contract for the service.
- 4.3. The Council provides the Tenants Handbook which contains various information and the tenants payment letter accompanying the Swipe Card for rent payments also contains relevant information.
- 4.4. Housing Services policies and works instructions available on the intranet are in place to ensure staff have clear processes to follow. This is subject to continual review in order to achieve improvements.
- 4.5. The Council's Tenant Participation Agreement, Council Plan and the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan are also relevant to this Strategy.
- 4.6. The Council's web-site incorporates a section on the Housing Directorate Services and is relevant to this Strategy. The address is www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing.

5. Aims and Objectives

- 5.1. It is the aim of the Council's Housing Directorate Strategy on Rent Administration and Accounting;

"To administer and manage the rent administration and collection service in an effective manner".

This aim will be achieved by:

- a) following best practice and ensuring adequate procedures exist in order to fulfil all statutory, accounting and Council requirements.
- b) monitoring performance against time-scales, legislation, of other service requirements and needs.
- c) providing accurate information
- d) ensuring time-scales are adhered to
- e) responding to changes in legislation
- f) increasing consultation with customers
- g) maintaining ISO 9001:2000 quality systems

5.2. Regular audits of the rent restructuring, rent accounting and administration are undertaken. An audit of rent accounting and administration is now in progress as at November 2008.

6. Statutory Requirements

6.1. Under Section 74 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the Council is required to keep a "Housing Revenue Account" in accordance with proper practices. These include the following issues:-

- Procedure and time-scales for serving any rent increase notifications
- Short term lease of properties
- Equity Share properties
- Various statutory information to be supplied to tenants, at the start of a tenancy and annually
- Appeal procedures
- Calculation of rents
- Procedure for recovery of other charges, included in the rent

6.2. Human Rights Act 1998 (Articles 6,8 and 14)

- Appeal procedures

6.3. Data Protection Act 1998.

- Protection of personal data held by the Council

6.4. Code of Practice in Rented Housing.

- Local authorities adopted approach towards race equality.

6.5. Health and Safety at Work Act 1994

- Responsibilities of the Council as employees in respect of Health and Safety Issues.

6.6. Landlord and Tenant Act 1985

- Provisions relating to tenancies and leases.

6.7. Local Government Act 1999

- The Council's responsibilities in respect of the Best Value regime.

6.8. The Housing Act 2004

- Incorporates aspects of dealing with Anti Social Behaviour

6.9. Housing Regeneration Act 2008

- Incorporates changes to tolerated trespassers

7. Client Consultation, Information and Involvement

- 7.1. The Council publication "Housing News" is distributed to all the Council's tenants and leaseholders. This is to ensure that they are kept up to date with regard to housing issues and also urges their involvement with the Council's consultation process.
- 7.2. The District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement, first introduced in November 2002 and is in the process of being renewed in November 2008, sets out in detail the way in which tenants and leaseholders will be consulted on housing issues.
- 7.3. A Tenant Participation Officer promotes the obligations set out in the Tenant Participation Agreement. The Council is actively involving the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and promoting a wider interest throughout the District.
- 7.4. The Chairman of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation is a co-opted member of the Housing Scrutiny Panel, which considers detailed housing issues.
- 7.5. Various information is provided in the "Tenants Handbook" issued to all tenants.
- 7.6. Tenants are regularly being consulted on various issues and surveys.
- 7.7. A census survey has been undertaken in 2008 and an analysis is now taking place to ensure the Council meets and understands the needs of the customers.
- 7.8. A tenant satisfaction survey has also been undertaken in 2008 with very positive results over 84% overall satisfaction with the Housing Directorate. The frequency of these surveys is now every two years and is completed by an independent company who specialise in this area.
- 7.9. The Council's web-site, Housing Section www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk also holds relevant information.

8. General Principles

The general principles governing the service are as follows:-

- 8.1. The Housing Directorate will continue to provide at least three staff (3FTE) dedicated to the activities covered by this Service Strategy.

- 8.2 Since the integrated housing system (OHMS) has been introduced, more information has become available to clients.
- 8.3 Staff within this Section will ensure that all clients and tenants are responded to promptly and accurately.
- 8.4 The Council's Housing Directorate will, at all times, attempt to attain the targets laid down by legislation.
- 8.5 Internet payments and 24-hour telephone payment facilities have recently been provided to tenants. Swipe card payment facilities are available allowing for more choice of places to make rent payments and an additional payment date has been provided for direct debits. In addition to this payment has also been introduced by text to increase the different payment methods and meet the changes in demands.
- 8.6 The ISO 9001:2000 accreditation for the Housing Directorate will ensure that procedures will be maintained to provide consistent quality.
- 8.7 Procedures will be monitored and reviewed to ensure timescales are met and targets achieved.
- 8.8 Tenant and client consultations and satisfaction surveys will continue to be undertaken.
- 8.9 At all times accuracy will be maintained on information supplied and appropriate balances. Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Corporate Policies will be complied with. Throughout all processes, staff will Be aware of the possibility of fraudulent claims.

9. Future Developments

9.1 The following “SWOT” analysis identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the areas covered by this Service Strategy

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Knowledgeable and committed staff ❖ Policy and Works Instructions available on the Intranet ❖ Integrated Housing System ❖ ISO 9001:9002 Accreditation ❖ Good relationship with tenants ❖ Good tenant consultation framework ❖ Comprehensive performance monitoring ❖ Good procedures and timetable 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Bed and Breakfast cases not on OHMS Housing Integral System. ❖
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Action Plans for Improvement 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Reduced funding from County Council from the “supporting people pot”. ❖ Major I.T.failure ❖ Implications of changes to Rent Reforms on Funding and Resources

10. Action Plan

10.1. The Action Plan for this Service Strategy as follows:-

Action	Lead Officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Publish annually different methods of rent payments in Housing News including the costs to the Council of various collection methods.	Housing Resources Manager and Principal Housing Officer (Information)	September 2009	Existing Resources
Publish varied costs related to rent Collection	Housing Resources Manager And Principal Housing Officer (Information)	December 2009	Existing Resources

Provide arrears recovery reports and statistics to management within one week of close of each fortnight	Housing Officer (Resources) and Housing Resources Manager	Ongoing Review September 2009	Existing Resources
Provide statistical information to management on National Indicators and Local Performance Indicators each quarter within two weeks of close of each quarter	Housing Officer(Resources) and Housing Resources Manager	Ongoing Review September 2009	Existing Resources
Analyse census survey undertaken in 2008 to ensure that the Council is aware of the needs of the customers together with difficult to reach and diverse groups.	Housing Officer I.T. and Housing Resources Manager	March 2009	Existing Resources
Undertake a further Direct Debit marketing campaign	Housing Resources Manager	December 2009	Existing Resources

11. Resourcing the Strategy

- 11.1 The number of staff resourcing this Strategy equates to 3.0 (FTE) within Housing Directorate 3.0 (FTE) staff within the Rent Accounting and Collection Team including 1 (FTE) dealing with supporting people claims and rent reforms). This excludes senior management and staff from other services who provide additional support such as both the Finance and Corporate Support Services Directorate.
- 11.2 The cost of this service is met primarily by the rent income received from tenants.

11.3 The Housing Directorate oversees the development of staff by, undertaking the following:-

- Training Needs Schedule which records each member of staff training needs and how these are met
- Personal Development Reviews which identifies training needs

An example of the training related to this Strategy that has been undertaken in the past includes training on the housing integrated system on new releases

	Staff Resource Projections			
	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
Average no. staff to provide service (FTE)	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00

12. Key Targets and Performance Monitoring

12.1. Listed below are the key targets and performance indicators, which the Rent Accounting and Collection Service provide. However, although this section provides this information, it is not responsible for the performance of these targets, which are as follows: -

Key Targets & Performance			
Performance Indicator	Actual 2006/2007	Actual 2007/2008	Target 2008/09
Rent collected by the local authority as a proportion of rents owed on housing revenue account (HRA) dwellings	98.83%	99.41%	98.81%.
Current rent arrears as a proportion of rent roll	1.69%	1.52%	1.60%
Amount of former tenant arrears collected per annum	£119,465	£85,240	£80,000

12.2. In view of legislative targets involved, and the reliance of other sections on the system, continual monitoring is essential. The Housing integrated computer system allows more detailed and frequent reports. There are quarterly management performance monitoring meetings for all Housing Managers with the Housing Directorate and the relevant Assistant Director of Housing. The

previous quarter's performance is discussed against targets set and a review of action that needs to be taken to improve performance in the following quarter.

- 12.3. The performance indicators are included within the Best Value Performance Plan, which is published annually, and a summary is provided to every household in the District. The Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholder Federation also monitor the performance, on a quarterly basis. This constant monitoring of all targets should adequately ensure that the provisions of this Strategy are achieved

13. Reviewing the Strategy

- 13.1. This Housing Directorate Strategy will be reviewed in consultation with the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in April 2012.

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Report to: Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 8 January 2009

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr D. Stallan

Subject: Housing Strategy 2009-2012 (Consultation Draft)

Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall - Ext 4004

Democratic Services Officer: Mark Jenkins – Ext 4607



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Recommendations:

- 1) That the Panel considers the attached Housing Strategy 2009-2012 (Consultation Draft) and endorses it for consultation with key partners, stakeholders and the public;**
- 2) That a Consultation Exercise be undertaken on the Consultation Draft, including a one-day Housing Strategy Conference;**
- 3) That appropriate comments received through the Consultation Exercise be incorporated within the final version of the Housing Strategy;**
- 4) That the final version of the Housing Strategy be submitted to the Cabinet, with a recommendation to the full Council that it be formally adopted;**
- 5) That subsequent annual Key Action Plans be submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet;**
- 6) That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers progress with the Key Action Plan, in accordance with its Terms of Reference, six months after its adoption.**

Report:

1. The Council's Housing Strategy was last produced in May 2003 and was assessed at that time as being fully "fit for purpose" by the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East). The Council was only the second local authority in the country to achieve the fit for purpose standard.

2. While there is now no requirement for local authorities to produce their own Housing Strategies, in July 2008, within its document "Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities" the Government made reference to the future of housing strategies and stated that, "Refreshed housing strategies should:

- fully reflect the wider vision of the authority and its partners;
- reflect a clear and evidenced approach;
- provide a strong focus on how partners will deliver their commitments, including on the infrastructure needed to support housing growth".

3. A Housing Strategy should set out a district's housing plans for the medium term (i.e. the next 3-5 years). However, these plans can also be formulated with regard to the housing objectives for the long term which, in some cases, can span a period of 30 years.

4 The London Commuter Belt (LCB) Housing Sub-Region, within which the District sits, is one of the largest sub-regions in the country, comprising 5 local authorities in Essex and all 10 local authorities in Hertfordshire. The local authorities and RSLs within the Sub-Region have previously worked in partnership to produce a Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, which forms a part of the Regional Housing Strategy. Council officers have actively engaged with sub-regional working and have contributed towards the delivery of the Sub-Regional Housing Action Plan.

5. The latest Sub-Regional Housing Strategy was produced in October 2004 and the local authorities and RSLs are now working together to produce a new Sub-Regional Housing Strategy in 2009. In order to assist in this process, all the local authorities in the LCB Housing Sub-Region have agreed to produce their own housing strategies for their district and that they should now be produced to a common format. This Council's latest Housing Strategy (Consultation Draft) has been produced in this common format and is attached as an Appendix to this report.

6. The draft Housing Strategy complements the current Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, Regional Housing Strategy and also meets national housing objectives. The main aspects of national housing policy and Regional and Sub-Regional Strategies are included in the appendices to the document. The appendices also include the London Commuter Belt Strategy Grid, which summarises the strategic approach and position at district level for each of the local authorities in the Sub Region.

7. The draft Housing Strategy assesses the District's current and future housing needs - having particular regard to a recently completed (draft) Strategic Housing Market Assessment produced by six local authorities in the eastern part of the LCB Sub-Region - and sets out the Council's approach to meeting those needs. As well as taking account of national, regional and sub-regional priorities, it also links with other Council and non-Council strategies that both influence, and are influenced by, the Housing Strategy.

8. The Consultation Draft also includes a Key Action Plan at Appendix 1, which sets out the proposed actions to be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives over the next 12 months.

9. It is proposed that the final version of the Housing Strategy be adopted for a period of three years, with Key Action Plans produced and updated on an annual basis for approval by the Cabinet.

10. In view of the strategic importance of the Housing Strategy, the document has been produced as a "Consultation Draft". It is proposed that a major Consultation Exercise be undertaken with the Council's partners, key stakeholders and the public over a three-month period in early-2009. All responses received from the Consultation Exercise will then be considered, and changes considered appropriate by the Housing Portfolio Holder will then be made for the final version, which will be submitted to the Cabinet for recommendation to, and adoption by, the full Council, in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

11. Having regard to best practice set out in the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) for the inspection of local housing strategies, it is proposed that - during the consultation period - a one day conference be held on the proposals within the Consultation Draft, to which all the consultees will be invited. Presentations will be given on the key issues and proposals, in order to fully brief consultees and to help inform their responses. Details of the Consultation Draft will also be publicised in the local press, with an invitation for interested members of the public to obtain a copy of the Consultation Draft and to provide their comments. A copy of the document will also be published on the Council's website.

12. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the attached Housing Strategy 2009-2012 (Consultation Draft) and endorse it for consultation with key partners, stakeholders and the public. The Scrutiny Panel will then be asked to consider progress with the final version of the Key Action Plan, in accordance with its Terms of Reference, six months after the Housing Strategy's adoption.



Epping Forest District Council

Director of Housing
Alan Hall FCIH MCM



Housing Strategy

2009 – 2012

(Consultation Draft)

This Consultation Draft Housing Strategy will be finalised as the Housing Strategy 2009-2012, incorporating agreed comments received through the consultation exercise

Copies of this Business Plan are available in Large print.

Please ring 01992 564292 for a large print copy.

Our Vision

“Epping Forest will be a district that has safe, decent and attractive housing that meets the needs of those who want to live in the District.”

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This Housing Strategy assesses the District's current and future housing needs, and sets out the Council's approach to meeting those needs. It takes account of national, regional and sub-regional priorities and the links between other Council and non-Council strategies that both influence, and are influenced by, the Housing Strategy.

As the move towards increased collaboration at the sub regional level, the Strategy both contributes towards, and is influenced by, the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy.

The Council fully recognises that it cannot deliver the Housing Strategy alone, and that working in partnership with other organisations and across traditional local authority boundaries are essential to its effective delivery. The Strategy identifies, and has been produced in collaboration with, those key partners.

The Strategy sets out the Vision for housing in the District, the key housing objectives and the aims and objectives relating to individual issues. It also provides an Action Plan, linked to the Sub Regional Housing Action Plan.

The format of this Housing Strategy follows an agreed format followed by all the Districts in the London Commuter Belt Sub Region (See [Section 1.4](#) below). By following the same format, it has been easier to bring together the main issues from individual districts to inform and produce the Sub Regional Housing Strategy.

Every attempt has been made to ensure that the Housing Strategy is not a "technical document", and that it meets the needs of the widest possible audience, including tenants and private occupiers, residents associations, housing organisations, Council members, the Government Office and other interested parties. A Glossary has been included as an appendix to explain technical terms. A Contact List has also been provided to enable readers to obtain further information on areas of interest.

The Housing Strategy is a dynamic document, which will be continually developed and reviewed, with performance on the delivery of plans monitored. [Chapter 7](#) sets out the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the Housing Strategy and the Key Action Plan.

1.2 Fit for Purpose Standard

In May 2003, the Council's previous Housing Strategy was assessed as being fully "fit for purpose" by the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East). The Council was only the second local authority in the country to achieve the fit for purpose standard.

In July 2008, within its document "Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities" the Government made reference to the future of housing strategies and stated that:

"Refreshed housing strategies should;

- *fully reflect the wider vision of the authority and its partners*
- *reflect a clear and evidenced approach*
- *provide a strong focus on how partners will deliver their commitments, including on the infrastructure needed to support housing growth"*

1.3 The Epping Forest District

The Epping Forest District covers urban and rural areas of 131 square miles, including around twelve towns and larger villages, ranging in population size of between 2,000 and 30,000, totalling around 120,000 people. It is an attractive green belt area, with good road and rail links to the capital, so it is popular with commuters. The southern parts of the District are on the

borders of Greater London and are more populous and urbanised. This area includes Loughton, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and Waltham Abbey.

The total number of dwellings in the District was approximately 53,200 in April 2008. Of these properties 84.5% are in the private sector. Around 6,600 properties (12%) are owned by the Council, which is by far the main social landlord in the District. The number of registered social landlord (RSL) properties is steadily increasing, with around 3% of the district's dwellings now owned by RSLs.

1.4 National, Regional and Sub-Regional Context

Epping Forest is within the East of England Region and the "London Commuter Belt" Housing Sub Region, which is the one of the largest sub regions in the country, comprising 5 local authorities in Essex and all 10 local authorities in Hertfordshire. The local authorities and RSLs within the Sub-region work in partnership to produce a Sub Regional Housing Strategy, which forms a part of the Regional Housing Strategy. The current Sub Regional Housing Strategy was produced in October 2004 and the local authorities and RSLs are working together to produce a new Sub-Regional Housing Strategy in 2009.

Epping Forest has actively engaged with sub regional working and contributes towards the delivery of the Sub Regional Housing Action Plan.

As explained in [Section 1.1](#), this Housing Strategy complements the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy and contributes to the delivery of its objectives. At some time in the future, and in discussion with the Government Office, the Council may decide not to produce its own Local Strategy, and rely solely on the Sub Regional Housing Strategy.

It is important that the Council's Housing Strategy complements not only the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, but also the Regional Housing Strategy, as well as helping to meet national housing objectives.

[Appendix 2](#) summarises the main aspects of national housing policy, the Regional Housing Strategy and the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, and demonstrates that the Council local Housing Strategy is aligned to all of these key strategies and policies.

Attached as Appendix 3 is the latest "London Commuter Belt Strategy Grid", which summarises the strategic approach and position at the local district level, for each of the local authorities in the Sub Region.

1.5 Consultation and Partnerships

The Council has produced this *Consultation Draft* Housing Strategy for 2009-2012, before finalising its Housing Strategy. Around [90](#) partners and other organisations, with different interests in the District's housing (as listed below), are being consulted on the *Consultation Draft*:

- Government Office for the East of England (GO-East)
- Registered social landlords (RSL's) with housing stock in the District
- Local town and parish councils (24)
- Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Association
- Recognised tenants and leaseholders associations
- Developers operating within the District
- Local estate agents and private landlords
- West Essex Primary Care Trust
- North Essex Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
- Essex County Council Social Care (Adult Services)
- Essex County Council Social Care (Childrens Services)
- Essex County Council Supporting People Team
- The three Citizens Advice Bureaux operating within the District
- Voluntary Action Epping Forest

As part of the consultation exercise, and during the consultation period, the Council is holding a one-day conference on this Consultation Draft, to which all consultees will be invited to discuss the main issues and to provide comments first-hand.

All the responses received during the consultation period will be considered and taken into account when producing the final version. Details of the *Consultation Draft* are also being publicised in the local press, with an invitation for interested members of the public to obtain a copy of the draft document and to provide their comments. A copy of the *Consultation Draft* is also being also published on the Council's website, which users will be able to download in PDF format.

1.6 Period of Housing Strategy

The Strategy sets out the District's housing plans for the medium term (i.e. the next 3-5 years). However, these plans have been formulated with regard to the housing objectives for the long term which, in some cases, can span a period of 30 years.

The Housing Strategy will be updated in three years time, during 2012, unless there are significant changes required to the Council's strategic approach.

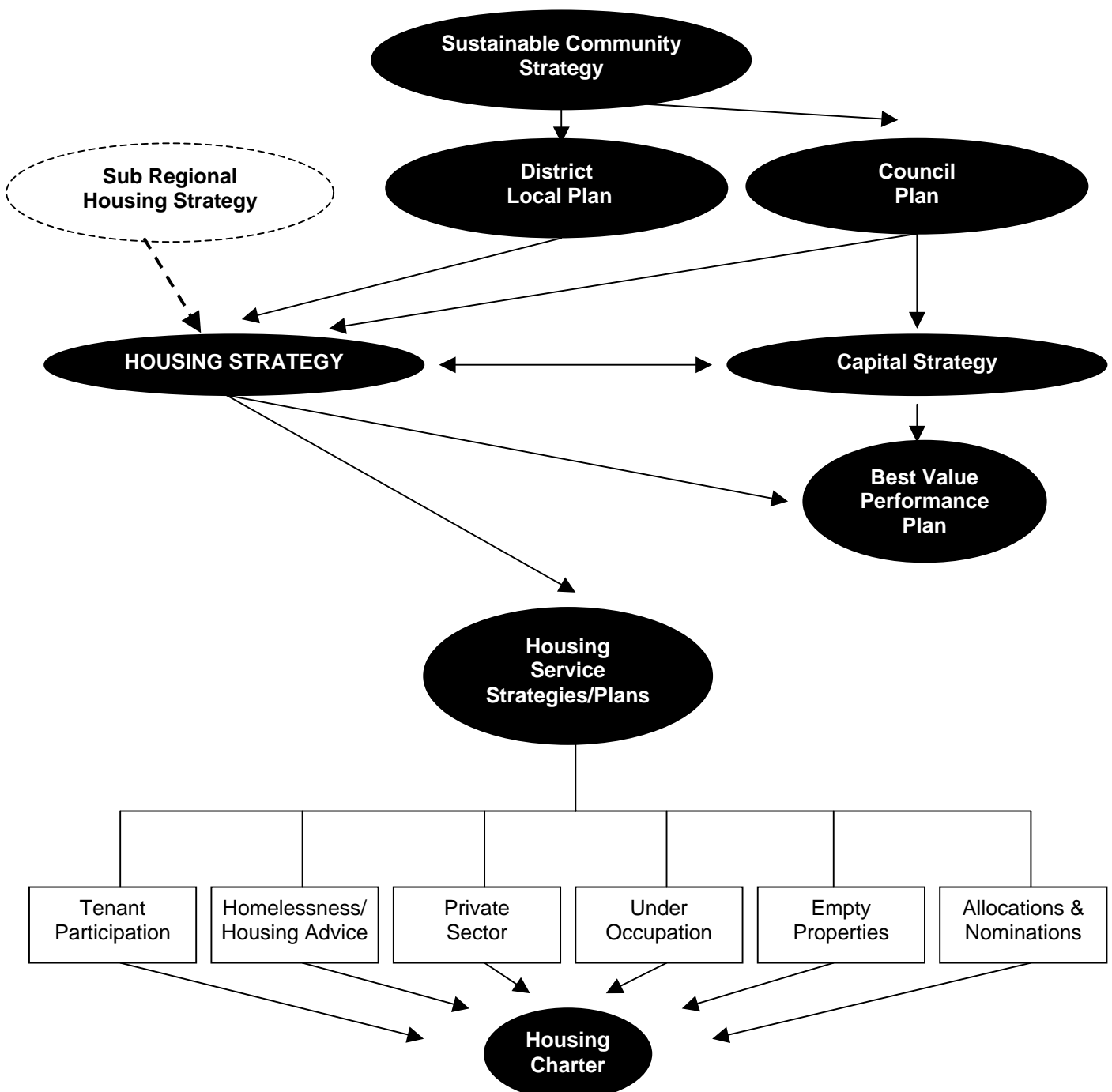
Chapter 2 – Strategic Aims & Priorities

2.1 Introduction

This Housing Strategy is only one of a range of complementary and inter-related strategic documents and plans produced by the Council. It is also influenced by a number of strategies produced by other agencies, or produced in partnership with other agencies. In formulating the Housing Strategy, careful regard has been had to relevant corporate objectives and strategies. This section of the Strategy sets out where it sits in relation to other strategies, produced both by the Council and other organisations, and the Council's strategic housing aims and objectives. Appendix 5 gives contact details to obtain more information on each of the strategies listed.

2.2 The Council's Strategic Approach to Housing

The hierarchy of the Council's strategic approach to housing can be summarised in the following chart:



<i>Sustainable Community Strategy</i>	The long term vision for the District, produced by the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership. The Partnership comprises all of the statutory agencies working in the District, including the Council, together with representatives of the voluntary sector (see Section 2.2 below).
<i>Council Plan</i>	The Council's prime strategic document, that sets out the Council's strategic direction for the planning and delivery of all its services over a four year period (currently 2006-2010). The Council Plan has a thematic approach, rather than following a traditional service structure, which mirrors the themes of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
<i>District Local Plan</i>	The Council's prime town planning document, setting out all the Council's town planning policies. This is being replaced by the new Local Planning Framework and associated documents.
<i>Capital Strategy</i>	Provides the Council's strategies on how capital projects will be planned, funded, delivered and monitored, together with details of the Council's HRA and General Fund Capital Programmes
<i>Best Value Performance Plan</i>	Sets out, on annual basis, the Council's plans for the following year to meet its Council Plan objectives. It reviews performance on the previous year's plans and sets targets for performance improvement. This takes the same thematic approach as the Council Plan.
<i>Housing Service Plans/ Strategies</i>	A series of separate documents, produced to a common format, that set out how individual housing strategies will be delivered in detail. They provide detailed objectives, policies, targets, performance information and financial/ staffing resource availability.
<i>Housing Charter</i>	Sets out the principles by which housing services will be delivered from the clients' point of view and what clients can expect.

2.3 Sustainable Community Strategy & the Vision for Housing

Under the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities have been given an over-arching role of community leadership and are required to prepare Sustainable Community Strategies, in consultation with the local community and stakeholders. A number of years ago, the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was formed, comprising the main stakeholders within the Epping Forest District from the public, private and voluntary sector.

Following extensive consultation, in 2003, the LSP produced its first Community Strategy, which is a long-term strategy for the District until 2021. The Community Strategy has seven cross-cutting themes relevant to the District, including one for housing called "Homes and Neighbourhoods". The Vision for the District's Homes and Neighbourhoods set out in the Community Strategy is that:

"Epping Forest will be a district that has safe, decent and attractive housing that meets the needs of those who want to live in the District."

The Epping Forest LSP is currently in the process of updating its Sustainable Community Strategy, to ensure that its visions, objectives and action plans take account of the current priorities for the District

2.4 Council Plan and Corporate Objectives

The Council's overall Vision, set out within its Council Plan, is that:

"We want the Epping Forest District to be a safe, healthy and attractive place in which to live and work."

In pursuit of this Vision, the Council has adopted the same visions and objectives as the Sustainable Community Strategy, including those for Homes and Neighbourhoods, set out in [Section 2.3](#) above.

2.5 Key Housing Objectives

The Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council Plan set out five objectives, which the Council has adopted as its Key Housing Objectives. These are:

- To ensure that growth in the number of homes in the District is properly planned, along with adequate infrastructures such as roads, health facilities, schools etc (i.e sustainable)
- To make affordable housing available – both for rent and for low cost home ownership - in rural and urban locations, for people who want to live in the District
- To ensure that people with special needs are able to live in suitable accommodation with appropriate levels of support
- To quickly accommodate homeless people in suitable, permanent accommodation
- To ensure that all homes in the District, in both the public and private sector, are in a decent condition

2.6 Individual Housing Objectives

Individual housing objectives relating to the needs and demands of different sectors of the community are given throughout this Housing Strategy.

Chapter 3 – Housing Needs, Demand and Supply

3.1 Housing Market

Aim

“To understand the local housing market and to identify the amount of housing necessary to accommodate the population of the District, at appropriate minimum standards and of suitable size, type and tenure”

Objectives

- a) Achieve a deeper understanding of the housing market in order to establish the level of need and demand for housing in the district.
- b) Establish the overall proportions of households that are likely to require market or affordable housing, now and in the future.
- c) Develop a robust and credible evidence base to inform the planning process at regional, sub regional and local levels.

Key Issues

Identifying Housing Needs

For some years, Government guidance on housing and planning has emphasised the requirement for local authorities to assess local housing need and develop strategies to address that need. This assessment process has generally been achieved by conducting Housing Needs Surveys. The Council last undertook a District-wide Housing Needs Survey in 2003, covering the period from 2003 to 2008. In 2006, a national framework was introduced under Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) for carrying out Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs), with final guidance published in March 2007. These assessments continue to provide information on the level of need and demand for housing locally, but they also contribute to the sub regional and regional levels of planning.

Regional Spatial Strategy - The East of England Plan

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England has planned for the provision of 48,600 additional dwellings by 2021, including 3,500 dwellings in Epping Forest (an annual rate of 175 per annum), plus a requirement for the Epping Forest District to contribute towards the expansion of Harlow by making provision for an additional, currently unspecified, number of homes close to Harlow.

Site Availability

Due to the Council meeting its Essex Structure Plan housing targets a number of years ago, very limited land has been allocated for housing within the Local Plan. Nearly all recent affordable housing developments have therefore come from “windfall” sites.

In the period 2001 to 2007 the actual dwelling delivery was 1,500 leaving a residual requirement of 2,000 dwellings, plus the additional number of new homes around Harlow.

However, of the required 3,500 additional homes within the District, around 1,500 additional homes were built between 2001 and 2007, which count towards this target. Furthermore, planning permissions have already been granted for a number of additional homes to be built. Therefore, the minimum amount still to be provided in the Epping Forest District between 2007 and 2021 is around 2,000– an annual rate of around just 143 per annum.

In response to the Local Development Framework (LDF), the Council has issued a "call for sites" from all land owners, seeking land that may have potential for all development purposes

over at least the next fifteen years. As a major landowner, the Council is also reviewing its own land-holdings and identify any sites that should be put forward for consideration.

All sites will be assessed on the basis of a single set of criteria which is currently being prepared. Any potential sites considered suitable as affordable housing sites will be considered by the Council's Members on the recommendation of the Director of Planning and Economic Development and would be included in future Local Development Plans. This would follow a detailed sustainability appraisal, which will be undertaken for all sites put forward.

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) analyses the entire local housing market, which is likely to be wider than the local authority boundaries. It forms a crucial part of the evidence base that informs planning policies. Epping Forest District Council is within the Eastern Region for planning purposes, and part of the London Commuter Belt (LCB) Sub Region for housing purposes. Since the LCB Sub Region comprises 15 local authorities, it was considered too large an area for the production of a detailed and meaningful study. Six districts of the Sub Region, including Epping Forest, joined to form London Commuter Belt (East)/M11 SHMA Area and commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to undertake a comprehensive and integrated SHMA. The other five districts in the SHMA area are Brentwood, Broxbourne, East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford. The research used secondary data from sources such as the UK Census, Housing Corporation, HM Land Registry and the Office for National Statistics, along with a qualitative consultation programme with a wide range of stakeholders. A draft report was published in November 2008.

Key Findings of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

ORS and Savills published the draft SHMA report in November 2008. The report is a lengthy and detailed document which needs to be properly studied to understand the main issues and key findings. However, the following provides a summary.

The report noted that key factors for the SHMA area, including Epping Forest are:

- Its proximity to London
- Its house prices
- The diversity of its offer that appeals to residents and migrant households

The make-up of the existing property type in the Epping Forest District, compared to the whole of the SHMA area, the East of England Region and England & Wales is provided in the table below, which shows that the mix of property types is most comparable to the whole of England and Wales:

Type	Epping Forest	SHMA Area	East of England	England & Wales
Detached	24 %	25 %	31 %	23 %
Semi-detached	32 %	29 %	32 %	32 %
Terraced	25 %	29 %	23 %	27 %
Flat	19 %	17 %	14 %	18 %

The make-up of the existing property tenure in the Epping Forest District, compared to the whole of the SHMA area, the East of England Region and England & Wales is provided in the table below, which shows that the mix of property types is most comparable to the whole of the Eastern Region:

Type	Epping Forest	SHMA Area	East of England	England & Wales
Owned Outright	33 %	29 %	31 %	29 %
Mortgaged	42 %	45 %	43 %	39 %
Social Rent	17 %	18 %	15 %	19 %
Private Rent	8 %	8 %	11 %	13 %

Between 2001 and 2006 the population of the area rose by 8.5% and the 2001 Census states that 5.5% of households in the SHMA area are overcrowded.

It is estimated that, across the SHMA area, there are 4,800 (1.8 %) households in housing need. Around 1,300 of these are Epping Forest residents, representing 2.4 % of households in need, which is the highest number and percentage in the SHMA Area.

31,100 households are considered to be unsuitably housed, including 7,100 in Epping Forest. The term 'unsuitably housed' is used to encompass households that are homeless or have insecure tenure; households that are 'mismatched' to the dwelling they live in; households living in dwellings that lack amenities or are in a poor condition; housing with social needs that can only be resolved through a move.

The SHMA report identifies that - based on statistics from the ONS Migration Statistics Unit - Epping Forest, is a net emigrant authority within the SHMA Area, with the following net migrations occurring over the five-year period 2002-2007

LA Area	Net Inward Migration	Net Outward Migration
Broxbourne	140	-
Harlow	-	470
Brentwood	-	410
Uttlesford	-	1,230
East Herts	-	930
Totals	140	3,040
Total	2,900 (Net Outward)	

With regard to international migration, ONS Migration Statistics show that, between 2001 and 2006, there were 1,800 inward migrants, compared to 2,200 outward migrants, resulting in a net outward migration of 400 people – only Epping Forest and Uttlesford have net outward migration in the SHMA Area.

Epping Forest has the largest difference between the 2004-based household growth projections to 2026 (8,200 households) and the East of England dwelling allocation (3,500 dwellings). Only Epping Forest and Brentwood have higher projected growth levels than their dwelling allocation. The largest negative difference between household growth projections and dwelling allocations is in Harlow, due to the planned expansion of Harlow.

The study found that around a quarter of all households contain only pensioners, while nearly 50% contain an adult couple with or without children. Over a fifth of households contain only one adult in the form of a single person or lone parent. Younger people tend to dominate the private rented sector. Over the 25 year period between 2004 and 2029, it is projected there will be an additional 62,000 people living within the SHMA study area. In Epping Forest, the number of people aged 65 or over is projected to increase by 13,100 over the period, with 3,400 of those people being aged 80 or over. However, the area has also been attracting families, with a substantial net gain in both the 25-44 and 0-15 age groups. Those who own their properties outright are far more likely to leave the area than others.

The average property price in Epping Forest in 2008 (Quarter 1) was around £365,000. The average property price in the SHMA Area rose by 114 % between 2000 and 2008 (Quarter 1), compared to 133 % in the Epping Forest District – the highest increase in the SHMA Area. However, the average property prices in the SHMA Area have increased at a lower rate than

the rest of the Eastern Region – although the average property prices are still around 125%-130% of the Eastern Regional Average.

In 2002, the average property price in Epping Forest was 9 times the median full-time earnings of someone working in the District. This rose to 11 times the median earnings by 2007 (compared to 6.5 times earnings in Harlow) – which is, by far, the highest ratio in the SHMA Area, although the largest increase was in Brentwood.

The SHMA Report identifies that there will be a projected shortfall of 5,700 affordable homes in Epping Forest between 2007 and 2021 (see [Section 3.2 below](#)). Bearing in mind this shortfall, the SHMA breaks down the residual dwelling allocation from the East of England Plan (2,000 homes) into the “ideal” amounts required for different tenure types. The tenure types are generally defined as follows:

- Market housing** is private housing for rent or for sale, where the price is set in the open market
- Intermediate affordable housing** is housing at prices or rents above those of social rent, but below market price or rents, and which meet the criteria for affordable housing set out above. These can include shared equity products (such as HomeBuy), other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent.
- Social rented Housing** is rented housing owned and managed by local authorities and registered social landlords (housing associations) for which guideline target rents are determined through the National Rent Regime. The proposals set out in the Three Year Review of Rent Restructuring (July 2004) were implemented as policy in April 2006. It may also include rented housing owned or managed by other persons and provided under equivalent rental arrangements to the above, as agreed with the local authority or with the Homes and Communities Agency as a condition of grant.

Epping Forest ("Ideal")	Housing Requirement 2007-21	Housing Requirement 2007-26
Market housing	100 (6.5 %)	600 (21.4 %)
Intermediate affordable housing	1,300 (62.5 %)	1,500 (51.2 %)
Social rented housing	600 (30.9 %)	800 (27.4 %)
Total Housing Requirement	2,000	2,900

Epping Forest has the highest percentage requirement of the total allocation for affordable housing (93.4%) than any of the other local authorities in the SHMA Area. The second highest is in Harlow (49.1%). The lowest is in East Herts (23.7%).

However, it is totally unrealistic to expect that only 6.5% of the required 2,000 new homes to be provided in Epping Forest will be in the form of market housing, since the provision of most new housing is brought forward by commercial developers, for whom it would be uneconomic to provide such a low level of market housing. Since it is unlikely – for commercial and economic viability reasons – that the amount of affordable housing required of developers on development sites will be increased from the current 40%, the following table provides a more realistic breakdown:

Epping Forest ("Realistic")	Housing Requirement 2007-21	Housing Requirement 2007-26
Market housing	1,200 (60 %)	1,740 (60 %)
Intermediate affordable housing	520 (26 %)	755 (26 %)
Social rented housing	280 (14 %)	405 (14 %)
Total Housing Requirement	2,000	2,900

The SHMA Report suggests an appropriate mix of property sizes for Epping Forest, which is detailed below:

1 bedroom	2 bedroom	3 bedrooms	4 bedrooms	5+ bedrooms
28%	35%	34%	2%	0%

The report identifies that the challenges for local authorities in the SHMA area include:

- The delivery of additional affordable and market housing, given the land supply and the difficulties facing the housing market at this time
- Balancing the growth of housing and jobs, given the finite land and natural resources
- The changing characteristics of households, the ageing population and the 'city flight' from London
- Preservation of the Green Belt

Key Partners

Opinion Research Services, Essex County Council, Hertfordshire County Council, neighbouring local authorities, registered social landlords, Government Office Eastern Region, East of England Development Agency, planning consultants, surveyors, house builders, estate agents and community groups.

3.2 Affordable Housing

Aim

"To maximise and increase the amount of good quality affordable housing in the District, in the form of social rented housing and low cost home ownership"

Objectives

- a) Work with registered social landlords and developers to increase the number of affordable homes within the District;
- b) Seek to achieve the provision of at least 40% affordable housing on large housing developments (over 0.5Ha or 15 properties) in urban areas through the use of agreements under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, with the affordable housing mix on such sites reflecting the private housing mix;
- c) In exceptional circumstances, where on-site affordable housing provision is inappropriate, seek the off-site provision of affordable housing, equivalent to at least 40% of the combined total number of properties developed on-site and off-site provision, or the provision of a financial contribution equivalent to the amount of subsidy the developer would have needed to contribute to the affordable housing, if it was provided on-site;
- d) Generally seek up to 30% of the total affordable housing provided on Section 106 sites as shared ownership, to assist first time buyers to gain access to home ownership;

- e) If the property market is slow, and it is not possible for RSLs to easily sell shared ownership properties, reduce the amount of shared ownership to be sought on Section 106 sites by increasing either the amount of affordable housing for rent and/or the amount of intermediate affordable housing, possibly with an arrangement that allows these properties to be converted to shared ownership in the future;
- f) In order for them to be affordable, ensure that - for shared ownership schemes:
 - (i) The average initial equity share sold to shared owners across all the shared ownership homes within any development is no more than 35%;
 - (ii) Shared owners are able to purchase a minimum equity share of 25% and a maximum equity share of 50% for shared ownership schemes;
 - (iii) Shared owners are able to purchase additional equity shares (staircase) up to full 100% ownership, except for rural housing schemes for which a maximum of 80% equity can be purchased under current Homes and Communities Agency policy; and
 - (iv) Shared owners pay an initial rent of no more 2.5% of the unsold equity per annum, with subsequent rent increases determined in accordance with the relevant housing association's rent setting policy;
- g) Through the Council's Preferred RSL Partnering Scheme, encourage partnerships with RSLs already operating within the district, rather than new RSLs, in order to maximise their individual management bases;
- h) Maximise the amount of funding provided by the Homes and Communities Agency to provide "additionality" for affordable housing schemes;
- i) Seek to ensure that affordable homes meet the Homes and Communities Agency's Design and Quality Standard, and at least Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes;
- j) On an exceptional basis, consider planning applications for developments on land currently in the Metropolitan Green Belt, for which planning permission would not normally be granted, if they provide high levels of affordable housing and are considered suitable for residential development.

Key Issues

Affordable Housing Requirements and the East of England Plan Allocation

The SHMA report identifies that a total of around 37,900 additional homes will be required overall within the SHMA area, in the period 2007-2021. Included within this target is a requirement for 13,000 additional affordable homes, with some households moving between districts to find suitable housing. The requirement for affordable housing across the individual districts is higher, because (for local analysis) an assumption is made that households' needs are largely addressed within their own local authority area.

As explained in **Section 3.1 above**, the minimum amount of new homes still to be provided in the Epping Forest District between 2007 and 2021 is around 2,000 – an annual rate of around just 143 per annum.

Findings of the SHMA Report Relating to Affordable Housing

In determining mortgage borrowing, the Government states that it should be assumed that a single earner will borrow up to 3.5 times his/her earnings, with two-income households borrowing no more than 2.9 times their joint income. On this basis, the SHMA report identifies that virtually no owner-occupied housing is affordable to households earning less than £30,000 per annum, and only 12 % of properties sold in the area would be affordable to individual earners with incomes of less than £50,000 borrowing at the maximum 3.5 times ratio, assuming little or no equity. For households to be able to consider the cheapest quarter of properties on the market in the SHMA Area, individual earners would need to earn at least £55,000 -

£60,000, with joint-borrowers needing incomes of £65,000 - £70,000 or more. This equates to a property price of nearly £200,000, which is well below the average property price in Epping Forest.

For households earning £20,000 or less (typically assumed to require social rented housing in the SHMA Area, just 17 % of local housing would be affordable – almost entirely in the social housing sector (with or without benefit support

Around half of the stock in the SHMA Area requires earnings of £65,000 or more, with around a third requiring annual incomes of more than £80,000 per annum, Given that over 75 % of the stock is owner-occupied, many households will have existing equity and will not depend exclusively on the household income. However, most newly forming households (and households seeking to move out of rented housing) do not benefit from this additional finance.

In conclusion, the SHMA Report identifies that there will be a projected shortfall of 5,700 affordable homes in Epping Forest between 2007 and 2021.

Realistic Affordable Housing Provision and Shortfall

Although the results of the SHMA suggest that around 93% of the 2,000-home provision should be provided as affordable housing, as explained in Section 3.1, it is more realistic to assume that around 40% of new homes on large sites in excess of 15 units will be provided as affordable housing. Since this amounts to just 916 homes - an annual rate of 60 per annum - it will leave a projected shortfall of around 4,785 affordable homes.

Recent Affordable Housing Completions

Due to the dearth of housing sites in recent years, resulting from the early achievement of the previous Structure Plan target, there have been very low numbers of affordable homes provided in recent years, as illustrated in the table below:

Tenure	2007/8	2006/7	2005/6	2004/5
Rented (exc. special needs)	4	14	48	90
Shared Ownership	10	5	4	18
Totals	14	19	52	108

Affordable Housing Pipeline

A number of large developments have detailed planning permission and are either on site or have not yet started, which include provision for affordable housing. At the time of writing, these include:

Site	No. of Affordable Homes	% Affordable	Status (as at 31.12.08)
Epping Forest College (Phase 1), Loughton	51	35%	On Site
EFDC Development Sites – District-wide	29	100%	On Site
Epping Forest College (Phase 2), Loughton	43	35%	Not yet started
Off site provision from Warren Hill development, Loughton	5	N/A	Not yet acquired
Ongar Station, Ongar	20	40%	Not yet started
St Margarets Hospital, Epping	40	30%	Not yet started
Acres Avenue, Ongar	12	100%	Not yet started
Gt Stony Arts Centre	9	100%	Not yet started
Totals	209		

Other sites where outline planning permission has been granted and include, at the time of writing, the provision of affordable housing are as follows. Note that the numbers of homes are based on the developers' current intentions:

Site	Proposed No. of Affordable Homes	% Affordable	Status
Merlin Way, North Weald	33	30%	Revised planning application not yet submitted
White Lodge/The Limes, Waltham Abbey	96	80%	Not yet submitted
St Johns School, Epping	38	25%	Not yet submitted
Totals	167		

In addition, active consideration is currently being given by developers for the development of a further 11 sites in the District. Although unlikely, based on the developers' current proposals, if all 10 developments receive planning permission, it would result – at the time of writing - in the provision of a further 238 affordable homes.

Local Plan Requirements

The Council's Local Plan, which is still the Council's primary planning document until the Local Development Framework is introduced, was formally altered in July 2006. The Local Plan now requires, in non-rural areas, the provision of 40% affordable housing on large housing developments (over 0.5Ha or 15 properties) through the use of agreements under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, with the affordable housing mix on such sites reflecting the private housing mix.

Off Site Provision and Developer Contributions

The Local Plan makes it clear that the Council will always seek the provision of affordable housing on large development sites, if at all possible. This is due to the dearth of available sites for affordable housing. However, it recognises that, in some exceptional circumstances, on-site provision may not be appropriate. In these cases, either off-site provision of affordable housing, or a financial contribution in lieu of the required affordable housing provision, may be agreed.

When off-site provision is agreed, the amount of affordable housing sought will be at least 40% of the *combined number* of properties on the large development *and the off site development*. For example, on a development of 50 properties, the Council would seek 32 properties off-site (i.e. 40% of 50 + 32 properties).

When financial contributions are agreed, the Council will seek a contribution equivalent to the amount of subsidy the developer would have needed to contribute to the affordable housing, if it was provided on-site. The Council will use this financial contribution to help fund an affordable housing development elsewhere in the District.

Grant funding

Social housing grant (SHG) funding may be available from either the Council or the Homes and Communities Agency to help fund affordable developments. However, the Council has limited SHG funding available, which has usually been received from developer contributions on sites where the on-site provision of affordable was not appropriate. Generally, the Council will only provide SHG for developments which the Homes and Communities Agency is not prepared to fund.

The Homes and Communities Agency allocates grant to the regions and bids are then invited from RSLs. The Homes and Communities Agency is increasingly concerned that public subsidy is not considered to be automatically available. Therefore, currently, the Homes and Communities Agency will only fund affordable housing developments if they meet the following four principal criteria:

- Value in terms of public subsidy per home and per person housed;
- Quality, judged using the Homes and Communities Agency's Design and Quality standards;
- Deliverability with particular concern for planning status; and
- Policy fit with national, regional and local strategies

Furthermore, the provision of grant must also provide identified added value, as set out below:

- Additional affordable housing to the amount that could be provided without grant;
- A different mix of housing, that would require subsidy; and/or
- Properties that meet higher design or environmental standards where the Homes and Communities Agency believes them to be of benefit.

Preferred RSL Partners and the Strategic Housing Partnership

For a number of years, the Council has operated a Preferred RSL Partnering Scheme, whereby it has selected five RSLs which the Council would prefer to undertake all affordable housing developments in the Districts. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, these Preferred RSL Partners have a good understanding of the housing needs of the District and work closely with the Council through regular meetings etc. Secondly, the Council would prefer a small number of RSLs to build up their management base within the District, rather than have a plethora of housing associations developing small amounts of affordable housing in the District.

The Council has formed the Epping Forest Strategic Housing Partnership, which comprises representatives from the five Preferred RSLs and senior housing officers.

The Council's current Preferred RSL Partners are:

- East Thames
- Hastoe (Rural Specialist)
- Home
- London & Quadrant
- Moat

Developers intending to undertake new developments that include any affordable housing provision are invited to seek tenders from each of the Preferred RSL Partners, to ensure that they obtain the most competitive price.

The Council will only support bids for grant funding to the Homes and Communities Agency from its Preferred RSL Partners.

Shared Ownership Policy

In October 2007, the Council's Cabinet approved a Shared Ownership, which sets out the Council's minimum requirements for shared ownership. The main provisions of the Shared Ownership Policy are set out in **Objectives (d) and (e) above**.

Home Ownership Grants

For 2008/9, the Council has introduced a pilot scheme of Home Ownership Grants, whereby 5 grants of £34,000 are being given to existing Council tenants to purchase properties in the private sector. The benefit of the scheme is two-fold. Firstly, it enables five tenants to enter home ownership, who would otherwise be unable. Secondly, it frees up Council accommodation that can be offered to applicants on the Council's Housing Register. The

success of the scheme and the take-up will be reviewed to consider whether a scheme should be introduced on a more permanent basis

Provision of Affordable Housing on Green Belt Sites

In view of the lack of affordable housing in the District, it may be necessary for the Council to consider - in the future – and on an exceptional basis, the granting of planning applications for developments on land currently in the Metropolitan Green Belt, for which planning permission would not normally be granted, if they provide high levels of affordable housing (in excess of 80%) and are considered suitable for residential development. If the Council is minded to grant planning permission for such sites, they would need to be referred to the Government Office to consider whether or not the planning application should be “called in” for further examination.

Key Partners

Homes and Communities Agency; Registered Social Landlords; Developers; neighbouring local authorities.

3.3 Homelessness

Aim

“To prevent homelessness and to respond to homelessness applications in accordance with statutory requirements, efficiently, effectively and fairly, helping homeless people to secure appropriate accommodation and keeping the use of bed and breakfast accommodation to a minimum.”

Objectives

- a) Prevent homelessness wherever possible and provide appropriate advice and assistance to homeless and potentially homeless people;
- b) Carry out the Council’s statutory duties and investigate homelessness applications thoroughly and fairly;
- c) Ensure that adverse decisions are reviewed, when requested, within statutory time limits;
- d) Continue to provide hostel accommodation and effectively manage and maintain the Council’s hostel for the benefit of homeless people;
- e) Continue to work closely with Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS) to secure rent deposit guarantees, and provide rental loans, to enable homeless people to access accommodation in the private rented sector;
- f) Continue to work with Women’s Aid to enable women subjected to domestic violence to be accommodated in safe and secure accommodation and, for those who wish to do so, to stay safely in their own homes;
- g) Ensure that no more than 100 homeless households are in temporary accommodation at any one time;
- j) Minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation, and seek to ensure that only single people are accommodated in B&B;
- k) Review the Council’s Homelessness Strategy every three years;
- l) To work in conjunction with the Government’s Communities and Local Government and seek to implement other initiatives that would assist with the prevention of homelessness across the Epping Forest District.

Issues

Homelessness Prevention

In June 2006, a fresh approach was adopted by the Council to dealing with people who consider themselves homeless and approach the Council for assistance. A Homelessness Prevention Team was established, to provide advice and consider all the options available which could prevent the household from becoming homeless. The success of this approach is demonstrated by the figures shown in the tables below, with a 60% reduction in the number of households accepted as homeless and in priority need between the years 2005/06 and 2007/08. This reduction has also had a considerable impact on the numbers of households requiring temporary accommodation. As at 31 March 2008, there were 75% fewer people in the Council's homeless persons hostel and other types of temporary accommodation, compared to the same date in 2006. The number of Council dwellings let to homeless households on introductory or secure tenancies, and the number of nominations to RSLs, have also declined steeply in 2007/08 when compared to the previous year.

Homelessness acceptances	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Households accepted as homeless and in priority need during the year	202	108	80

Homeless applicants accommodated by the Council in temporary accommodation at 31 March	2006	2007	2008
Homeless families in priority need in temporary accommodation	227	158	59
of which in bed and breakfast accommodation	21	7	2

Lettings to homeless households eligible for assistance and in priority need	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Council dwellings let to homeless households on secure or introductory tenancies	86	136	99
Homeless households taking up nominations to RSL dwellings	28	44	9

Homelessness prevention	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Households who considered themselves homeless and approached the LAs homelessness prevention service and where casework resolved their situation	460 cases	516 cases	523 cases

The table below demonstrates that one of the most common reasons for homelessness is the breakdown of a family relationship, resulting in parents or relatives no longer being willing to provide accommodation, sometimes with violence involved. Another commonly occurring reason for homelessness is that the household has lost their rented accommodation.

Reasons for homelessness (Acceptances 2007/08)		
Parents or other relatives no longer willing to accommodate	32	40.0 %
Non violent breakdown of relationship	6	7.5 %
Violence	9	11.3 %
Harassment, threats or intimidation	0	0 %
Mortgage arrears	2	2.5 %
Rent arrears (LA/RSL/private)	4	5.0 %
Loss of rented or tied accommodation	24	30.0 %
Left an institution or care	0	0 %
Other reasons	3	3.7 %

Relationship Mediation

In order to help tackle the problems created by relationship breakdowns, the Council has established a service level agreement with **Page 77** Relate has trained mediators who can

assist clients with the difficulties they are having within their family relationships. This could be where the client is experiencing relationship problems within their family, or with their partner. A referral is made on the client's behalf, after they have talked to a homelessness prevention officer, who agrees that a Relate mediator may be able to help. Relate is reporting a success rate of 80% in assisting clients to resolve their relationship difficulties, thereby preventing homelessness.

Domestic Violence

The Council works closely with Harlow Womens Aid, in order to provide temporary accommodation to women fleeing domestic violence at a womens refuge in Harlow. The Council has also facilitated the provision of a womens refuge within the Epping Forest District, and has worked with Harlow Womens Aid to provide an outreach advice service for women in the District.

Women dealing with relationship breakdowns involving violence may, in certain circumstances, benefit from the Council's 'Sanctuary Scheme'. This scheme helps families to stay in their homes if they have become victims of domestic violence or hate crime. The security of the home is improved through a variety of measures, such as internal fire doors, additional locks into the premises and fire fighting equipment. It was set up jointly by the Council and the District's Crime and Disorder Partnership. Four sanctuaries have been set up since the scheme's inception in 2006, at a cost of £1,200 per scheme.

Assistance with Private Rented Accommodation

Clients seeking privately rented accommodation, but unable to fund the deposit, may be referred to the Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS). The scheme assists through the issue of a rent deposit guarantee, in the form of a bond instead of the usual deposit. The Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme is mainly funded by charitable donations, but in November 2008 a sum of £20,000 was underwritten by the Council to support EFHAS, which was increased to £40,000 in October 2008.

In recognition of the Council's excellent performance in homeless prevention and reducing the numbers of people in temporary accommodation, the Government's Special Advisor on Homelessness awarded the Council a one-off grant of £10,000 in 2007/8 to be used for further homelessness prevention measures. The Council decided to utilise this grant to set up a Rental Loan Scheme, with grants of up to a maximum of £600 being awarded to a single homeless applicant and up to a maximum of £900 to a family household, to whom the Council owes a full duty, to assist them in securing accommodation in the private sector. The Council is currently considering not only continuing with the scheme, but also increasing the provision to £20,000, which will enable the Council to assist around a further 22 – 33 homeless applicants to seek accommodation in the private sector.

In order to secure such accommodation, normally a returnable deposit and a payment of one month's rent in advance is required. Some eligible applicants already receive assistance through EFHAS referred to earlier. The Rental Loan Scheme enables applicants to pay (or contribute towards) the required one month's advance rent. Both the Rental Loan Scheme and EFHAS removes the need, in some cases, for the Council to provide permanent accommodation itself, leaving more properties available for existing Housing Register applicants.

Originally, applicants were required to short pay back the loan within 1 year. However, in August 2008, it was agreed that the payback period should be extended to 2 years, in order to increase the take up of the scheme. Amounts repaid are recycled to provide rental loans to other homeless applicants.

Separately, a bid has been submitted for a Performance Reward Grant (PRG) from the Essex Local Area Agreement (LAA) on behalf of all Essex authorities. The main element of the bid is for a PRG of £250,000 to assist local authorities to secure private sector accommodation to homeless applicants.

Key Partners

Communities for Local Government; Essex Probation Service; Essex Childrens and Families Service; Epping Forest Community Mental Health Team; NACRO Community Enterprises; Women's Aid; East Thames Housing Group; Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme; Relate; Supporting Epping Forest Residents in Temporary Accommodation (SEFTA).

3.4 Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

Aim

“To give equal access to services for people from BME backgrounds, ensuring that the culture exists that will empower these communities and integrate their needs and aspirations into every day housing provider activities”

Objectives

- a) Treat customers equally, irrespective of their gender, race, colour, nationality, faith or disability, and comply with the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Race Relations Code of Practice (Housing) and the Good Practice Standards for Social Landlords on Tackling Harassment;
- b) Monitor the provision of housing services in relation to ethnicity, to ensure that all parts of the community have equal access;
- c) Provide information clearly and in plain English, or translated into other languages where there is a need to do so;
- d) Identify any issues that may act as a barrier to BME communities accessing housing services.

Key Issues

BME Groups in Epping Forest

The following table gives a breakdown of ethnicity in the Epping Forest District, as provided by the 2001 Census:

Ethnic Group	%
White British	91.23
White Irish	1.18
Other White	2.68
Mixed White & Caribbean	0.36
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	0.08
Mixed White & Asian	0.36
Other Mixed	0.24
Indian	1.68
Pakistani	0.39
Bangladeshi	0.07
Other Asian	0.29
Caribbean	0.42
African	0.36
Other Black	0.05
Chinese	0.40
Other	0.22

As can be seen the vast majority of the population in Epping Forest is White British

Access to services

In 2003, a baseline study was conducted to assess the housing and related needs of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community in Essex. The study was commissioned by the Essex Housing Officers Group (EHOG) and carried out by the University of Salford and ATH Consultancy Ltd, with funding from EHOG and the former Housing Corporation. The report identified access to services as being an issue that should be considered further by the local authorities involved in the study. In particular, it was identified that some communities may not appreciate what services are available, may have inaccurate views about who housing providers cater for, and perceive that service providers may not appreciate the importance of their culture or religious beliefs in assessing their needs. The Council's Housing Directorate has since carried out further work, through a postal questionnaire, to identify the ethnic origin of Council tenants and any special needs they may have. This data has been uploaded onto the Council's Housing IT system, so that these needs can be identified when dealing with clients.

Providing information

Certain challenges are involved in the provision of information in other languages. According to the 2001 Census, 91.23% of the population of Epping Forest are 'White British', 2.68% stated that their ethnic origin was 'Other White' and 1.68% stated 'Indian'. No other ethnic origins are significantly represented and no large BME communities have been identified within the District. The Council considers, therefore, that the most effective way to provide information is to use plain English in its communications, with options to request foreign language translations. Through Essex County Council's procurement service, arrangements are in place for interpreting and translation services, and these arrangements are made known to front-line staff. Interpreting services can be provided on the day they are needed, and there are language identification posters in housing offices. Translations can normally be provided within 24 hours.

Specialist Accommodation for BME households

In view of the relatively low numbers of BME households within the District, it is not considered necessary to provide specialist accommodation for these groups. However, in order to ensure that households from BME groups have equal access to mainstream affordable housing, the Council annually compares the percentages of housing applicants from BME groups accommodated by the Council and RSLs with the percentage of housing applicants from BME groups registered for social housing. Generally, this has identified that the numbers are similar, suggesting that the Council's allocation policies are not indirectly discriminatory.

Key Partners

London Commuter Belt sub-regional group, Essex Equality and Diversity Network (EEDN), Essex Racial Equality Council, Essex County Council

3.5 Gypsies & Travellers

Aim

“To understand the housing needs of gypsies and travellers and to ensure that an appropriate number of authorised sites are provided within the District, based on regional requirements”

Objectives

- a) Reduce the incidence of gypsies and travellers becoming homeless through eviction, without having alternative sites to move to;
- b) Meet regional requirements for pitch provision and reduce unauthorised encampments;
- c) Improve the living conditions, health and educational opportunities of gypsies and travellers;
- d) Minimise the impact of the sites on the countryside and the settled communities;

- e) Endeavour to make site provision for gypsies and travellers in areas that will reduce the need to travel.

Key Issues

The provision of sites for gypsies and travellers has historically been a cause of tension in some parts of the community. As legally recognised ethnic groups, romany gypsies and irish travellers are protected by the Race Relations Act. This means that it is unlawful to treat them less favourably than other groups, including the provision of the opportunity to live in a decent home. It does not mean, however, that gypsies and travellers should receive any preferential treatment and they are subject to the same legal restrictions, including those under planning legislation, as the 'settled' community.

There are currently 18 gypsy and traveller sites in the District, totalling 95 pitches. Eleven of the sites, constituting 75 pitches, are in Roydon and Nazeing. Only one of the sites, in Stanford Rivers, is in the public sector, and is managed by Essex County Council. The remainder are on privately-owned land.

The provision of mobile home sites for gypsies and travellers, on land not previously used for this purpose, is subject to planning permission. However, apart from some of the towns and larger villages, the Epping Forest District lies entirely within the Metropolitan Green Belt, which has meant that there is a lack of immediately suitable land on which sites can be provided. This has, in part, resulted in a number of unauthorised encampments, some of which have been "tolerated", with enforcement being action taken on others.

The Council has previously dealt with issues relating to gypsies and travellers reactively, considering planning applications as they arise. In addition, the Council has a housing responsibility to provide suitable accommodation for gypsies and travellers who report as homeless. There is now a recognition, however, both nationally and locally, that a more strategic and proactive approach is necessary.

National planning policy requires a significant increase in the number of gypsy and traveller sites in appropriate locations, with a focus on increased provision in the next 3-5 years. In October 2007, the Secretary of State directed the Council to carry out a plan for the provision of suitable sites, and to provide an additional 49 pitches by 2011 - with a planned increase of 3% per annum from this level thereafter. However, the Council is contending these figures, on the basis that emerging research in Essex has estimated that there is a need for only 35 additional pitches by 2011.

In view of the Secretary of State's direction, throughout the latter part of 2008 and during early 2009, the Council has been involved in a consultation exercise on the strategy to be adopted with regard to sites for gypsies and travelers, and sites that might be acceptable or otherwise. An Area Suitability Study has been undertaken to assess areas that are potentially suitable or unsuitable. A 'call for sites' has been undertaken, asking developers to identify land that might be available and the views of both the settled and gypsy and traveller communities have been sought.

When the Epping Forest Gypsies and Travellers Plan is finalised in late 2009, the formal representation phase will begin. An independent inspector will determine whether the Plan meets the various legal and policy tests, one of which will be the robustness of the 'delivery strategy'. This will need to state now sites are to be brought forward and by whom; how they will be deliverable and viable; and how the necessary infrastructure will be provided. The outcome of this work could form the basis of future bids for government grants.

Delivery of the Plan will have to be multi-agency, and the ongoing management of the sites may provide opportunities for partnership working with RSLs.

Key Partners

Essex County Council, Homes and Communities Agency, East of England Regional Assembly, local councils, GO-East, RSLs

3.6 Supported Housing for Older People & Other Vulnerable People

Aim

“To help vulnerable people with special housing needs to live in homes suitable for their needs, with appropriate levels of support.”

Objectives

- a) Work with other statutory and voluntary agencies to enable people with special housing needs to live in homes suitable for their needs, with appropriate levels of support;
- b) Work with the Essex Supporting People Team to ensure that supported housing and floating support services are provided to those in most need at an economic cost;
- b) Encourage the provision of “lifetime homes” within all developments, and ensure that at least 10% of homes provided on new developments in excess of 10 homes meet the lifetime homes standard;
- c) Undertake adaptations to Council properties to enable tenants with physical disabilities to remain in their existing homes;
- d) Ensure that the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme gives appropriate priority to vulnerable people;
- e) Provide advice and support to older owner-occupiers needing to arrange repairs and improvements to their homes, including energy efficiency advice, through the Council’s CARE Agency;
- f) Ensure that accommodation at sheltered housing schemes meets modern standards, suitable for older people;
- g) Provide help to older people in their homes who need monitoring and emergency assistance, through the provision of Telecare services.

Issues

Supporting People

Supporting People is the regime introduced in April 2003, through which Essex County Council (on behalf of the Essex Commissioning Body) provides funding to housing providers for supported housing within the County. Until 2007, the various commissioning agencies within the Epping Forest District produced a Local Supporting People Strategy. This provided details of the supply, needs, and plans for housing support to a variety of vulnerable client groups. However, following a review of the governance arrangements for supporting people in Essex, it was agreed that local supporting people strategies should be produced for housing sub regions within Essex. Therefore, a Local Supporting People Core Strategy Group has been established, comprising the five Essex districts within the London Commuter Belt Sub Region, to produce a Local Supporting People Strategy for the London Commuter Belt (Essex), and to oversee delivery.

Housing Needs Survey 2003

Although the data is a little out of date, the Housing Needs Survey undertaken by the Council in 2003 gives some useful data about disability in the Epping Forest District. Completed in 2003, 11,212 households were surveyed in 20 housing sub areas. A high response rate of 27% was achieved, resulting in 6% of all households in District responding.

The Housing Needs Survey 2003 found:

- 18% of households in the District contain somebody with a disability - Amounting to around 8,970 households (Higher than the national average of 15%)

- 81% of such households comprised one disabled member, whilst 19% comprised two disabled members
- 46% of all disabled people were over 65 years of age
- 17% of all disabled people were under 49 years of age

Further data from the 2001 Census indicates that over 40% of people of pensionable age suffer from a limiting long-term illness.

A further Housing Needs Survey will not be undertaken due to the recent introduction of Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs), which provide information on the level of need and demand for housing. SHMAs have effectively negated the necessity to carry out district-wide Housing Needs Surveys. See [Section 3.1](#) for further information.

Older People

Population forecasts by Essex County Council suggest that the population of Epping Forest residents over 65 years of age will increase over future years. Early findings of the London Commuter Belt (East) M11 SHMA demonstrate that almost 10% of the population of Epping Forest are aged 75 year or above. This suggests that increased housing support will be required to a larger number of older people.

There has been a shift in the housing needs of older people in recent years, away from accommodation-based support, such a sheltered accommodation, towards more floating support and the provision of telecare,

The following table provides details of the number of schemes providing supported accommodation for older people:

Type	No. of Buildings	No. of Properties
Sheltered housing	13	468
Frail elderly schemes	2	99
Residential accommodation	13	469
Nursing homes	4	260

It is clear that rented sheltered accommodation and frail elderly schemes are far less popular amongst older people than in the past; often, Council sheltered accommodation is allocated to housing applicants with quite low levels of housing need, and some schemes are difficult to let. Many Council properties on housing estates that have previously been considered particularly suitable for older people, and therefore designated for older people, have had to be de-designated and let to younger people, due to a lack of demand. Therefore, there is no need for any more rented accommodation for older people in the District. However, there may be a need for an extra-care scheme for older people, which would provide higher levels of care than sheltered housing schemes, but less than residential accommodation. The possibility of reconfiguring the Council's frail elderly scheme at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey is therefore being investigated.

Telecare

Telecare is a relatively new initiative being pursued by Essex County Council's Adult Social Care Service in order to reduce the costs of 24-hour care provided to older people. It utilises technology to monitor the well-being of older people in their own homes. The Council provides a telecare service, called Careline, with trained assessors available to undertaken client assessments. Telecare equipment includes:

- Speech alarm units
- Flood detectors
- Carbon monoxide detector
- Pressure mat
- Large button telephone
- Smoke detectors
- Fall detector
- Extreme temperature sensor
- Bogus caller button

The County Council is very committed to the further deployment of telecare as an aid to independence, security and choice of tenure. A trial of 'holistic assessment' was piloted in the Epping Forest District in 2008/9, as a partnership with the County Council's Social Care and other local authorities, using existing resources.

As a mainstream service, the County Council will continue to provide and support telecare commissioning, through the approved assessor route, under both its Fair Access to Care Services policy and prevention strategies. Telecare is one of three strategic pillars of commissioning and the County is committed to the development of telecare services both within, and external to, the Council across all sectors.

Related county-wide initiatives may use:

- TV/IP technology to reduce social isolation in vulnerable groups;
- Telehealth partnerships;
- Telemonitoring as an aid to better assessments and carer remote monitoring, possible involving careline services as monitors or responders.

Epping Forest District Council installed 423 telecare packages in 2007/8, funded by the County Council.

Caring & Repairing in Epping Forest (C.A.R.E.)

C.A.R.E. is the Council's Home Improvement Agency (HIA) and has been operating within the District since 1991. Previously managed by Circle 33 Housing Trust, it was taken in-house in 2003.

C.A.R.E. helps vulnerable people in the private housing sector, mainly those who are older and/or disabled, to live independently in the community for as long as they want to do so. The range of services provided by C.A.R.E. includes:

- Giving advice on a range of issues from benefit entitlement to technical advice relating to work to be carried out;
- A Handyperson Service to carry out repair jobs;
- Putting people in touch with reputable contractors;
- Helping to access funding for essential repairs, maintenance and disabled adaptations;
- Providing advice on energy efficiency;
- A falls prevention service;
- Referring to other agencies that provide services to the client group.

In 2007/8, C.A.R.E. dealt with over 600 requests for assistance - as a result of which, 87 people were helped to get Council grants for essential building work, 106 people were provided with a Handyperson Service and 260 referrals were made to partner organisations.

C.A.R.E. is part-funded by the District Council, but also receives funding from Essex County Council (ECC) and through Supporting People. In 2008/9, the Agency received a total of approximately £56,600 from these external sources.

People with Physical and Sensory Disabilities

The Housing Needs Survey 2003 provided some useful information on physical disabilities, as follows:

- 5,325 households had someone with a mobility problem
- Walking difficulties affected 53% of households with a disabled person - 7% of these were wheelchair users (Representing 560 households in the whole District)
- In only 22% of cases did a wheelchair user live in a home that had been suitably adapted
- 78% of wheelchair users do not live in an adapted dwelling.
- 11% of all dwellings (5,216 properties) had been adapted for a disabled person

The Council has recently worked with Ability Housing Association to develop a scheme of 5 bungalows for wheelchair users at Mason Close, Waltham Abbey. Ability is currently looking to develop an adjacent area of land to provide an additional 3 bungalows.

The Council and housing associations undertake disabled adaptations to their housing stock, to meet the needs of disabled tenants. The Council spends around £450,000 per annum on disabled adaptations. In addition, non-Council tenants are entitled to apply for means-tested disabled facilities grants (DFGs) and the Council spends around £400,000 per annum on DFGs.

People with Learning Disabilities

Essex County Council's Informatics Team has identified 375 people aged 18 or over with learning disabilities living in the District. Of these, they have accommodation details of 227 people.

There are 3.9 people with learning disabilities aged 18 and over known to Informatics living in the District per 1,000 of the general population, compared to the Essex figure of 5.9 per 1,000.

The following table provides comparative accommodation data on adults with learning disabilities between the County and Epping Forest:

	Aged 18 – 64				Aged 65+			
	Epping Forest		Essex		Epping Forest		Essex	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
House	74	35	976	28	0	0	66	18
Ground Floor Flat	9	4	268	7	2	13	21	6
Upper Floor Flat	9	4	173	5	0	0	5	1
Bungalow	4	2	208	6	0	0	47	13
Residential School	2	1	11	0	0	0	0	0
Residential Care	42	20	981	28	7	47	167	45
Nursing Home	2	1	36	1	1	7	8	2
Health Accommodation	9	4	61	2	0	0	7	2
Other or not advised	61	29	818	23	5	33	46	13
Total	212	100	3532	100	15	100	367	100

Source: Management Information, Informatics (May 2008)

Informatics also estimates that 59 people with learning disabilities in the District live with carers aged 65 or over. This is a priority group of people who are likely to need housing support in the near future.

Young Parents

The following, latest available, data illustrates the conception rates for women under-18 years of age in the Epping Forest District, compared to Essex and nationally:

Conception rates for under 18s (2001-2006)			
	2001-2003	2004-2006	% Change (01/03-04/06)
England	42.5	41.1	- 3.3 %
Essex	32.6	31.2	- 4.3 %
Epping Forest	23.0	26.0	+10.6 %

As can be seen, the conception rates for under-18 year olds has *increased* in Epping Forest by over 10% between 2001-3 and 2004-6, compared with *decreased* conception rates in Essex and England.

Generally, most young parents are able to be supported by their family. However, each year, a number of young parents without accommodation or support approach the District Council for homelessness assistance. In these cases, although accommodation can be provided, there is currently no support that can be provided in terms of parenting skills. Since the numbers are relatively small, and a similar situation exists in neighbouring local authorities, the Council has been working with Brentwood Borough Council, Uttlesford District Council and partner agencies to develop a Young Parents Scheme, comprising 13 supported flats in Ongar, to which the three local authorities would have equal nomination rights. Detailed planning permission has been granted and it is proposed that the development, management and support provision for the scheme would be undertaken by East Thames Housing Group, with Supporting People funding that has been made available.

Lifetime Homes

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has produced ‘Lifetime Homes’ standards, which set out the measures necessary to provide housing which can better meet the changing needs of the population. These standards are closely aligned with Part M of the Building Regulations, but also incorporate some further measures which will enable better and easier adaptation of homes should it be necessary.

The standard allows ease of access and movement by people with mobility difficulties or those pushing a pram, for example. Some other requirements of the Lifetime Homes Standard are:

- Provision for a future stair lift;
- Turning circles for wheelchairs in the future in ground floor living rooms;
- Low window sills and sockets/light controls at convenient height;
- Distance to any car parking space kept to a minimum, and actual space capable of being widened to accommodate wheelchair access.

As part of its Local Plan requirements, for new developments in excess of 10 properties, the Council requires that at least 10% must be constructed to the Lifetimes Homes Standard, and the Council has ambitions to increase this amount through forthcoming Local Development Documents.

Key Partners

Essex County Council; RSLs; West Essex Primary Care Trust; North Essex Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust; Brentwood Borough Council; Essex Supporting People Team; Uttlesford District Council; Voluntary Action Epping Forest.

3.7 Empty Homes

Aims

“To bring long term empty properties back into use and in so doing increase the supply and range of affordable housing, enhance the environment, help tackle homelessness and help reduce anti- social behaviour”

Objectives

- a) Provide information and advice, in order to raise awareness of the issues of empty properties and encourage residents to report problem properties;

- b) Provide advice and information to the owners of empty properties to assist them in deciding the best option for bringing their property back into use, including information about renovation, availability of financial assistance, private sector leasing, sale or letting;
- c) Encourage, facilitate and administer the take up of various financial incentives available to owners of empty properties;
- d) Consider enforcement action in cases where an owner of a long term, problematic empty property is absent or uncooperative, and all reasonable informal measures have been exhausted.

Key Issues

In spite of the high demand for housing in Epping Forest, there are still long term empty homes in the private sector. The Epping Forest House Condition Survey 2005 estimated that 2.9% of the private sector stock was empty (1,250 homes). A further Vacant Properties Survey looked at a large sample of empty homes and this found that, of the 1,250 empty homes, 450 (36%) had been vacant for over 6 months and, of these, 190 (15%) had been vacant for more than 12 months. The national average for long term empty properties is 51%, and in the East of England is 48%.

Whilst the proportion of properties that have been empty for a long time is below both national and regional averages, these numbers still represent a substantial resource that could provide good homes for many people. Not only are they a wasted resource, they can often blight a locality, and can be associated with fly tipping and other anti-social behaviour.

The Council's Empty Property Strategy 2006-2009 confirms the Council's commitment to tackle the issue of empty properties and sets out the action to be taken to bring long term empty properties back into use. A range of measures, both informal and enforcement based, have been put into place. These are described below.

Finder's Fee Scheme

The Finder's Fee Scheme was introduced in 2007. Where a person owns a property that has been vacant for more than 6 months, and that property is let to a person on the Housing Register for a minimum of 12 months, they can receive a Finder's Fee. This is a one off payment of £1,000 paid in two instalments – one quarter at the start of the tenancy and the balance on completion. This both brings empty properties back into use and enables a nominated person from the Housing Register to be housed. The Scheme is limited to five properties per year and property owners will only be entitled to one payment under the Scheme.

Private Sector Leasing

In recent years the Council has made significant progress with private sector leasing through the Fresh START Scheme, in partnership with the East Thames Housing Group. Under the Scheme, East Thames leases up to 20 properties in the District at any one time from private landlords for three years – guaranteeing the rent, including during void periods – and then lets them at market rents to homeless nominees from the Council. In view of the more intensive management required, the Council provides East Thames with a management fee. This scheme is also available to the owners of empty properties who prefer the option of leasing to that of privately renting or selling on the open market.

Epping Forest is one of five councils within the London Commuter Belt that has set up a scheme with Central Government funding – called PLACE (Private Lease Agreements Converting Empties). It specifically targets long term empty properties that require substantial works to bring them back into habitable use. The owner receives a grant to carry out the works and then enters into a 3 year lease agreement with a Preferred Registered Social Landlord. The Council retains nomination rights.

Council Tax Discounts

In order to discourage owners from leaving their properties empty, a change was made from April 2007 to the discount given for empty, unfurnished dwellings. Properties left empty for six months or less receive a 100% Council Tax discount. A 50% discount is then applied for a further six months and, after this period, full Council Tax is payable in respect of empty properties.

Empty Homes Grants

The range of financial assistance in the way of grants offered by the Council has been extended to include Empty Homes Grants, to encourage the owners of empty properties to bring them back into use.

It is the Council's longer term objective to move towards equity release schemes and, once in place, it is intended that this grant will change to a loan format.

Enforcement

It is important that both property owners and Council officers know and appreciate that enforcement is available if all informal measures fail to reach a resolution in a reasonable timescale. There is specific legislation available to deal with empty properties, which the Council will utilise if necessary. The main three options are as follows:

Enforced Sale - Where there is an unpaid debt to the Council (such as unpaid Council Tax, or where the Council has undertaken works in default after an owner has failed to comply with a legal notice and not been able to recover the cost), and the debt is recorded as a Local Land Charge, the power of enforced sale can be used. The Law of Property Act 1925 allows a Council to apply to a court for an order requiring that the property be sold to recover the debt, costs and interest.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) - Part 4 of the Housing Act 2004 introduced a new power to allow local authorities to make EDMOs. EDMOs are designed to provide local authorities with the power to take over (or have a third party take over) the management of an empty property that has been empty for more than 6 months in order to ensure that it becomes and remains occupied. In effect, this is a form of compulsory leasing.

Compulsory Purchase - The Housing Act 1985 allows local authorities to compulsory purchase under-used dwellings where there is a general housing need in the area (which is the case in Epping Forest). Compulsory purchase is regarded as the final sanction and is used only in exceptional cases where all other reasonable actions have failed. Epping Forest is conscious of all the difficulties involved in compulsory purchase but will be prepared take this action where the circumstances of a case mean it is appropriate to do so.

Advice and Informal Action.

A recognised barrier to owners bringing empty properties back into use, or disposing of them, is the lack of impartial advice. Council officers in the Private Sector Housing Team advise the owners of empty homes on the options for renovation, availability of financial assistance, private sector leasing, sale to RSLs or on open market, etc. This includes advice on letting and providing lists of letting agents who manage privately rented properties on behalf of owners.

The Council highlights the issue of empty properties and the action that can be taken through media such as its Forester magazine and national campaigns like Empty Homes Week. The Council's website is also being developed as a valuable information source.

Key Partners

The LCB Consortium for the PLACE scheme –Chelmsford Borough Council, Harlow, Uttlesford and East Herts District Councils; Pathmeads and Swan Housing Associations.

3.8 Underoccupation

Aim

“To ensure that the under-occupation of the Council’s and RSLs’ housing stock is kept to a minimum, in order to ensure that the residents of the District are able to maximise its use”.

Objectives

- a) Ensure that the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme gives a higher priority to those tenants who under-occupy property and wish to move to a smaller dwelling;
- b) Ensure that all allocations of Council and RSL housing make full use of the dwelling;
- c) Encourage any tenants under-occupying property to consider a mutual exchange and provide them with every assistance;
- d) Allow a maximum of only one spare bedroom as a result of any mutual exchange between Council and RSL tenancies;
- e) Provide financial incentives to encourage tenants of larger Council properties to move to smaller property;
- f) Ensure that tenants under-occupying Council properties following a succession of tenancy are provided with alternative smaller accommodation;
- g) Continue to operate a Rents Strategy, based upon factors which recognise the size of properties, to provide tenants with an additional incentive to consider occupying a smaller home;
- h) Where appropriate, arrange for practical and emotional support to be provided to older and other vulnerable people transferring from larger to smaller properties.

Key Issues

Introduction

In view of the increasing need and demand for social housing accommodation (provided by the Council and housing associations), it is essential that, wherever possible, under-occupation is minimised. The Council has a Housing Service Strategy on Under-occupation that covers this area in detail. There are legal limitations to the Council’s and the housing associations’ ability to eradicate under-occupation, and the individual circumstances of tenants and their families also have to be considered.

Allocation of Social Housing and Mobility

The formulation and implementation of the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme, which also governs the provision of nomination rights to vacant housing association properties, is one of the key ways to reduce under-occupation occurring in the first place. Offers of vacant accommodation made to housing applicants always comprise the required number of bedrooms for the household.

In order to motivate existing tenants who are currently under-occupying accommodation, and who wish to move to smaller accommodation, the Council gives them maximum priority under the Allocations Scheme, placing them in Band 1 and offering applicants financial assistance of £500 plus £500 for each bedroom “released”, up to a maximum of £2,000.

Older or vulnerable tenants who need practical and emotional support in transferring to smaller accommodation are assisted by the In-Touch Floating Support Service.

Existing Tenants

Council and housing association tenants have the legal right to exchange properties, with the landlords' consent; requests can only be refused for specific reasons. The Council has a policy of only allowing exchanges to take place if no more than one "spare" bedroom results. Where possible, the Council will try to facilitate a three-way mutual exchange.

One of the factors that under-occupying tenants take into account when considering moving is the benefit of reduced household costs; the Council's Rents Strategy ensures that, generally, larger properties are charged higher rents than smaller ones.

In law, family members of tenants who have lived at a property for over a year have the right to succeed to the tenancy on the tenant's death. However, in order to minimise under-occupation, and having regard to legislation, the Council has a policy that:

- Generally, successor tenants under-occupying accommodation are encouraged to move to smaller Council accommodation;
- Where a property is under-occupied:
 - unless the successor tenant has lived in the property for more than ten years, or is over 60 years of age; or
 - if the property is under-occupied by more than one "spare bedroom";

alternative (smaller) accommodation is offered and legal action taken if necessary

Key Partners

In-Touch Support; housing associations, Homeswapper.

3.9 Overcrowding

Aim

"To ensure that no homes are statutorily overcrowded and that the number of households living in overcrowded conditions is minimised"

Objectives

- a) Ensure that the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme gives priority to housing applicants who are overcrowded in their current accommodation;
- b) Take appropriate action against landlords and tenants where properties are statutorily overcrowded (whereby the "permitted number" is exceeded);
- c) Facilitate and assist existing Council and housing association tenants to undertake mutual exchanges into larger properties that suit their needs.

Key Issues

Allocation of Social Housing

One of the main reasons why housing applicants, including existing Council and housing association tenants, seek (alternative) social housing is due to their current accommodation being smaller than their needs, often due to the birth of (additional) children. In these cases, not only are applicants eligible for larger housing, they receive a priority for social housing, and additional priority if they have other aspects of housing need. Moreover, where applicants are living with friends or family in overcrowded properties, they are given priority too.

Where applicants are "statutorily overcrowded" (see below), they are placed in the highest priority band for re-housing.

One way to reduce overcrowding is through mutual exchanges within the social housing sector. More information on this is given in [Section 5.3](#) on Housing Mobility.

Enforcement Action

Legislation requires all properties to have a “permitted number” of occupants, based on the size and number of rooms. Permitted numbers are normally much higher than the number of people that would normally be considered to be overcrowded. A child is classed as 0.5 people.

The Council’s Private Sector Housing Team investigates all reported cases of overcrowding and assesses the level, compared to the statutory permitted numbers. However, statutory overcrowding does not appear to be a major problem in the District. In 2007/8, only 2 cases of overcrowding were reported to the Council.

Where statutory overcrowding occurs, advice is given in the first instance, but if the overcrowding persists, legal action will often be taken against the owner or landlord to cease the overcrowding.

Key Partners

Housing associations, private landlords.

3.10 Rural Housing

Aim

“To increase the amount of affordable homes within rural areas, in order to help meet the housing needs of local people, whilst safeguarding the essential qualities of rural life”

Objectives

- a) In villages with a population of less than 3,000 people, on new developments comprising;
 - (i) two or more dwellings on greenfield sites - seek the provision of 50% of the homes as affordable housing; and
 - (ii) three or more dwellings on previously-developed land - seek the provision of at least 33% of the homes as affordable housing;
- b) Work with parish councils to assess the housing needs of local people living in rural areas and to identify sites suitable for the provision of affordable housing schemes;
- c) Increase the amount of affordable housing in rural areas, by granting planning permission for small scale affordable housing schemes on appropriate sites within the Green Belt, adjacent to rural settlements, as an exception to normal planning policy, where there is a demonstrable local housing need.

Key Issues

The lack of affordable housing in villages is likely to have a greater effect on individuals and the community than in urban areas, and that the opportunities for increasing the amount of affordable housing is less than in urban areas. This is because less suitable sites for development usually become available, and local inhabitants are more likely to have to move away from their local area than in larger areas.

This is recognised by the Council’s Local Plan. For developments in areas with under 3,000 people, the Local Plan requires a greater amount of affordable housing to be provided on greenfield sites than urban areas. For both greenfield and brownfield sites, the threshold number of properties above which affordable housing is sought is far lower (2 or 3) than in urban areas (15).

In addition, through the Local Plan, the Council has adopted a “planning exceptions policy”, whereby planning permission may be granted on sites that only provide affordable housing, for which planning applications for *market* housing would be refused. However, certain conditions must be met, including that the development must be:

- In smaller settlements that have a recognisable community, distinct and separate from the metropolitan area;
- Small scale;
- In response to a demonstrable local housing need (identified through a rural housing survey);
- Supported by the Parish Council;
- Well-related to the existing settlement; and
- Providing affordable housing in perpetuity.

In order to ensure that these rural affordable housing schemes only provide accommodation for local residents, applicants must be:

- Long-established local residents.
- Immediate family dependents of long-established local residents;
- Former long-established residents; or
- Living elsewhere, who cannot otherwise take up, or continue to, work in the village.

To date, three rural housing schemes have been provided under the planning exceptions policy (providing a total of 20 affordable homes), namely: Manns Yard, Willingale; Houchin Drive, Fyfield; and Harlow Rd, Matching Tye. Social housing grant is available from the Homes & Communities Agency to fund rural housing schemes..

The Council has selected Hastoe Housing Association to be its Preferred Rural RSL Partner, which is working with a number of parish councils to help assess their local housing needs and to provide more rural housing schemes.

Key Partners

Parish councils; Housing Corporation; Hastoe Housing Association; developers

Chapter 4 – Decent Homes

4.1 Background to Decent Homes

In 2001, the Government introduced the “Decent Home Standard”, which it made as an important national housing policy, and one which the Council has supported. The Government also provided two primary targets to all social landlords for them to meet the standard. Firstly, to ensure that the number of non-decent homes reduced by 1/3 between April 2001 and April 2004 and, secondly, to ensure that social landlords have no non-decent homes by 2010. The Decent Home Standard requires that homes must:

- be free of “Category 1 hazards” under the Health and Housing Hazard Rating System;
- be in a reasonable state of repair (i.e. must not have one or more key building components in an old / poor condition, or two or more other components that are old and need replacement or major repair);
- have reasonably modern facilities (i.e. must not lack three or more specified facilities); and
- provide thermal comfort (i.e. have effective insulation and heating).

4.2 Decent Homes in the Public Sector

Aim

“To ensure that all homes in the public sector are in a decent condition”

Objectives

- a) Ensure that all Council and RSL tenants live in decent homes, that meet the Government’s Decent Homes Standard, through the effective maintenance of the public sector housing stock;
- b) Ensure that all Council and RSL homes meet the Decent Homes Standard by April 2010;
- c) Ensure that adequate information is obtained and updated on the condition of the public sector housing stock, through periodic stock condition surveys and procedures to record maintenance work undertaken;
- d) Review the Council’s Repairs and Maintenance Plan annually, to ensure that it addresses the right priorities in the light of stock condition data and Council policies and priorities;
- e) Keep under review the options available for the Council’s housing stock, both in terms of the whole stock and individual estates, and ensure that the form of ownership and management is the most appropriate to meet the decent homes standard.

Key Issues

Council Housing

The Council had 1,627 properties (22% of its stock) that did not meet the Decent Home Standard in April 2002, at which time the national average for medium-sized district councils at that time was 31%. However, significant programmes of work since 2002 have enabled the Council to reduce the number of non-decent homes to just 237 properties in April 2008, representing just 3.6 % of the stock. The Government target - to reduce the number of non-decent homes by 1/3 before April 2004 – was achieved one year early.

Programmes of work continue to be undertaken to ensure that the Government target to eradicate non-decent homes by 2010 is achieved. This takes account of the need to also tackle the 466 currently decent homes, that will otherwise become non-decent in the meantime.

The Council produces annually a Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan, which forms part of its HRA Business Plan. This sets out the detailed aims, issues, objectives, targets and performance in respect of the maintenance of the Council's housing stock for the next 30 years, including the eradication of non-decent homes. To assist with planning, the Council undertakes a stock attribute survey on an ongoing basis, which identify required works.

Housing Stock Options Appraisal

The Government has previously required all stock-holding local authorities to carefully consider the options open to them for increasing investment in, and improving the quality of, their housing stock. This included the possibility of a large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) of their stock to an RSL, or the formation of an arms length management organisation (ALMO). Such a transfer would have to be with the consent of the majority of tenants.

In 2002, the Council undertook a detailed Housing Stock Options Appraisal, in consultation with the district-wide Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, which considered the available options. Part of this process involved a tenants consultation exercise. The outcome of this consultation was that:

- The most important issue for tenants was keeping rents affordable;
- The majority of tenants rated the services as "good" and expressed satisfaction with the Council;
- Many tenants expressed a view that they were strongly against any change of landlord;
- Tenants wished the Council to follow the stock retention option; and
- Tenants felt they had already told the Council their views and wished the Council to stop asking the same questions.

The main conclusions from the Stock Options Appraisal itself were as follows:

- The Council, under current arrangements, can meet the Government's Decent Homes Target;
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) can sustain itself for the short to medium term future and allow financial contributions to be made towards capital programmes over the next 20 years;
- A shortfall of some £12 million remained in the level of resources needed to meet the full investment programme over the following 10 years;
- Since the Council has resources to achieve investment levels well above the basic Decent Homes Standard, it was doubtful whether bids for either the ALMO or PFI programmes could be justified;
- Stock transfer continues to offer some very real benefits;
- However, the case from the existing tenants perspective is less convincing and, based on the consultation carried out so far, it is very doubtful that tenants would support a stock transfer proposal.

It was therefore decided that the Council should continue with the existing arrangements for the management and ownership of its housing stock.

The Council's HRA Financial Plan is updated annually. The latest HRA Financial Plan shows that the HRA is not expected to fall into deficit until Year 20 (2033/34) and that, furthermore, significant levels of revenue contributions to capital outlay (RCCO) have been included, which can be removed to increase the amount of HRA balances.

Housing Association Properties

In 2004, the Council undertook a survey of all housing associations in the District to obtain data relating to decent homes. This survey identified that, mainly due to the more recent ages of the

housing association stock, most housing association properties met the decent home standard and that, for those that did not, the RSLs were putting programmes of work in place to ensure that the target would be met by 2010.

Key Partners

Communities and Local Government; RSLs; consultants; contractors.

4.3 Decent Homes in the Private Sector

Aim

“To assist as many vulnerable families as possible that live in non-Decent homes, in order to help bring their homes up to the Decent Homes Standard”

Objectives

- a) Provide a year-on-year increase in the proportion of vulnerable private sector households who live in decent homes;
- b) Fully implement the provisions of the Council's Private Sector Renewal Strategy, in the short term to promote the types of housing assistance available, and in the longer term, introduce equity release and other loan type mechanisms;
- c) Provide a quality service to home-owners and tenants of privately rented accommodation, who are older and/or disabled, and other vulnerable groups, in order to promote independent living and to enable them to live in their homes in greater comfort, security, safety and warmth;
- d) Develop C.A.R.E.'s services to meet the future needs of vulnerable people in the District.

Key issues

Decent Homes in the District

In 2003, the Government extended its Decent Homes targets to the private sector by way of a Public Service Agreement, 'PSA7'. This would be met if there was a year on year increase in the proportion of vulnerable private sector households in Decent Homes and if that proportion increased to:

- above 65% by 2006/7;
- above 70% by 2010/11; and
- above 75% by 2020/21

Vulnerable families are defined as those with young children or older people on low income, or people on disability benefits.

The findings of the Council's Private Sector House Condition Survey 2005 identified that only 61% of private sector homes in the District would meet the 2006/7 Decent Homes target (a shortfall of 340 properties), and that there would be a shortfall of 770 properties in meeting the 2010/11 target. Extrapolation of these figures indicates that approximately 1,175 homes - 90 per annum - would have to be made decent in order for the 2020/21 target to be met.

In 2006, in recognition of the difficulties local authorities would face in meeting these targets, the Government made additional ring-fenced funding available for Decent Homes in the private sector. The Council was allocated the following funding for this purpose:

2006/7	£447,000
2007/8	£226,374
2008/9	£216,800

However, in each case, the announcement that these grants were to be made available, and the amount that was to be awarded, was not made until immediately prior to the beginning of the financial years. This made it not only difficult to programme the forthcoming year's work, but also made long-term business planning challenging. In addition, at such short notice, it was not possible to match these large capital sums with a revenue resource to fund the actual delivery of Decent Homes programmes in the private sector.

Decent Homes Targets – the Changing Picture

Until 2007, eligibility for housing grants in the District was based on the Fitness Standard. This meant that, before the Decent Homes Standard could become the main assessment criteria for grants, a change in Council policy would be required. The Council's new Housing Assistance Policy was implemented in April 2007 and, from this date, the Council has been able to start offering housing assistance to vulnerable families in non-Decent homes. Therefore, gains towards meeting the PSA7 target were not made until the end of 2007.

However, in its 2007 spending review, the Government announced that the number of targets that local authorities would be required to report upon would be reduced. Apart from a small number of statutory targets, these were to be chosen through Local Area Agreements from a prescribed 'indicator set' which did not include a direct replacement for PSA7. It appears instead that a new target for Decent Homes is likely to be 'absorbed' into a Departmental Strategic Objective (DSO), which is to be announced before the end of 2008. Until the new targets have become embedded, local authorities are still being required to report their progress on Decent Homes programmes.

Funding

Although the PSA7 Decent Homes target in its original form may be obsolete, Decent Homes funding has been retained within the Regional Housing Pot until 2011. However, the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) has announced that, in 2009/10 and 2010/11, the previous 'formula-based' approach of allocating funds will be replaced with one where a proportion of the funds will contribute towards a regional loan/equity release scheme, which will enable the recycling of funds. The remaining funds will be awarded in response to bids made by local authorities working either individually or together. Working with other authorities within the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region, the Council was successful with one bid for an 'Affordable Warmth' Project. The bid was for £7m between 2009/10 and 2010/11 across the Sub-Region, and the amount awarded was £6.62m. It is expected that each local authority in the Sub-Region will receive £441,180, which will enable energy efficiency measures to be provided in approximately 100 homes in the District.

The Potential for Loans/Equity Release

One of the findings of the Council's Private Sector House Condition Survey 2005 was that the District has an above-average proportion of older residents, and that this is likely to grow. This mirrors the picture nationally and, in response to this, there are drivers from the Government to encourage local authorities to move towards funding home improvements through loans and/or equity release schemes rather than grants. It has been recognised that such a policy is more likely to be successful if it is introduced gradually, extending the condition periods of some grants, so that they are effectively repayable. The Council's Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2007 was an intermediate step towards introducing a policy based on loans and/or equity release, and the Housing Renewal Action Plan included an action to 'formulate an agreement with a specialist financial provider to offer a range of equity release and similar financial packages' by the middle of 2008. However, the subsequent downturn in the housing market has made this less likely to be successful within the planned timescale, especially given the performance of some equity release products during previous periods of economic decline. It is currently considered a better option to take this forward in the longer term as a joint initiative with other London Commuter Belt Sub-Region authorities, rather than pursuing it short-term as a single authority.

Key Partners

Chapter 5 – Sustainable Communities

5.1 Introduction

In its document “Sustainable Communities: Homes for All”, published in 2005, the Government defines sustainable communities as:

“Places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive; well-planned, built and run; and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all”.

In planning for the future, and in respect of the existing communities, the Council seeks to ensure the facilitation of sustainable communities.

5.2 Housing Growth in the District

Aim

“To ensure that a sufficient number of new homes are provided in the District to meet Regional Spatial Strategy requirements and that growth is sustainable, through good planning and the provision of adequate physical and social infrastructures”

Objectives

- a) Ensure that there is a sufficient number of new homes provided in the District to meet the requirements of the East of England Plan and that sufficient sites are identified to ensure the delivery of housing for at least the next 5 years at any one time;
- b) Ensure that new homes provided in the District are sustainable, by good planning and the provision of adequate infrastructures.

Issues

London-Harlow-Stansted Growth Area and Growth Area Funding

The Growth Area

In 2003, the Government identified the London-Stansted-Cambridge Growth Corridor within the Sustainable Communities Plan. This comprises the following local authority districts:

Broxbourne	East Herts	Epping Forest
Harlow	Uttlesford	

The corridor has experienced substantial economic growth in the last decade, underpinned by clusters of some of the country’s most successful businesses in biotechnology, life sciences and information communications technology, as well as a rapid increase in the use of Stansted Airport. Yet despite the relative economic prosperity, there remain concentrations of deprivation and social exclusion as well as significant shortages of affordable housing.

A step change is therefore required to increase the economic success and prosperity, and to tackle the problems of affordability and exclusion. “Growth” is a critical component of this and the issue is not whether growth will continue, but at what level and how it will be developed into sustainable communities in which people will want to live and work.

A significant increase in the numbers of new homes and jobs are proposed for the London-Harlow–Stansted part of the corridor by 2021, with greater potential identified in the longer term. However, achieving this growth requires significant improvement to infrastructure provision and a significant uplift in the rate of economic development. Within the East of England Plan, the London-Harlow-Stansted Corridor has been identified as a “Growth Area”. For

this reason, Harlow Renaissance Ltd has been established to assist with delivering regeneration projects funded through growth area funding from the Government. Across the growth area, partnerships have developed and there has been significant progress with the local authorities involved, working together in the development of the area.

A Growth Area Fund (iii) Programme of Development has been formulated for the area, and the delivery of the proposed projects have been formulated in a Delivery Plan.

The structure and format of the Programme reflects the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan 2003 and the East of England Plan to ensure an integrated approach to the delivery of growth and regeneration.

The Programme aims to:

- Provide a rationale for growth and a strategic overview of the interventions required to facilitate housing growth, economic prosperity and regeneration as proposed in the Sustainable Communities Plan 2003, East of England Plan, Regional Economic Strategy and, where appropriate, the Essex and Hertfordshire Local Area Agreements).
- Demonstrate the inter-relationship between housing growth, regeneration, economic prosperity and infrastructure provision.
- Establish a basis for support from central government and other agencies and provide a mechanism for prioritising bids for investment within the Programme area.

The Growth Fund

In line with the principles of the Local Government White Paper, during 2007/8, the Government reviewed how funding support for Growth Areas was to be delivered, in order to better align it with the development of Local Area Agreements and the Local Performance Framework.

The Growth Fund is providing £832,000 nationally to support the infrastructure in the Growth Areas (and other "Growth Points") for 2008/09–2010/11. This is part of the £1.7bn that the Government will be investing across the Growth Areas, the Thames Gateway, Growth Points and Eco-towns. The Growth Fund was announced in December 2007 to support the delivery of infrastructure in local areas.

The key elements of the Growth Fund are:

- The provision of un-ringfenced block funding to local authorities and their partnerships.
- As an un-ringfenced grant, with the exception of reflecting the split between capital and revenue, there will be no grant conditions about how or when it is spent. It will be for local authorities to prioritise how the funding is used in their area, with performance monitored through performance indicators.
- In order to determine funding allocations, all eligible local authorities / local partnerships were invited to submit a Programme of Development during the summer of 2007.
- Programmes of Development are documents that set out local areas plans and ambitions for growth, including a trajectory for housing delivery and the infrastructure needed to support it, identified resources and an assessment of the extra funding needed to deliver.
- Funding decisions were based around the assessment of the Programmes of Development, against the key criteria set out in the guidance, the number of homes to be delivered by 2016, and the scale of the key infrastructure challenges at the location.

This was the first time that local authorities and partnerships were invited to submit a Programme of Development as the basis for funding decisions.

In December 2008, the Government announced a £605m allocation to 163 local authorities with long term plans to increase house building. The Government states that the funding will enable local authorities to invest in the essential services that need to accompany the building of new homes - from transport links and schools, to the regeneration of town centres and the provision of parks and other green spaces. The Growth Fund is being managed by the new Homes and Communities Agency

The announcement included the provision of the following funding for the London-Harlow-Stansted Growth Area:

	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL
Capital	£6,786,475	£6,805,761	£13,592,236
Revenue	£328,149	£346,262	£674,411
TOTAL	£7,114,624	£7,152,023	£14,266,646

The five local authorities within the Growth Corridor will be working together, along with Harlow Renaissance, to decide how the funding can be best utilised, having regard to the Programme's Delivery Plan

New Housing Provision

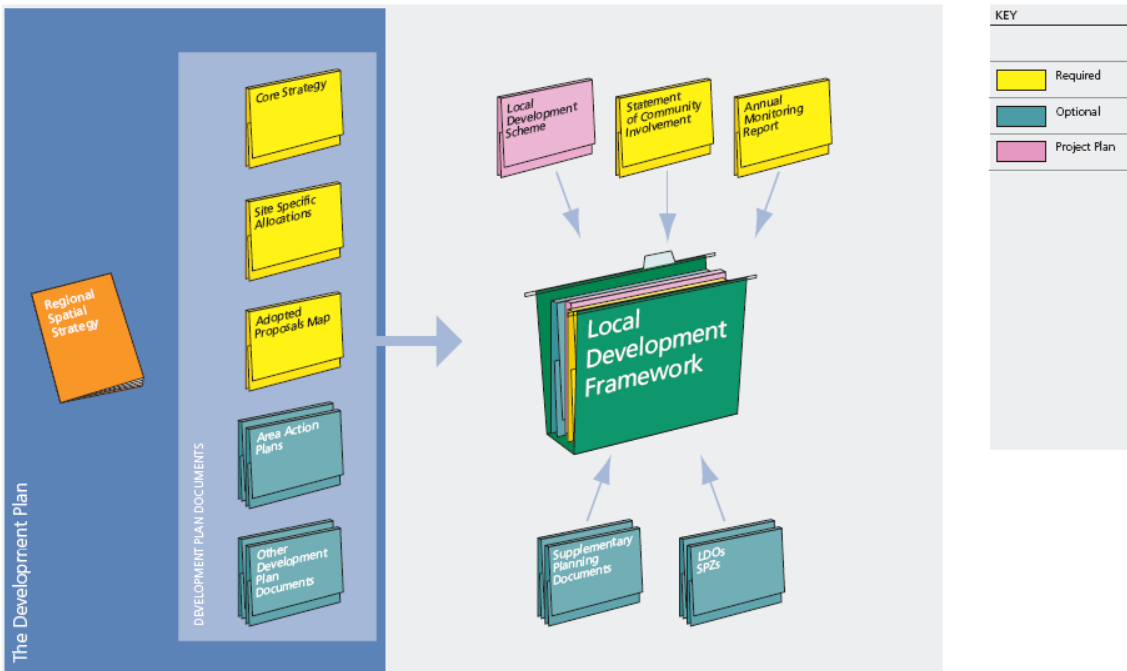
Section 3.1 above explains the East of England Plan's allocation of new housing for the District. Under "Planning Policy Guidance 3: Housing", all local authorities are required to identify sufficient land to meet Regional Spatial Strategy requirement for at least the next 5 years at any one time.

Section 3.1 also explains that, in addition to the housing allocation for Epping Forest, the District must also contribute towards the additional housing requirements of neighbouring Harlow. Therefore, the Council is in active discussions with Harlow Council and others over how Epping Forest can contribute to Harlow's expansion in the most sustainable. It is likely that some form of joint delivery vehicle will be established in order to take a strategic approach to the new provision,

The Local Development Framework (LDF)

The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced the Local Development Framework. The intention is to make the process of developing new local planning policy quicker, easier and more responsive to change.

The following diagram illustrates the structure of the LDF:



The Core Strategy

The Core Strategy is the key document of the LDF, and sets out the strategic vision for the future development of the District. The policies contained within this document must address the fundamental issues facing the District, and ensure delivery of the identified objectives.

A Core Strategy will set a strategy for the plan period in accordance with the East of England Plan - as the Regional Spatial Strategy - which sets the framework for development between 2001 and 2021.

There are several “givens” that arise from the East of England Plan that must be addressed in the Core Strategy:

Delivery of housing growth – this will include policies that manage the growth of Harlow and the delivery of open market and affordable housing to meet the needs of this district. See [Sections 3.1 and 3.2](#) for more information.

Delivery of economic growth – the East of England Plan sets a target of 14,000 new jobs to be provided across Epping Forest & Brentwood districts. The split between the two districts is to be determined through the Core Strategy process.

However there are many more local issues that will be covered in the Core Strategy, including strategies for the town centres, use of renewable energy, the retention / provision of open space, community facilities and special needs housing, flood avoidance / mitigation, etc.

The Sustainable Community Strategy

The Government has placed strong emphasis on the links between the LDF, the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement. Government policy states that the new planning system both offers, and requires, the development of a stronger leadership role for local authorities and elected members, built on collaboration through LSPs and accountable delivery through local area agreements. The Government intends that spatial planning objectives for local areas, as set out in the LDF, should be fully aligned not only with national and regional plans, but also with the shared local priorities set out in Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS) where these are consistent with national and regional policy. To achieve this, the Local Government White Paper strongly encourages local authorities to ensure that:

- their SCS takes full account of spatial, economic, social and environmental issues;
- key spatial planning objectives for the area as set out in the LDF Core Strategy are fully aligned with SCS priorities; and
- the LAA, as the delivery agreement with central government, is based on the priorities of the SCS and supported by local planning policy to deliver the outcomes agreed.

Linking the LDF Core Strategy with the Sustainable Community Strategy

The Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is currently at the early stages of producing a new Sustainable Community Strategy. In view of the requirement that sustainable community strategies and core strategies should be linked to each other, the LSP has agreed that the opportunity should be taken to:

- (a) work with the District Council to inform, support and endorse the Core Strategy consultation process;
- (b) use the consultation exercise to consult on issues and options relating to a new Sustainable Community Strategy; and
- (c) use the results to inform the further development and production of a new Sustainable Community Strategy (and in the first instance a Consultation Draft Community Strategy).

Key Partners

East of England Regional Assembly (EERA), Essex County Council, Harlow District Council, developers, parish councils, Epping Forest LSP.

5.3 Housing Mobility

Aim

“To facilitate opportunities for people wanting to move into, out of and within the District.”

Objectives

- a) Operate an online mutual exchange register for social housing tenants wanting to exchange their Council or housing association home;
- b) Whilst giving priority to local housing applicants, allow housing applicants from other districts to register on the Council’s Housing Register;
- c) Advertise vacant Council and housing association properties through HomeOption, the Council’s choice based lettings scheme, to enable housing applicants to obtain alternative housing;
- d) Support and promote the Government’s Homebuy initiatives, to enable applicants to move to suitable accommodation, whilst also accessing home ownership.

Key Issues

People need to move accommodation for various reasons. Probably the two most common are to move to more suitable accommodation (perhaps larger accommodation following an expansion in family size), and to move for employment reasons (either to take up a new job or to have improved journey times).

To a large extent, mobility in the private sector is governed by market forces, particularly in relation to the supply of housing and the level of house prices. Therefore, the area of greatest influence that the Council can effect is in the social housing sector, through the adoption and implementation of policies that can assist those unable to purchase their own home, and who are therefore unable to exercise the associated choice.

The Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme and Choice Based Lettings

The Council’s Allocations Scheme sets out the way social housing in the District is allocated. To facilitate mobility into the District, applicants living in areas outside Epping Forest are eligible to register, although priority is given to local applicants.

In November 2007, the Council introduced its choice based lettings scheme, called HomeOptions, in partnership with five neighbouring local authorities within the Housing Sub-Region. Under the scheme, the Council advertises all vacant Council and RSL housing vacancies fortnightly in a magazine and website. Housing applicants are invited to make expressions of interest for up to 3 vacancies each fortnight, via the internet, telephone, text or postal coupon. The vacancy is then offered to the applicant who has expressed an interest, is in the highest band and has been on the Housing Register the longest.

By operating a choice based lettings scheme, applicants are able to move within the District with associated choice, although the extent of choice is limited by the overall demand. One of the benefits of working within a consortium of local authorities is that applicants from different areas are able to see accommodation available in other districts, and may express interests in those properties.

The Council's Housing Allocations Scheme is reviewed and updated annually, to ensure that it is always appropriate to meet housing needs.

Mutual Exchanges

One of the best ways for social housing tenants to move to other areas is through a mutual exchange, which can also facilitate moves within the District. The Council participates in a national, web-based, mutual exchange scheme, called "Homeswapper", which enables existing tenants to register and search nationally for tenants with whom they could exchange. The Council meets the cost for residents living within the Epping Forest District.

Key Partners

Housing associations, Homeswapper, local authorities in the SHMA Area, Locata.

5.4 Energy Efficiency

Aim

"To implement measures to reduce carbon emissions and improve the energy efficiency of all properties in the District regardless of tenure"

Objectives

- a) Consistently raise awareness of the importance and benefits of improving the energy efficiency of homes;
- b) Provide information to the public on energy saving initiatives;
- c) Seek opportunities to develop partnerships, in order to improve the energy efficiency of dwellings within the District;
- d) Promote campaigns to reduce the number of households in fuel poverty;
- e) Install energy-efficient heating systems, doors, windows and insulation measures in Council-owned properties;
- f) Provide housing assistance to vulnerable private sector households, in order to improve the energy efficiency of their homes;
- g) Carry out regular surveys to monitor the success of these initiatives;
- h) Ensure that, for new affordable housing developments, registered social landlords meet at least Level 3 of the Government's Code for Sustainable Homes.

Key Issues

Domestic dwellings in the U.K. produce about 30% of annual Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions and making homes more energy efficient is an effective way of cutting these. Figures from DEFRA, approved and adopted in the Essex Local Area Agreement (LAA2) indicate that the Council will reduce per capita emissions of CO₂ from 6.8 tonnes per year to 5.9 tonnes per year by 2011.

Epping Forest District Council's Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Returns demonstrate that, from 1995 to 2008, the energy used in homes has been reduced by 15%, with an annual reduction of 1-3.5%.

As well as helping to counteract climate change, other important benefits in improving the energy efficiency of the properties include reducing fuel bills to help alleviate fuel poverty and making homes more comfortable and healthy to live in.

“Fuel poverty” occurs when a household has to spend more than 10% of their income to achieve a satisfactory level of heating. The factors giving rise to fuel poverty are:

- Low income and debt;
- Poor household insulation and ventilation standards;
- Inefficient or expensive heating systems;
- Lack of access or availability of affordable fuel;
- Under occupation of homes; and
- Lack of awareness of cheaper tariff options.

In 2007, the Council produced a Fuel Poverty Strategy, setting out realistic and achievable measures for dealing with the factors that give rise to fuel poverty. It outlines a multi-agency approach by Essex County Council, Epping Forest District Council, the PCT, Voluntary Action Epping Forest, Warm Front, the Essex Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEEAC) and energy supply companies to alleviate fuel poverty for all the residents of the District, regardless of tenure.

The aims of the Strategy are to :

- raise awareness of fuel poverty among both professionals and the public;
- provide a good quality advice service to all residents;
- ensure that all residents have access to available services;
- target fuel poor households; and,
- improve the levels of affordable warmth for all tenures.

Energy Efficiency in the Council's Stock

In 2006, the Council produced a stand-alone Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency covering the Council's own housing stock. The Service Strategy is due to be reviewed in 2010.

The Council has an ageing housing stock profile, with the majority of the stock built between 1945 and 1980. Average Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) Ratings of the stock are therefore generally lower than RSL housing in the District, as a result of the lack of more recently-built properties with improved energy efficiency. The stock also includes properties built prior to 1945 with solid walls. Where these are located in rural settings, they may not be served by mains gas and are likely, as a result, to have low energy ratings.

In 2007/8, the average SAP rating of the Council's stock was 69, compared to 66 in 2006. This compares favourably with the District Council Average in 2005/6 of 66, and the top District Council Quartile of 69. However, it will be increasingly difficult to improve existing average SAP ratings, as the measures necessary are expensive, will require ongoing maintenance and are not particularly cost-effective.

The number of properties failing the Decent Homes Standard as a result of the thermal comfort criteria in 2006 was 119 and, at that time, it was anticipated that this figure would remain constant. However, surveys also indicated that 131 properties failed the Standard under the heating criteria, with a projection that this might rise to 606 by 2010.

The Council's Energy Efficiency Programme for 2006-08 was part-funded through the Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC); however, funding under the EEC scheme has been withdrawn and is no longer available. In order for the Council to carry out the level of energy efficiency measures required to meet the target energy ratings, the Council has had to seek alternative funding and engage a contractor capable of installing energy efficiency measures.

An Agreement has been drawn up between Epping Forest District Council and British Gas Trading Ltd under the new Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) scheme, which reduces the Council's costs in carrying out energy efficiency measures for a maximum period of three-years. This ensures that, from the funding available, the maximum number of Council properties will benefit from the range of energy efficiency measures available under the scheme; including cavity wall insulation, loft insulation up to 250mm thickness, pipe and tank

insulation, low energy light bulbs, hot water cylinder jackets, thermostatic radiator valves and draught proofing.

The level of funding available from British Gas Trading Ltd will be dependant upon the overall energy savings that are identified from the surveys. The commitment available from British Gas Trading Ltd can be anything up to a maximum of 50% of the cost of the work.

Energy efficiency improvements for the Council's own stock are part-funded through a programme of ongoing capital investment and funding contributions available from the new Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) scheme. The additional funding allows the Council to carry out energy efficiency improvements to reduce fuel poverty in the maximum number of Council properties and to benefit from contributions to a local community fund from British Gas. The energy efficiency improvements are based around the installation of appropriate equipment and the insulation needs required to ensure that all properties will reach the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

Over the five-year period 2006-2011, the Council has committed a total of £5.86m to ensure that all Council properties will meet the thermal comfort and the heating criteria contained within the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

Energy Efficiency in the Private Sector

The mean SAP rating in private sector homes in the District is 58 (House Condition Survey 2005) which is comparable with national figures. The proportion of properties with a SAP rating below both 30 and 20 is lower than the national figure. The lowest mean SAP rating is in the privately rented sector, detached houses and in pre-1919 properties. It is also in the privately rented sector that most of the households in fuel poverty can be found - 14.8%, compared with 3.2% for owner-occupiers.

In 2005, it was estimated that just 4.1% (1,800) of private sector dwellings in the District were in fuel poverty, compared with the national average of 11% for England. However, these figures are likely to have increased due to recent sharp increases in energy prices. In addition, 13.3% (6,100) of private sector dwellings failed the thermal comfort criteria of the Decent Homes Standard. While most of these properties were not adequately insulated, approximately 1,400 needed new heating.

Vulnerable householders (older people on low incomes, families on low incomes and people receiving disability benefits) may be eligible for Small Works Assistance or a Thermal Comfort Grant from the Council to help them insulate their home and/or get new heating. The Council also works in partnership with Warm Front, Essex Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEEAC) and utility companies to offer grants or discounts on insulation, new heating and other energy efficiency work.

Key Partners

Warm Front, Essex Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEEAC), Essex County Council.

5.5 Local Area Agreement 2008-11 – “Liberating Potential”

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are three-year agreements with priorities agreed between all the main public sector agencies working in the area and with Central Government. They are focused on improving local services and increasing economic prosperity for local people. The Essex Local Strategic Partnership has worked in partnership with all the District LSPs and District Councils in the County to produce a new LAA for 2008-11, called “Liberating Potential”.

The Council and the Epping Forest LSP have been fully engaged with the formulation of this latest LAA, which sets out 10 priorities within 4 main themes.

Although by its very nature, housing touches many of the LAA themes, the only priority which is directly related to this Housing Strategy is Priority 2 – “More people supported to live independently in their own homes with better support for carers”. The way in which this

Housing Strategy helps meet this objective is set out in **Section 3.6** on “Supported Housing for Older People & Other Vulnerable People”

5.6 Respect Agenda & Anti-Social Behaviour

Aim

“To provide an effective response to anti-social behaviour, its causes and to improve outcomes for the community”

Objectives

- a) Work in collaboration with Essex Police, and other partners of the District Crime and Disorder Partnership, to protect victims and witnesses of crime and the local community from the effects of crime;
- b) Take appropriate action against perpetrators of anti-social behaviour;
- b) Seek to enable the perpetrators of crime to recognise the consequences of their behaviour and assist perpetrators to gain access to support, in order to help change their behaviour;
- c) Establish measures to prevent future repetition of anti-social behaviour by perpetrators.

Key Issues

The Government has promoted the concept of “respect”, which the Council endorses. Respect is a value – it is about being considerate to the needs of others, being decent, honest and caring about the community as well as people’s own individual concerns. It is essential in creating sustainable communities, where people feel safe, secure and happy to live.

The Council is working to address anti-social behaviour by ensuring that young people are given opportunities, and by challenging ‘problem families’ to accept support to change their behaviour. Work will continue to strengthen communities and ensure that public spaces are clean and safe, and that victims and witnesses of anti-social behaviour are protected and supported.

It is important to inform victims, witnesses and the community of the action taken to tackle anti-social behaviour. People who feel confident that anti-social behaviour is being tackled will feel more confident to go about their daily lives without fear. Those who are informed about action taken are more likely to continue to monitor and report anti-social behaviour in their area.

Between 2005-2008, anti-social behaviour complaints were reduced by 11% across the District. The Council has set a further ambitious anti-social behaviour reduction target over the three-year period 2008-2011 of 10%. This will only be achieved by working together with key partners and stakeholders in a co-ordinated way.

In 2007, the Council signed up to the Government’s Respect Standard for Housing Management. This commits the Council, as a landlord to the Council’s tenants, to:

- Accountability, leadership and commitment
- Empowering and reassuring residents
- Prevention and early intervention
- Tailored services for residents and provision of support for victims and witnesses
- Protecting communities through swift enforcement
- Support to tackle the causes of anti-social behaviour

The Council has also formulated and published Housing Service Strategies on Anti-Social Behaviour and Harassment, which sets out in detail the Council’s approach towards this two issues.

Key Partners

Essex Police, Registered Social Landlords, Probation, Youth Offending Team, Adult Social Care and Community Well-being, 'Connexions', NACRO, Drug Intervention Teams, Essex Watch, Transport for London, neighbouring local authorities, Essex County Council, West Essex PCT and Essex Fire and Rescue Service.

Chapter 6 – Resources

6.1 Introduction

It is very difficult, for a wide-ranging Housing Strategy covering a three-year period, to set out the Strategy's total resource requirements – especially since funding is provided from a variety of sources other than the Council.

Therefore, rather than attempting to identify total resource requirements for all aspects of the Housing Strategy, the Strategy's Key Action Plan – set out at Chapter 9 – provides the resource requirements for individual actions over the next year.

6.2 The Council's Capital Resources

From the Council's point of view, its Capital Strategy has identified "Improving its own Housing Stock" and "Meeting Local Housing Need" as its first and second capital priority respectively. As a result, significant capital resources have been identified to work towards the achievement of these stated priorities. Housing Revenue Account resources are directed at the Council's own stock and General Fund resources are directed at providing additional housing need and meeting private sector housing need.

The following table summarises the Council's Capital Programme between 2008/9 and 2010/11:

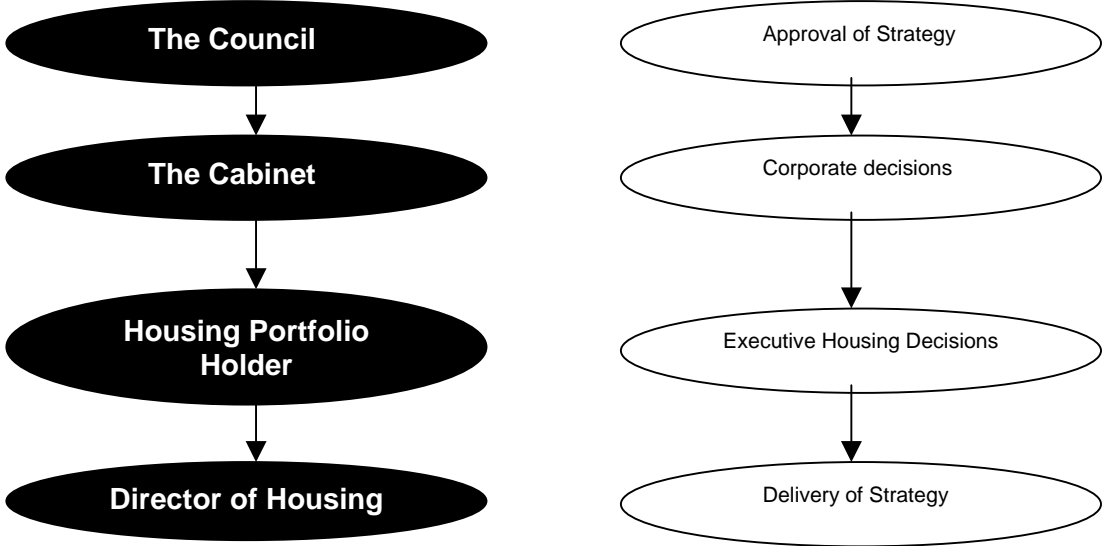
Activity	2008/9 (Estimate)	2009/10 (Forecast)	2010/11 (Forecast)
Social Housing Grants to RSLs	£930,000	£155,000	0
Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)	£400,000	£400,000	£400,000
Other Private Sector Grants	£280,000	£350,000	£350,000
DFG and Private Sector Grant Contingency	0	£310,000	£310,000
Home Ownership Grant Scheme	£102,000	£68,000	0
Compulsory Purchase – Empty Properties	0	£378,000	0
Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements to the Council's Housing Stock	£7,553,000	£5,436,000	£4,308,000
Off-Street Parking on Housing Estates	£29,000	£460,000	£341,000
Environmental Works on Housing Estates	£122,000	£102,000	£102,000
CCTV Installation on Council Estates	£35,000	£50,000	£50,000
Disabled Adaptations to Council Properties	£394,000	£430,000	£450,000
Total	£9,845,000	£8,139,000	£6,311,000

As can be seen, the Council is committing significant capital resources as its contribution to the achievement of the housing aims and objectives set out in this Housing Strategy.

Chapter 7 – Monitoring the Strategy and Performance Review

7.1 Framework for Delivering the Strategy

In view its strategic importance, this Housing Strategy will be approved at a full meeting of the Council, on the recommendation of the Council’s Cabinet. However, responsibility for the delivery of the strategy rests with the elected Housing Portfolio Holder and the Director of Housing. The decision-making hierarchy can be summarised as follows:



7.2 Reviewing and Monitoring the Housing Strategy

See [Chapter 8](#) and [Appendix 1](#) for details of this Housing Strategy’s Key Action Plan.

All actions will be formally monitored quarterly by officers, through the Housing Special Events Plan, using Microsoft Project software. Progress on the Housing Strategy Key Action Plan will be formally monitored by the Housing Scrutiny Panel of councillors every six months, which includes the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

The Housing Strategy will be reviewed during 2012, or earlier if the need for significant revisions is identified. However, the Action Plan will be updated annually (and monitored in the way set out above).

Chapter 8 – Key Action Plan

8.1 Key Action Plan

An important part of this Housing Strategy is its Key Action Plan, which is attached as Appendix 1. All local authorities in the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region have agreed to use the same format for their actions plans within the housing strategies, which is the same format as for the Sub-Regional Housing Action Plan.

For each action, the Action Plan sets out:

- The relevant category
- Person responsible
- Timescale
- Resource requirements
- Any associated targets or performance indicators

As explained in [Section 7.2](#), although the Housing Strategy will be updated after three years, the Key Action Plan will be updated annually.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1	-	Key Action Plan
Appendix 2		The Council's Housing Strategy in Context with National Housing Policy, the Regional Housing Strategy and the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy
Appendix 3		LCB Strategy Grid
Appendix 4	-	Glossary of Terms
Appendix 5	-	Contact List

Housing Strategy Key Action Plan

Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Resources
Housing Market	Complete the Strategic Housing Market Assessment with the 5 partner LAs and disseminate the findings through the Council's website and local media	Principal Housing Officer (Information / Strategy)	Apr 2009	Existing
Housing Market	Following the completion and analysis of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, consider with partner local authorities the implementation of viability studies to test the deliverability of potential development sites	Asst. Director of Planning & Economic Development	Dec 2009	Not yet quantified
Affordable Housing	Work with RSLs and developers to provide 209 affordable homes for rent and shared ownership at the following sites with detailed planning permission: (a) Epping Forest College (Phase 1), Loughton (b) Epping Forest College (Phase 2), Loughton (c) EFDC Development Sites – District-wide (d) Off site provision from Warren Hill development, Loughton (e) Ongar Station, Ongar (f) St Margarets Hospital, Epping (g) Acres Avenue, Ongar (h) Stony Arts Centre, Ongar	Director of Housing	Dec 2010	HC SHG allocated as at 31.12.08 – £2.85m LA SHG allocated as at 31.12.08 - £1m
Affordable Housing	Work with RSLs and developers to provide around 167 affordable homes for rent and shared ownership at the following sites with outline planning permission: (a) Merlin Way, North Weald (b) White Lodge/The Limes, Waltham Abbey (c) St Johns School, Epping	Director of Housing	Dec 2010	HC SHG - Unquantified

Affordable Housing	Provide 5 Home Ownership Grants of £34,000 to existing Council tenants to purchase in the private sector and review the success of the scheme and the take-up to consider whether a scheme should be introduced on a more permanent basis	Housing Resources Manager	April 2009	Housing Capital Programme - £170,000
Affordable Housing	Work with Home Housing to investigate the feasibility of developing 6 Council-owned sites for affordable housing, possibly cross subsidised by some private sales, at: (a) Chequers Rd, Loughton (b) Millfield, High Ongar (c) Thatchers Close, Loughton (d) Kirby Close, Loughton (e) Langley Meadow, Loughton (f) Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey	Director of Housing	April 2009	LA SHG – To be assessed
Affordable Housing	Produce a Development and Design Brief for the Broadway, Loughton, following the consultation exercise, providing significant levels of housing, including high levels of affordable housing with a mix of shared ownership and social rented housing	Asst. Director of Planning & Economic Development	April 2009	Existing
Affordable Housing	In partnership with one of the Council's Preferred RSL Partners, convert the Council-owend Leader Lodge and develop the associated grounds to provide 6 affordable flats	Director of Housing	Sept 2009	HC SHG - £24,000
Affordable Housing	After obtaining approval from the charity holding the freehold, work in partnership with one of the Council's Preferred RSL Partners to convert 20 unpopular bedsits for older people at Marden Close, Chigwell Row into 10 self-contained rented flats for families	Director of Housing	Dec 2009	Not yet quantified
Homelessness	Update the Council's Homelessness Strategy, following appropriate consultation	Housing Options Manager	April 2009	Existing

Homelessness	Increase the amount of funding allocated for Rental Loans to £20,000	Housing Options Manager	April 2009	£20,000
Homelessness	Actively engage with the Government's new Mortgage Rescue Scheme	Housing Options Manager	April 2009	To be announced by CLG in 2009
Black & Minority Ethnic Groups	Record the ethnicity of all Council tenants, using data obtained from the latest Tenants Census.	Principal Housing Officer (Information / Strategy)	Apr 2009	Existing
Black & Minority Ethnic Groups	Compare the ethnicity of applicants provided with Council accommodation with the ethnicity of Housing Register applicants	Housing Options Manager	July 2009	Existing
Black & Minority Ethnic Groups	Review all customer satisfaction monitoring conducted by the housing service to ensure the diversity of customers is monitored in relation to satisfaction	Principal Housing Officer (Information / Strategy)	March 2009	Existing
Gypsies & Travellers	Challenge the East of England Regional Assemblies draft proposals to require Epping Forest to provide an additional 49 authorised pitches for gypsy and travellers	Asst. Director of Planning & Economic Development	Apr 2009	Existing
Gypsies & Travellers	Following consultation on the draft proposals, produce and submit for examination a Gypsies and Travellers Development Plan Document addressing the provision for new sites to accommodate gypsies and travellers in the District.	Asst. Director of Planning & Economic Development	Sept 2009	Existing
Gypsies & Travellers	Undertake an Assessment of Gypsies and Travellers Housing Needs, in collaboration with other Essex authorities	Asst. Director of Planning & Economic Development	Sept 2009	Existing
Gypsies & Travellers	Identify the most suitable locations for the additional authorised pitches for gypsy and travellers eventually required by the East of England Regional Assembly	Asst. Director of Planning & Economic Development	Sept 2009	Existing

Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables	Investigate the potential, with Essex Adult Care Services, for Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey to be designated an Extra-Care Housing Scheme	Asst Director of Housing (Operations)	April 2009	Existing
Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables	Obtain TSA accreditation for the Council's Careline Service	Housing Manager (Older People)	April 2009	Existing
Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables	Investigate with Ability Housing Association the potential to provide an extension to their existing supported housing scheme for wheelchair users at Mason Close, Waltham Abbey	Director of Housing	April 2009	Unquantified at present
Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables	In partnership with East Thames Housing Group, commence a development at Station Approach, Ongar, in partnership with Brentwood and Uttlesford Councils, to provide 13 self contained flats with adequate support for young parents	Director of Housing	April 2009	Unquantified at present
Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables	In partnership with East Thames Housing Group, commence a development of 8 affordable homes for people with learning disabilities, with associated drama therapy from the Theatre Resource Project, at Gt Stony, Ongar	Director of Housing	April 2009	Unquantified at present
Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables	Through the LDF Core Strategy, seek to introduce a requirement that all new housing developments in the District should meet the Lifetime Homes Standard	Director of Planning & Economic Development	Dec 2010	Existing
Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables	In collaboration with Essex County Council and the other 4 Essex local authorities within the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region, produce an Essex LCB Local Supporting People Strategy	Director of Housing	Apr 2010	Existing

Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables	Contribute towards the production of the Essex Strategy for Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs), setting out the approach to be taken to HIA's in Essex beyond 2010	Private Housing Manager (Grants & C.A.R.E.)	Dec 2009	Existing
Empty Homes	Write to all owners of properties that have been empty for at least 2 years encouraging them to bring their properties back into use and advising them of the options available	Private Housing Manager (Technical)	April 2009	Existing
Empty Homes	Develop the Council's web-site to provide further information and advice to the owners of empty properties	Private Housing Manager (Technical)	April 2009	Existing
Empty Homes	Bring at least 5 long-term empty properties back into use by Council intervention.	Private Housing Manager (Technical)	April 2009	Existing
Under-occupation	Write to all under-occupying Council tenants, encouraging them to transfer to smaller accommodation	Housing Options Manager	June 2009	Existing
Rural Housing	Investigate the development potential for rural housing schemes in Moreton and Abbess Roding, in partnership with the Parish Councils and Hastoe Housing Association, under the Council's planning exceptions policy	Director of Housing	April 2009	Existing
Decent Homes – Public Sector	Undertake programmes of work to ensure that all the Council's homes meet the Decent Homes Standard by April 2010	Housing Assets Manager	April 2010	Housing Capital Programme - £11.1m
Decent Homes – Public Sector	Complete a major improvement scheme at Springfield, Waltham Abbey.	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	April 2009	Housing Capital Programme - £4m
Decent Homes – Private Sector	Provide, through housing assistance, a year-on-year increase in the proportion of vulnerable private sector households in Decent Homes.	Private Housing Manager (Grants & C.A.R.E.)	April 2009 and ongoing	Housing Capital Programme - £280,000 in 2008/9

Decent Homes – Private Sector	Implement an Affordable Warmth Scheme as a joint initiative with other LCB authorities	Private Housing Manager (Grants & C.A.R.E.)	April 2009 - March 2011	EERA - £441,780 (2009/10 – 2010/11)
Decent Homes – Private Sector	Work on a joint project with other LCB authorities for a joint equity-release / loan-based housing product	Private Housing Manager (Grants & C.A.R.E.)	From April 2009	Unquantified at present
Housing Growth	Work with Harlow Council to agree the number of new homes required in the Epping Forest District, and the most suitable locations, to contribute to Harlow's growth	Director of Planning & Economic Development	Dec 2009	Existing
Housing Growth	Produce a Local Development Document on Site Specific Allocations, setting out the locations and numbers of housing growth within the District	Director of Planning & Economic Development	Dec 2009	Existing
Housing Mobility	Expand the HomeOptions Choice Based Lettings Scheme to include Broxbourne Borough Council	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	April 2009	Existing
Energy Efficiency	Complete energy efficiency surveys for all the Council's properties	Housing Assets Manager	April 2010	Existing
Energy Efficiency	Seek funding for a small pilot scheme using renewable energy sources to a group of Council properties	Housing Assets Manager	April 2009	Not yet quantified
Energy Efficiency	Set up a Fuel Poverty Referral System in the District.	Environmental Co-ordinator	June 2009	Not yet quantified
Energy Efficiency	Produce a leaflet on domestic energy efficiency.	Environmental Co-ordinator	Apr 2009	Not yet quantified
Respect & Anti-Social Behaviour	Produce an updated leaflet for the public on the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	Apr 2009	Existing
Respect & Anti-Social Behaviour	Consider the feasibility of the Council's Careline Service providing a 24 hour monitoring service for Council CCTV cameras in the District	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	Sep 2009	Unquantified at present

The Council's Housing Strategy in Context with National Housing Policy, the Regional Housing Strategy and the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy

National Housing Policy

In February 2003, the Government published "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future", commonly referred to as the Communities Plan. This document sets out the Government's main housing and regeneration policies and plans at the national level. It is important, therefore, that the Council's Housing Strategy fits in with those plans, and contributes towards the achievement of the Government's objectives. The table below lists the Government's key requirements of sustainable communities related to housing, and how they are being progressed by the Council in its own plans.

National Policy	The Council's Plans
Ensure that all social tenants have a decent home by 2010	The Council and all RSL's in the District are on target to meet the Government's Decent Home Standard by 2010. More details are given in Section 4.2 on Decent Homes
Improve conditions for vulnerable people in private accommodation	The Council is working to help improve conditions in the private sector and to provide assistance to vulnerable people in both the public and private sector. More details are given in Section 3.6 on Supported Housing for Older People and Other Vulnerable People and Section 4.3 on Decent Homes in the Private Sector.
Ensure all tenants get an excellent service from their landlord	The Council already has high levels of tenant satisfaction, and works with registered social landlords in the District to encourage them to also provide excellent services.
Increase demand in low demand areas	The District is not one that experiences low demand for housing, in either the public or private sectors.
Tackle the housing shortage, especially in London and the South East	The District is within the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough Growth Corridor and neighbours the designated Growth Point of Harlow.
Ensure communities are sustainable, enhance the overall environment and protects the countryside	The Council has fully engaged with the consultation processes for the East of England Plan to assess what would be the appropriate amount of growth that the District can accommodate, and where it should be located.
Protect the countryside and enhance its quality, rather than create urban sprawl	Once the level of growth for the District has been determined through the final version of the East of England Plan, the Council will then ensure that any growth is delivered and is sustainable, properly planned, built in the right location(s) and has adequate infrastructures (e.g roads, health facilities, schools etc).
Accommodate and sustain the economic success of London and the South East, and alleviate the associated pressures on services and housing	More details on the Council's approach to ensuring sustainable communities are given in Chapter 5 .

Ensure that, where new and expanded communities are needed, they are sustainable, well-designed, high quality and attractive places	
Work towards a better balance in the housing market in the long term	
Address the housing needs of rural communities	The Council has a number of planning policies to facilitate the local housing needs of rural areas, including a rural exception policy within its Local Plan. More details on the rural housing are given in Section 3.10 .

More recently, in July 2007, the Government produced its Housing Green Paper “Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable”, which sets out the Government’s plans for achieving its vision of “everyone having access to a decent home at a price they can afford, in a place where they want to live and work”.

It is important, therefore, that the Council’s Housing Strategy also fits in with those plans. The Green Paper set out the Government’s three main objectives, as set out in the following table. The table also summarises the way the Council is working towards supporting the Government’s objectives

Key Objective	Main Proposals
Work with partners to provide more homes to meet growing demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a new housing target for 2016 of 240,000 additional homes a year to meet the growing demand (2 million homes in total). • Deliver a total of 3 million homes by 2020 • Ensure that more social and shared ownership homes are delivered in villages • Set up partial reviews of regional plans to increase regional and local targets • Introduce a new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant to direct resources to those councils delivering high levels of housing • Increase the target of new homes to be delivered on surplus public sector land to 200,000 by 2016 • Recycle homes and land, by making the most of existing homes and disused land (with a target of 60% of new homes to be provided on brownfield land).

<p>Local Position:</p> <p>The East of England Plan states that 3,500 additional homes need to be provided by 2021, together with an additional (unspecified) number of homes around the growth area of Harlow. Chapter 5 sets out the Council's approach to ensuring the provision of sustainable communities, including the plans for housing growth and the use of brownfield land.</p>	
<p>Work with partners to provide well-designed and greener homes, linked to good schools, transport and healthcare</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide infrastructure funding for areas of growth • Introduce a Planning Gain Supplement Bill, to ensure that local communities benefit from new developments. • Increase protection of the environment by cutting carbon emissions and seeking all new homes to be zero carbon from 2016 • Eliminate poorly designed new housing and make good new developments the norm
<p>Local Position:</p> <p>The Council is currently drafting its Local Core Strategy under the Local Development Framework. One of the objectives of the Local Core Strategy will be to ensure that new homes are built in the right place, supported by the right amount of social infrastructure. The Council currently requires all affordable homes to meet Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, and encourages private developers to meet the same level for market housing. The Council's Planning Directorate works closely with developers to ensure good urban design for new developments.</p>	
<p>Work with partners to make more affordable homes to buy or rent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a £8 billion programme for affordable housing in 2008-11 • Provide at least 70,000 more affordable homes per year by 2010-11, including at least 45,000 new social homes a year and over 25,000 shared ownership and shared equity homes a year.
<p>Local Position</p> <p>Section 3.2 explains the Council's objectives for increasing the amount of affordable housing within the District.</p>	

East of England Regional Housing Strategy

In 2003, the first East of England Regional Housing Strategy was launched, produced by the Regional Housing Forum (now called the Regional Delivery Group), a body established to consider the housing needs of the region and comprising representatives of interested organisations, including local authorities. The region covers Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

In early 2004, the Regional Housing Forum published an Addendum to the Regional Housing Strategy, called "Mind the Gap", which is an interim statement linking the 2003 version of the Regional Housing Strategy to a subsequent version

The Regional Housing Strategy provides background information on housing in the region, including priorities for action and an Action Plan. The Council's Housing Strategy has therefore been formulated, having had regard to the Regional Housing Strategy.

The Regional Housing Strategy has five Strategic Aims, which are as follows:

- To ensure everyone can live in a decent home at an affordable price;
- To contribute effectively to social inclusion within sustainable communities;
- To enable housing to contribute fully to ensure good health and promote health equality
- To use housing investment to complement sustainable economic development
- To contribute to a sustainable environment

The Regional Housing Strategy's Action Plan relates to five objectives. The table below lists these objectives and shows how they have been incorporated within the Council's Housing Strategy:

Regional Action Plan Objective	The Council's Plans
To provide more affordable homes in the East of England across the range of identified needs	Section 3.2 sets out the Council's plans to increase the number of affordable homes in the District. Chapter 3 generally explains the Council's objectives for meeting a range of identified needs.
To reduce housing stress witnessed by high levels of homelessness	The Council has produced a Homelessness Strategy setting out proposals to prevent and respond to homelessness within the District. Section 3.3 provides more details.
To improve the conditions of existing housing stock	The Council has produced a Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan, which forms part of its HRA Business Plan, setting out ways of improving its housing stock. See Section 4.2 for details on the Council's objectives for improving the private sector housing stock.
To make better use of the housing stock available	The Council's approach to dealing with under-occupation is set out in Section 3.8
To improve housing's contribution to the sustainability of the region	Chapter 5 explains the Council's intentions to ensure that new housing developed in the District is sustainable.

Sub-Regional Strategy

The Vision for the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region, which is similar to the Regional Housing Strategy's Strategic Aims, is:

- To enable growth in the sub-region and to provide for the needs of the homeless and those who require affordable housing, whilst protecting the environment;
- To create sustainable communities and achieve social inclusion; and
- To make the best use of the existing stock, whilst improving its condition in both the public and private sectors

In order to achieve the Vision, the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region has the following priorities:

- Maximising the delivery of affordable housing;
- Building sustainable and thriving communities;
- Improving the condition of the housing stock in both the public and private sectors

- Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups; and
- Delivering outcomes through effective partnership working

These priorities flow throughout the Council's own Housing Strategy.

	Housing Needs Survey Date completed Next Due Consultant used Annual requirement figure	HIMAs Hometrack User	Rural Schemes in pipeline Surveys underway/proposed	Key Workers Surveys on needs Local policies schemes under development	Intermediate	Move on Surveys on requirements SP issues Identified need	Under-Occupation What schemes are available or in the pipeline	Home Improvement Agencies Existing provision Service levels Discretionary services Links with private sector DFGs	DFG responding to needs requirements Other issues
Brentwood	Completed and reported Feb '05. Fordham Research. 576 units per annum over the next five years	Not using Hometrack at present.	Blackmore - survey complete and looking for a site. Navestock Village Hall site, planning permission granted.	Chapter on keyworkers included in the Housing Needs Survey. No specific local policies and no site specific schemes		Specific arrangement with The Foyer.	Agreement with Anchor Staying put.		
Broxbourne	Completed June 2007 by DCA, annual shortfall 680 new affordable homes	Working with East LCB/ M11 group commissioning HMA. Not using Hometrack	None	Little evidence of need from Housing Needs Assessment or demand for recent S/O scheme aimed at key workers	working with RSL partners to develop more affordable intermediate housing	No specific plans for survey	Data from Housing Needs Assessment to be analysed	None	Mandatory grant assistance only
Chesham	HNS being undertaken as part of SHIMA. Initial findings show annual requirement to be 866 homes. Survey conducted by Fordham	SHIMA work underway - draft report expected October 2007. Using Hometrack for ongoing monitoring data.	1 scheme completed 06/07. 2 schemes in pipeline - 5 surveys completed, nothing new planned, just updates	Key worker survey completed by Fordhams in 2004. Covered both private and public sector employers. Concluded no need based on criteria that housing costs were a significant factor in causing recruitment and/or retention difficulties. KW incorporated within intermediate banding but no separate need.	Intermediate housing is represented within overall AH planning policy of 35% requirement being 25% rented 10% intermediate products. Proportions under review as part of SHIMA	Survey completed 2006 - results inconclusive but LA will set quotas for each scheme.	Underoccupation now recognised within new allocation policy to be approved in June 2007.	New service recommissioned by county - Chelmsford has SLA with provider and makes a significant contribution. Key part of Private Sector Strategy.	New stock condition survey currently underway expected to report Autumn 2007. DFG remain high demand and at highest point exceeded £1,00,000 in one year.
Dacorum	Housing Needs survey completed 2003 by David Couttie Associates. Annual requirement 1,246 units.	Yes	Rural Surveys for Tring rural, Chipperfield and Wigginton completed by the CDA for Hertfordshire and The Rural Housing Trust. Rural schemes proposed for Chipperfield, Wigginton, Potten End & ...	Survey produced by Herts. CC in 2003. Two schemes for key workers recently completed in Hemel Hempstead providing 8 units for shared ownership. A further scheme providing 17 units for intermediate rent in planning process. 20 hard to let elderly persons' dwellings re-designated to Key Worker.		None	New Under Occupation Scheme introduced Summer 2007. Provides financial incentive for tenants to move to smaller Council or Housing Association property. Payment varies depending on the size of the property being vacated.	DBC operates Houseproud Scheme to help homeowners over 60 improve/adapt their home. Renovation and Home Repair Grants also provided to improve privately owned dwellings or bring empty ones back into use. Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy in place.	
East Herts	Completed 2004 by David Couttie and updated in-house 2005. Annual requirement figure is 537. Beginning SHIMA scoping.	No	Scheme in pipeline - Albury village. Furneux Pelham & Aston rural parish surveys recently completed; both parishes do not want to progress survey findings at this stage. Little	Housing needs survey completed by HCC Dec 2004. Number of schemes built and in the pipeline for key workers including mid market ASTs as well as traditional rent and S/O.		No survey work carried outwork done. Have agreed arrangements with YMCA and Vale House to provide each with 2 units of move-on accommodation a year. Awaiting SP review of move-on.	No incentive schemes as non-stock holding authority. Have additional pointing category on (Common) HR policy which gives points for existing tenants wishing to move to smaller properties.	Council fund Papworth to provide HIA. The agency assists vulnerable and disabled people through the grants process and the procurement and supervision of works. It also carries out home security and energy efficiency assessments, provides a handy person	Funding levels always oversubscribed. Have built into LSVT agreement a 30 year funding arrangement for each of our LSVT HAs to spend an amount agreed at the point of master plus inflation year on year.

Housing Needs Survey	HIMAs	Rural	Key Workers	Intermediate	Move on	Under-Occupation	Home Improvement	DFG
Date completed Next Due Consultant used Annual requirement figure	Hometrack User	Schemes in pipeline Surveys underway/proposed	Surveys on needs Local policies Schemes under development		SP issues Identified need	What schemes are available or in the pipeline	Agencies Existing provision Service levels Discretionary services Links with private sector strategies DFGs	responding to needs requirements Other issues
Last updated - 2003. Consultants - DCA. Annual requirement = 665 New affordable homes p/a. Working with neighbouring councils on a joint SHMA.	Not currently a Hometrack user.	One rural exceptions scheme completed in November 2007. Two further schemes in discussions with parish council.	Key Worker Study included as part of last Housing Needs Survey - not very useful. Key worker schemes now given low priority for new developments, due to narrow definition, lack of take-up and the availability of Keyworker Homebuy	The Council has no need for intermediate rented schemes, and seeks no more than 20% of the affordable housing on S106 developments as shared ownership.	General commitment to move on. Council has adopted the Essex Housing Officers Group's Protocol on move-on. No surveys undertaken on. No surveys undertaken	High priority is given to underoccupying tenants wanting to transfer to smaller accommodation under our Allocations Scheme. A Financial Incentive Scheme offers up to £2,000 to underoccupying tenants to transfer to smaller accommodation. A firm policy on requiring underoccupying successor tenants to transfer to smaller accommodation is operated.	EFDC operates its own HIA which takes a holistic approach to the assessment of vulnerable people, helping them to make choices in the way they want to live their lives. It has an essential role in the delivery of private sector housing assistance and in addition to running a Handyperson Service and Small Loans Scheme, it has an efficient system for 'cross-referral' to other agencies that provide assistance to vulnerable people.	Rapid increases in the numbers of applications for DFGs from 2003-2007 has flattened off but demand remains high. Relocation Grants are given where it is impractical to adapt an applicant's existing home. EFDC has a Service Agreement with Essex County Council for the delivery of DFGs and is part of an Essex-wide DFG benchmarking group. A cross-county Contract with a single stairlift provider was signed in 2008.
Completed Sept'04, published Apr'05. Consultant ORS. Annual requirement figure = 1bed 72 1cho, 2bed 94 social rent, 3bed 11cho, 4bed 41cho + 35 social rent, 5+bed 21cho + 3 social rent	Yes	N/A	Original zone agent research, 3 year old local study, ORS HNS info + info from Hometrack. Policy to be agreed late 2006. Gateway scheme has requirement in 106 for KW LCHO. Policy Feb 2007 KW = CLG definition	50% new build, predominantly one-bed, policy stipulates levels of affordability linked to incomes and incl. Service charges	Survey to link with SP. No specific need verified at present.	Cash incentive scheme. Portable discount scheme discontinued due to lack of interest (2005)	Peppworth Trust HIA, provides 'full range of discretionary services, Private sector strategy actions to further develop links with HIA / affordable warmth, etc.	Loss of discretionary top up from Essex CC.
Date completed 1002. Next due 2009. Affordable housing need is 766 units per year - 415 relets leaving a net shortfall of 351 per year. Regular marketing monitoring assessments with local estate agents to be carried out.	The use of Hometrack is to be considered.	There is a Rural Exception Policy for parts of the borough. Research into housing need with Parish Councils is planned.	Key worker need identified as part of Housing Needs Survey 2005. New key worker scheme in the Bushley area is currently being considered.	46 units completed 2005-2006. A further 46 were completed in 2006-07. 97 units are planned for 2007-08. A policy on LCHO property types is to be developed.	No survey currently proposed to scope requirements or identify need - awareness as part of homeless action plan update 2006	Pilot under-occupation schemes are being considered for Coningsby Drive in Potters Bar and Buckingham Road in Borehamwood. If successful, this will serve as a template for future schemes.	Currently provided by Anchor Staying Put. This service provides advice with grant applications and DFGs as well as a handyperson service. Service levels to be formalised at the end of 2007.	Research to be carried out and more strategic approach to be adopted, as recommended by Audit Commission inspection of Hertsmere Housing Strategy role in September 2006.
Housing needs survey update (desktop) completed Dec 2006. Annual shortfall 634 affordable units up from 357 in 2002.	Signed up to Hometrack Jan 2007.	Rural needs surveys Kelshal & Radwell completed. Report awaited on Codicote. Two rural surveys (Reed and Kimpton) underway.	No local KW details only Hertfordshire CC details provided from their survey in 2004.	Within 25% affordable housing requirement there is a 65%/35% split rented/intermediate housing (mainly shared ownership)	Need for temporary accommodation for young people identified remodelling of family hostel commissioned. Learning Disabilities Team have identified a need for 18 units of semi-independent accommodation.	Cash incentive scheme, although not much interest.	Terminated HIA agreement with Anchor Staying Put in August 2006. Currently use specialist consultants including Anchor on a fee per project basis. Also contribute the Handyperson scheme run by ASP (£12,000 per year). SP review still to be undertaken.	Alteration to Private Sector Renewals Policy being considered (March 07) Proposal is to focus £815,000 on satisfying mandatory DFG costs (£700,000 +) with other funding used to meet the needs of the vulnerable people of the district.
Update completed July 2006 by DCA	yes	1 scheme in pipeline. 2 surveys carried out	HNS covered Key workers, local definition adopted.	Will consider but rented intermediate - around 60% of market rents	Need for temporary accommodation for young people. Need identified for controlled drinking scheme.	Incentive scheme for tenants to move out of family housing into sheltered.	Managed by Environmental Health.	Current funding oversubscribed.
St-Albans								

	Housing Needs Survey Date completed Next Due Consultant used Annual requirement figure	HMAS Hometrack User	Rural Schemes in pipeline Surveys underway/propos ed	Key Workers Surveys on needs Local policies schemes under development	Intermediate	Move on Surveys on requirements SP issues Identified need	Under-Occupation What schemes are available or in the pipeline	Home Improvement Agencies Existing provision Service levels Discretionary services Links with private sector strategies DFGs	DFG responding to needs requirements Other issues
Stevenage	Working with NHDC on joint HMA. DCA appointed and report is due Dec 07. Member presentation in Jan 08.	Purchased Hometrack, training to be arranged.	No rural areas	HMS has a key worker section. Herts. CC key worker David Couttie study. No specific local policies. Fairview Rd - Genesis HA scheme 143 shared ownership key worker flats funded through Challenge Fund. Update: majority of flats have been sold, but a cascade mechanism was applied. Unable to supply into in respect of number of flats sold to key workers.	currently negotiating a section 106 for discounted sale housing.		Awaiting information from the Handyman scheme in partnership with North Herts. & Anchor Housing. Awaiting further info from Env Health to update		
Three Rivers	Completed survey in 2003 report was published by David Couttie associates main requirement are for 1 bedroom flats and 2 to 3 bed houses under shared ownership	Training session are place on September 29th to give people the relevant skills to use the package	Sarrett, and Denham way are schemes pipeline schemes.	TRDC is a Zone agent making referral s directly to lea Valley homes.	Not currently looking at the intermediate market, but will look at need when LCB research has been carried out.	3 year tenant satisfaction survey in partnership with NHF is taking place.	Renovation grants , home repairs grants and mandatory disability grants.		
Watford	Updated Dec 2004 by DCA. New survey due in 2007, which will be incorporated into HMA. Annual requirement of 570.	Not a Hometrack user.	Schemes in pipeline with Rural Housing Trust and one with Hasboc.	Key Worker survey undertaken by DCA in 2005. Key worker schemes have been built in Uttlesford but problems have been had with letting/selling them. No further schemes in pipeline.		Move on survey currently being completed by LCB LCSSG.	No schemes in place at present.	Provision by Springboard.	Current funding is heavily oversubscribed.
Watford	Last full survey 2001; updated 2004 to provide forecast to 2006. Both done by David Couttie Associates. Forecast shortfall of affordable housing 631 units per year. LDF will incorporate work on HNS and HMA etc.	Hometrack user and member of Hometrack Club. Interdepartmental liaison to incorporate HMA and HNS in LDF work. Part of consortium of 6 authorities which has invited expressions of interest for carrying out HMA.	N/A	Referrals to Lea Valley Homes. Additional points awarded on housing list. Specific need identified for Watford General Hospital/Watford Football club site. 14 units scheduled for the Fire Station site. Definition of keyworker developed giving flexibility to address local needs.	Part of general drive for affordable housing. The 30% affordable on site requirement comprises 75% social rented and 25% shared ownership. Intermediate rent may be considered as part of the 25% shared ownership provision in negotiations on Sect 106	Partnership working through Prevention of Homelessness consortium to try to ensure optimum use of all move-on resources to free up hostels and provide interim lower support accommodation and address emerging needs. Move on Plans Protocol (DLG and Homeless Link) to be raised at Post consortium January 08	Developed Local Lettings Policy for new 1 & 2 bed flats prioritising under occupying social tenants and promoting "Mietroliving" concept for the over 50's. Cash& Incentive scheme (transferred to Watford Community Housing Trust) in place with both cash and help with removals. Additional points awarded in Allocation Policy	HIA services are provided in Watford through a partnership between Watford Council, Herts CC and Anchor HA. The caseworker is accommodated in the EH Office, funded by Herts CC Supporting people and provided by Anchor HA. The surveying resource is provided by Watford BC. The HIA service is offered to disabled, elderly and vulnerable clients who apply for DFGs and "repair" grants/financial assistance.	Mandatory funding only, no top up grants however, a relocation grant is available where there are excessive work costs or the work is not practical. With this policy funding has generally matched demand over the last few year but the proposals in the consultation document will put pressure on the budget. Occupational Therapists from Herts CC are based in the EH Office which has resulted in clients with better partnership working and
Welwyn. & Hatfield	The last Housing Needs Survey was produced in 2004-05 and the data is expected to be reliable for up to 5 years. We paid David Couttie Associates £35,000 for this Survey. Its unlikely we'll commission our own individual one again because of the developing sub-regional housing market	No	None	Key worker survey was included in housing needs survey. Several schemes under development.		None	Currently reviewing HIP Agency provider and handyman service across the borough.		

	Homebuy	Empty Homes	BME Housing Issues	Travellers	DHS for Private Sector	Affordable Warmth	Review of Allocation Policies	Choice Based Lettings
Brentwood	How is it working Role of Zone Agents Allocation policy Social Homebuy	Existing PSL schemes Developing PSL schemes Use of EDMOs & CPOs Cross district working	Developing services Consultation Identify & responding to needs	Identified requirements Potential sites Cross district working	Identifying vulnerable groups Benchmarking Monitoring Private sector stock condition surveys	Local schemes & incentives	Development of common housing registers	CBL in place Future schemes linking future with existing for sub reg mobility
	Not worked closely enough with the Zone Agent yet to comment. No pursuing social homebuy at present.	Council manage 20 PSL's and working with a local RSL who have 3 PSL's. These schemes are not linked to empty homes. Looking at joint working with Epping and Uttlesford on sharing an Empty Homes Officer.	BBC was part of the Essex Housing Officers Group's Equality and Diversity study - Facing the facts and supports EHOG's appointment of a Diversity & Equity Worker.	Worked jointly with other Essex Local Planning Authorities to conduct a Countywide needs assessment. The results are being considered.	Stock Condition Survey carried out jointly with the Housing Needs Survey. 2% of Private Sector unfit. 15.9% failed DHS.	Fuel Poverty Strategy 2005. Affordable warmth programme in partnership with Home Improvement Agency. Use repairs assistance grants as mechanism to target energy efficiency.	Linked to the introduction of CBL. No plans to develop a CHR.	Member of the Herts. and Essex Housing Options Consortium which is working towards introducing CBL by summer 2007.
Broxbourne	Affordable housing strategy target for new development 5% Homebuy, slow takeup of shared ownership schemes due to affordability issues	PSL in place, CPO's under consideration, empty homes charter for East of England accepted in principle, corporate empty homes strategy expected by June 2007.	Ethnic minority link worker employed by Herts. CC. 'Other White' group is largest minority in the borough, 100 face to face interviews with ethnic minority households as part of 2007 Housing Needs Assessment	2006 E Herts. study covering 6 LAs including Broxbourne identified demand for 35 additional pitches over the study area 2006 - 2011 + 10 transit pitches, partnership working continuing	Decent Homes Strategy 2006 and annual targets set to meet 70% by 2010. House Condition survey planned 08/09	Partnerships in place with energy agencies	Comprehensive review completed September 07. Choice based lettings scheme to be implemented in 2008 in partnership with 5 other LAs - no common housing register.	Part of Choice Based Lettings consortium of 6 LAs due to be implemented April 2008
St Albans	LA maintains own list and markets properties. We also perform affordability assessments on applicants. Have around 500 people on register.	Limited use of own PSL schemes (approx 6 properties). Part of LCB consortium looking at linking Empty Homes with PSL/Decent Homes standard. Have refreshed Empty Homes Strategy March 2007 do not expect to use EDMO's routinely.	No need identified for BME specialist in housing at present	County wide approach to research will result in sites being identified and extended in Borough	Poor data held on this, but hope to improve soon through stock condition survey due for completion Autumn 2007.	Use Warm front to promote and supply energy efficiency in the private sector. Will review service when results of new stock condition survey known	Development of Common Housing Register deferred to bring CBL scheme forward.	Partner of LCB East consortium - anticipated implementation 2007
Dacorum	Good working relationship with Zone Agent for Hertfordshire LA SLA recently drafted	Low number of empty properties in the Borough. Continue to monitor and will take action if becomes necessary.	BME Involvement Strategy and consultation group in place	An assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies & Travellers in South & West Herts. completed in April 2005 by the Centre for Urban & Regional Studies. Sites have been identified. Currently awaiting political input.	Energy Conservation Grants available for loft and cavity wall insulation and draught proofing	Following success of a pilot scheme which commenced in April 2004, CBL has been extended to cover all vacancies throughout the Borough since June 2006		
East Herts	Working well. Takes responsibility for all East Herts. shared ownership. Most of which is not key worker (CLG style).	Empty Homes Officers is working with Herts., Beds and Bucks group to promote/develop best practice. Part of successful LCB group bidding to CLG funding for an Empty Property Scheme.	Have recently carried out specific consultation work with both the Polish and Portuguese communities. Are holding advice sessions once a month on a Sat for Polish and have also funded an interpreter for Weds in Bishops Stortford offices.	Survey completed Summer 2006. Joint project with north and east Hertfordshire LAs and Herts. CC. Site numbers identified, site scoping and identification now completed and findings being collated for presentation later in year.	Stock condition survey carried out in 2004. Level of unfitness is approx. 3%. Level of vulnerable households in decent homes estimated at 72.8%. Average SAP rating for private homes is 51.	Non means tested discretionary energy grants available to provide half the cost of energy efficient works for private sector and owner occupiers. The Council has apart-time Energy Efficiency Officer.	Have a CHR in the District although not all HAs have agreed to sign up at this stage. Not an all singing all dancing CHR but a pragmatic and effective for existing social tenants needing to transfer. Allocations policy amended in readiness for CBL	Are part of the Herts. and Essex Consortium that won funding from the then ODPM. Intend to launch CBL in the district in January 08. Once running will further develop and consider cross boundary nominations. Part of the Stansted Area Housing Partnership (4 LAs) that develops social housing

	Homebuy How is it working Role of Zone Agents Allocation policy Social Homebuy	Empty Homes Existing PSL schemes Developing PSL schemes Use of EDMOs & CPOs Cross district working	BME Housing Issues Developing services Consultation Identify & responding to needs	Travellers Identified requirements Potential sites Cross district working	DHS for Private Sector Identifying vulnerable groups Benchmarking Monitoring Private sector stock condition surveys	Affordable Warmth Local schemes & incentives	Review of Allocation Policies Development of common housing registers	Choice Based Lettings CBL in place Future schemes linking future with existing for sub reg mobility
Epping Forest	Homebuy - appears to be working OK, but little take up in District. Good relationship with Homebuy Agent. Not pursuing Social Homebuy, due to it being untested and problematical. Council is considering a variation of the former DIVSO scheme, with the Council and Moat. Housing sharing a 50% stake in an applicant's first property, with rent being paid on the 50% share to Moat.	EFDC has a number of initiatives to bring empty properties back into use including Empty Homes Grants, a Finder's Fee Scheme and the PLACE (private lease agreement) Scheme which is run jointly with 4 other authorities within the LCB. Under the Empty Property Strategy 2007-2009, EDMOs and CPOs are only used as a last resort.	Research into this topic was undertaken through the Essex Housing research network and a report "Facing the Facts" was produced. As an outcome, a co-ordinator was appointed for 18 months to work with the community and establish citizens panels. The contract ended in 2007. An equalities and new initiatives group operates as an offshoot of the Essex Housing Officers Group to conduct research into diversity issues including BME.	The Government has given the Council a target of providing 49 additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches by 2012, and in November 2008 consultation will begin on Development Plan Provision for Gypsies & Travellers in the Epping Forest District which identifies 27 potentially suitable sites.	The latest Private Sector Stock Condition Survey completed in 2005 had regard to the DHS in the private sector. The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2007-2009 includes a Housing Assistance Policy based largely on the Decent Homes Standard. Monitoring is carried out against the former PSA7 target.	The Council's Fuel Poverty Strategy 2007 provides a multi-disciplinary, cross tenure approach to providing Affordable Warmth. For Council stock energy efficiency measures are provided through a programme of ongoing Capital investment. Energy efficiency work in the private sector is mainly funded by Local Authority grants and through government funded initiatives.	EFDC reviews its Allocations Scheme annually as a matter of course. The last review was completed in April 2008 and the Scheme changed to cover a general update requirement. There are no plans to introduce a Common Housing Register.	EFDC is a member of the Herts. & Essex Housing Options Consortium. The HomeOption CBL scheme commenced 5th November 2007
How	Trying to encourage RSL partners to work with zone agent, alone agent agreed to provide regular data on migration and take-up, allocation through CBL and Zone Agent register, uncertain about plans for Social Homebuy.	PSL scheme with East Thames. Cross district pilot scheme for empty homes, no plans yet to use EDMOs and CPOs but hopefully pilot will introduce framework for this.	Launched Facing the Facts 2004, Partner RSL conducted further local research that evidences need for BME sheltered scheme, looking for site in Harlow to develop.	Requirements - tbc, two x-county sites in town, no x-district work in progress.	Strategy for identifying and promoting DHS in private sector. No benchmarking or monitoring in place at present. Private sector stock condition commissioned & taking place autumn 2007	Objective in Council's Energy Strategy and Private Sector Strategy to be achieved in 2006/07	Policy under review, plans to consult on CHR 2007 across partner RSLs. Consultation has begun. J- draft policy for 2007/2008	CBL in place from September 2005, x-district allocations through SAHP, happy to consider further expansion beyond SAHP
Hertsmere	Liasing with Lee Valley Homes (Zone Agent) to be included as part of non NAHP grant funded LCHO & Key worker intermediate rent scheme marketing partnership - Oct 2006	First draft of Empty Homes Strategy now completed. Awaiting approval from Members. Empty Property Homes loans approved as part of the Private Sector Housing Strategy in February 2007	"Cultural Diversity in Hertsmere" report published in 2005. Consultation to take place with researchers who have liaised with community groups. Possibilities for housing schemes for minority faith groups are being considered.	2006 report by Scott Wilson jointly funded by Hertsmere, CC and x 4 boroughs 'Accommodating needs of travellers and identification of sites'	Stock condition survey completed June 2005. Limited monitoring taken place in conjunction with HMO licensing - comprehensive strategy for DHS in place by 2007, updated stock condition to be completed 2009	Be Warm Be Wise (Cavity wall + loft insulation) scheme has been operating since 2002. To be reviewed as part of the inspection Remedial plan. An affordable warmth strategy will be written during 2008.	Subject to review when CBL introduced	Part of bid "Herts. Housing Choice" with x7 LA's for development of CBL 2007/2008
North Herts.	Limited projects to comment on the effectiveness of the zone agents at the present time. Warden HA working with Lea Valley Homes to provide 4 units in Great Ashby.	Very limited success with PSL scheme working with Aldwyck. At present no schemes progressing. Problems with setting acceptable standards of properties. Herts Beds and Bucks Environmental Health officers are working with a HA to formulate process for EDMO operation awaiting the	Research into this topic undertaken 2005. Further research into needs of BME elderly to be carried out in conjunction with Supporting People?	Cross district accommodation needs survey completed (5 LA's) second phase of work to identify suitable site location underway. EE Plan has 2 options for North Herts either 3 or 15 pitches.	Michael Howard Associates commissioned to carry out stock condition survey. Completion of report due in March 2007. Report still being finalised	A affordable warmth work is undertaken by the Private sector housing team. Promotion includes advertising in the NHDC outlook, local road shows (i.e. going out to group meetings) and displayed information in public centres (LA receptions, shops, Library's)	Common Housing Register implemented July 2005, Allocation policy implemented in 2004.	Implementation of CBL scheme to be implemented in future.
St-Albans	Work with Zone Agents and local allocation policy. Not implemented Social Homebuy.	Managed by Environmental Health-using RSL for PSL.	Have Special Advisory Officer who consults with BME groups regularly	Survey completed-site identification process underway-working with South West Herts Las	Environmental Health responsibility-private sector condition survey completed	Yes	Linked to development of CBL	Participating in bid for funding-part of Herts. Housing Choice partnership

	Homebuy	Empty Homes	BME Housing Issues	Travellers	DHS for Private Sector	Affordable Warmth	Review of Allocation Policies	Choice Based Lettings
	How is it working Role of Zone Agents Allocation policy Social Homebuy	Existing PSL schemes Developing PSL schemes Use of EDMOs & CPOs Cross district working	Developing services Consultation Identify & responding to needs	Identified requirements Potential sites Cross district working	Identifying vulnerable groups Benchmarking Monitoring Private sector stock condition surveys	Local schemes & incentives	Development of common housing registers	CBL in place Future schemes linking future with existing for sub reg mobility
Stevenage	Lea Valley has been piloting a scheme with Stevenage in which it has managed the shared ownership list on the councils behalf. This was implemented prior to Lea Valley receiving Zone Agent status. Stevenage BC & Lea Valley meet regularly to monitor. Stevenage BC prioritise applicants once they have been identified by RSL for particular schemes. The Scheme is currently negotiations over marketing partnership and choice based lettings ,no clear strategy for social homebuy.	PSL scheme with HPCA now disbanded. Stevenage Env Health Team working with Pathmeads HA to manage EDMO's. Team also attends Beds, Bucks & Herts. Group. Empty Property Strategy introduced. Have expressed concerns that no RSLs will commit to taking on any EDMO props.	HNS contains BME section	A site scoping study has been commissioned and is underway.	Obtained grant from central government for up to 2010. Quarterly Returns sent to Go-East to identify vulnerable properties and spend money to reach decent home target.	Energy Efficiency Grant available	Reviewed and implemented new allocations policy. Now have one register combining the old new applicants and 'transfer registers. The new system uses points within a banding system to prioritise. Updated in July 2007	Locata appointed. Stevenage Homes Ltd manage the implementation of CBL policy to include all property types.
Three Rivers	Working with float as Zone Agent for Essex. Have not implemented Social Homebuy.	no problem with slum areas or empty homes action needed at present. Consultation to find the benefits of renting out properties under the RBS	Implementing our equalities action plan and identifying new ways of working with this target group.	Strategy written for this group meetings and action plan will be developed over the next 6 months.	Scheme to survey council stock cavity insulation and loft insulation. Affordable warmth strategy 2004 joint working with pct Watford and decorum councils.	See CBL column new work in pipeline.	Bid has gone into Housing cooperation A waiting outcome joint working group established with 7 L.As.	
Uttlesford	Lea Valley Homes manage allocations to New Build and Open Market Homebuy units. Quarterly updates received on the delivery of Open Market and New Build products in Herts.	Cross boundary working with Harlow, Chelmsford, Epping & E. Herts. with Government funding. Have signed up to Empty Homes Charter.	Active on Essex wide BME Action Group. Consultation will be completed through the Essex wide citizens panel and will help to identify future housing needs.	One site in Uttlesford, no future need for sites at present.	No schemes in place at present.	This will be reviewed when CBL is introduced.	Part of consortium with Epping, Brentwood, East Herts., Broxbourne and Chelmsford, which is going live with CBL in November 2007.	
Watford	Lea Valley Homes manage allocations to New Build and Open Market Homebuy units. Quarterly updates received on the delivery of Open Market and New Build products in Herts.	Still in discussion via Herts., Beds and Bucks Empty Homes Forum with potential RSL to manage properties under EDMOs. Growing problem of properties left vacant pending redevelopment. LA trying to encourage temporary use, and to identify these early by monitoring planning applications.	BME Housing Strategy approved by Cabinet March 2006. Strategy and guide on WBC website. Plans for monitoring implementation via One Watford Equalities Group. Equalities Impact Assessment Action plan for Private Sector Services being carried out throughout 2007-8. EIAs on Housing and Homelessness Strategies planned.	Travellers requirements identified from EERA study included in BME Housing Strategy approved by Cabinet March 2006. S and W Herts Study published March 2007 to enable public consultation	Private Sector Stock Condition survey 2004 prepared by David Adamson & Partners Ltd provides a baseline figure. Currently on target to meet 2010 PSDH target. Project to update survey data planned for 2008-09.	3 year contract with Powergen for installing energy efficient boilers. Arrangement with Powergen and Mark Insulations to target public sector properties for surveys and insulation works. For private sector properties "Heat Streets" commenced Feb 06, installing loft/cavity wall insulation and covering all wards in the Borough. More focussed work to take place in 2007-08 to target vulnerable households.	Allocation policy updated to take account of stock transfer. More detailed review to be undertaken in 2008 in preparation for choice based lettings.	Working with 7 Herts. LAs to explore feasibility of joint CBL and bid for funding.
Welwyn. & Hatfield	No	Empty homes survey completed November 2005. It showed that WHBC do not have a problem with empty homes in the borough. No PSL schemes. Have EHome Group to coordinate surveys. No EDMO's used so far. Attend meetings of the Empty Homes Forum across the district.	Yes - Ongoing	Yes - ongoing	Yes - ongoing	Yes - sits with Environmental Health	Review carried out summer 2006. Stakeholders consultation day to follow.	Joint bid for CBL with Harlow in progress

Glossary of Terms

Affordable housing	Subsidised housing for rent, or low cost home ownership (eg shared ownership), where the monthly costs are far lower than market rents or a full mortgage.
Affordable warmth	The principle that householders should spend no more than 10% of their disposable income on their total fuel bill, to avoid <i>fuel poverty</i> .
National Affordable Housing Programme	The name given to all the <i>Homes and Communities Agency</i> capital funding allocated to <i>RSLs</i> , either nationally or locally, enabling them to build or acquire affordable housing.
Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups	Groups of people within local communities whose race is either black, or another race, that is in the minority within the UK.
Brownfield sites	Industrial or unused areas in towns that may be suitable for an alternative form of development, particularly housing.
Cabinet	An important Council committee, comprising senior councillors, each responsible for a <i>portfolio</i> , that makes corporate Council decisions.
Capital receipt	Money received for the sale of a capital asset (eg land or buildings)
Choice-based lettings schemes	A scheme whereby people in need of affordable rented housing can ask to be considered for specific vacant Council or <i>RSL</i> accommodation. This is instead of such accommodation being allocated to applicants on waiting lists on the basis of housing need, with only a very limited choice being given.
Concealed households	Individuals, or small groups of people, within a larger group of people occupying a property, who would like to live separate from the larger group.
East of England Regional Assembly (EERA)	A body that represents the interests of local authorities in the <i>East of England</i> , comprising councillors representing each of the local authorities in the region.
East of England Region	The region of England in which the Epping Forest District is situated, covering the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.
Floating support	Practical support provided to those in need by a support worker for a temporary period, until such time as the support is no longer required, when the support is discontinued and provided to others who have a need.
Fuel poverty	When a household needs to spend more than 10% of their household income to achieve a satisfactory standard of heating.
General Fund	The Council's financial account that deals with income and expenditure relating to all the Council's services, part of which is the ring fenced <i>HRA</i> .

Green Belt	Areas of countryside that surround towns and villages, on which non-agricultural development is not normally allowed, in order to maintain the character and quality of the countryside.
Halifax House Price Index	A source of information, operated by the HBOS Bank, that provides details of average house prices and house price trends in local areas, based on information providing by mortgage applicants.
Homes & Communities Agency	The Government agency that funds <i>registered social landlords</i> (RSLs).
Housing association	See <i>Registered Social Landlord</i> .
HRA subsidy	An annual revenue subsidy provided to local authorities by the Government to assist with the management and maintenance of their housing stock.
Intentional homelessness	Homelessness that has occurred as a result of a person doing something, or failing to do something, that would have resulted in their homelessness. Local authorities only have a duty to provide short term, temporary accommodation to intentionally homeless people.
Interim accommodation	Temporary accommodation provided to homeless people whilst their homelessness application is being investigated.
Key workers	Public sector employees who are crucial to the provision of local services, e.g. teachers, health workers and police officers.
Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LA SHG)	SHG provided by local authorities.
Local Plan	The formal Council document that sets out all the Council's planning policies, on which planning applications are considered and forward plans are formulated.
Major repairs allowance (MRA)	An annual Government subsidy given to local authorities to assist with the maintenance of their housing stock, calculated by a formula based on the type and age of the housing stock.
Mobility housing	Homes that have been designed to accommodate either able-bodied residents or those with physical disabilities, that assist the physically disabled to move around and live in the home more easily.
Communities and Local Government (CLG)	The Government department that has responsibility for formulating and implementing the Government's housing policy at a national level and allocates resources for different national housing programmes.
Partnering	An <i>Egan principle</i> whereby a client and contractor have a closer relationship, sharing the risk, often avoiding the time and cost of tendering.
Portfolio Holder	A senior councillor, who is a member of the <i>Cabinet</i> , responsible for specific areas of Council work (eg housing, finance etc). The Council has a number of portfolio holders.
Regional Housing Strategy	Produced by the Regional Delivery Group, a document that provides a picture of the housing situation in the region and draws out the key challenges. It identifies the investment priorities in existing and new

housing.

Registered Social Landlord (RSL)	A non-profit making organisation (usually a housing association) that is registered with, and regulated by, the <i>Housing Corporation</i> . They are run by a voluntary Board of Management, and employ professional housing officers to manage the organisation.
Rent restructuring and rent convergence	A Government requirement that all councils and <i>RSLs</i> must re-calculate their rent levels, by reference to individual property values, regional and national earnings, national average rent levels and numbers of bedrooms. Nationally, council and <i>RSLs</i> must also ensure that their rent levels are brought in line with each other by 2010.
“Rethinking Construction”	A report by Sir John Egan on ways to reduce construction costs and improve the quality of construction projects, through different working practices, including <i>partnering</i> .
Revenue contributions to capital outlay (RCCO)	Rental or other income used to pay for capital expenditure.
Rough sleeping	Homeless people who have nowhere to live and do not have a proper roof over their head.
Section 106 Agreements	Legal agreements between the Council and developers, sometimes required as a condition of a planning permission, that require the developer to provide specified public facilities or funding associated with the development. This can include the provision of <i>affordable housing</i> .
Shared ownership	A form of tenure whereby a property is partly owned by the occupier and partly owned by an <i>RSL</i> , to enable people with incomes too low to purchase a property outright to begin on the home ownership ladder. The occupants pay rent to the <i>RSL</i> at the same percentage of the full rent as the <i>RSL</i> owns.
Shelter	The national campaign organisation for the homeless, who also provide advice and support to homeless people.
Sheltered housing	Independent accommodation provided to elderly people, with support from a warden and an emergency call facility, usually having a communal lounge facility.
Social exclusion	The situation where individuals, or groups of individuals, within the community do not have the means, material or otherwise to participate in social, economic, political or cultural life.
Social Housing Grant (SHG)	Capital funding provided to <i>RSLs</i> by either councils or the <i>Homes and Communities Agency</i> to enable them to build or acquire <i>affordable housing</i> .
Social inclusion	The process whereby people do not experience <i>social exclusion</i> .
Social landlords	Generally, <i>RSLs</i> and local authorities.
Stock Options Appraisal	A process to determine the most appropriate future ownership and management of the Council’s housing stock.
Supporting People	A new Government initiative that became effective from April 2003. It brought together former sources of funding for supported housing into

county-wide “pots” for distribution to supported housing providers within the County, based on locally determined priorities, through agreed contracts. County-wide “commissioning bodies” produce a Supporting People Strategy explaining how the funding will be distributed.

Supporting People
Commissioning Team

The team of County Council officers responsible for managing and administering *Supporting People* at the county level.

Supporting People Core
Strategy Group

Representatives from the Council, Social Services, Primary Care Trust, North Essex NHS Mental Health Partnership, Epping Forest CVS and Probation Service, responsible for consulting on, and producing, the Local Supporting People Strategy and overseeing *Supporting People* at the local level.

Tenant Services
Authority

The Government Agency that regulates local authority and registered social landlord housing

Urban Capacity Study

A study into the possible use of *brownfield sites* in towns for other purposes, including housing.

Contact List

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CONTACTS Civic Offices, Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ				
Subject	Name	Designation	Telephone	e-mail
Housing Allocations and Nominations	Russell Wallace	Housing Options Manager	01992 564490	rwallace@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Best Value Performance Plan	Stephen Tautz	Quality & Performance Management Manager	01992 564180	stautz@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Council Plan	Stephen Tautz	Quality & Performance Management Manager	01992 564180	stautz@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Council Stock Condition	Haydn Thorpe	Housing Assets Manager	01992 564162	hthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Crime & Disorder Reduction Strategy	Caroline Wiggins	Crime & Disorder Reduction Co-ordinator	01992 564122	cwiggins@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Empty Properties	Lyndsay Swan	Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources)	01992 564146	lswan@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Energy Efficiency (Council Properties)	Haydn Thorpe	Housing Assets Manager	01992 564087	hthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Homelessness and Housing Advice	Russell Wallace	Housing Options Manager	01992 564490	rwallace@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Housing Finance	Brian Moldon	Senior Finance Officer	01992 564606	bmoldon@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Housing Portfolio Holder	Cllr David Stellan	Housing Portfolio Holder	01992 564004	ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Housing Strategy	Alan Hall	Director of Housing	01992 564004	ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Local Plan	Ian White	Forward Planning Manager	01992 564325	iwhite@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Planning	John De Wilton Preston	Director of Planning & Economic Development	01992 564115	jpreston@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Private Sector Housing (Policy, Grants and C.A.R.E.)	Lyndsay Swan	Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources)	01992 564146	lswan@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Social Inclusion Strategy	Chris Overend	Policy Officer	01992 564247	coverend@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Tenant Participation	Sandy Lindsay	Housing Resources Manger	01992 564035	slindsay@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Under Occupation (Council Properties)	Roger Wilson	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)	01992 564419	rwilson@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORD (RSL) CONTACTS

Organisation	Contact	Tel. No	e-mail
East Thames Housing Group	Dan Read	0208 522 2000	dan.read@east-thames.co.uk
Estuary Housing Association	Kerry Preston	01702 462246	kerry.prestons@estuary.co.uk
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London & Quadrant Housing Association	Andrew Clarke	0208 535 2931	aclarke.lqgroup.org.uk
Moat Housing Society	Paul Martin	01621 841180	paul.martin@moat.co.uk
Home Group	Jay Rutnam	01279 621621	jay.rutnam@homegroup.org.uk

OTHER PARTNERS CONTACTS

Organisation	Contact	Tel. No	e-mail
Citizens Advice Bureau – Epping	Rachel Poulter	01992 574989	bureau@eppingcab.cabnet.org.uk
Citizens Advice Bureau – Loughton	Susan Britton	0208 502 0031	bureau@loughtoncab.cabnet.org.uk
Citizens Advice Bureau – Waltham Abbey	Margaret McDermott	01992 710353	bureau@walthamabbeycab.cabnet.org.uk
Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation	Molly Carter	01992 564292	rjones@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
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North Essex NHS Mental Health Partnership	Glenys Vaughan	0208 271 4020	glenys.vaughan@essexcc.gov.uk
Voluntary Action Epping Forest	Jacqui Foile	01992 564178	epping.cvs@virgin.net



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