

## Scrutiny Standing Panel Agenda



### **Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel Thursday, 25th March, 2010**

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

**Time:** 7.00 pm

**Democratic Services Officer:** Mark Jenkins (The Office of the Chief Executive)  
Tel: 01992 564607 Email: mjenkins@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

**Members:**

Councillors S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Brookes, K Chana, J Collier, D Dodeja, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P Richardson, 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. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

(Assistant to the Chief Executive). To declare interests in any items on the agenda.

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

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

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

**4. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING (Pages 5 - 10)**

To agree the notes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 21 January 2010.

**5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 11 - 16)**

(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. DEFERMENT OF THE REVIEW OF THE ALLOCATIONS SCHEME (Pages 17 - 20)**

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

**7. HOMELESSNESS PRESENTATION (Pages 21 - 22)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2009 - 10 SIX MONTH PROGRESS REPORT (Pages 23 - 32)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**9. HOUSEMARK BENCHMARKING REPORT ON VALUE FOR MONEY (Pages 33 - 36)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**10. HRA BUSINESS PLAN 2010-11 REPORT (Pages 37 - 156)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**11. HOME OPTION CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME - PROGRESS REPORT (Pages 157 - 162)**

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

**12. OPTIONS FOR CROSS BOUNDARY ALLOCATIONS (Pages 163 - 166)**

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

**13. CONSULTATION ON THE REVIEW OF THE SCOPE OF THE HOUSING APPEALS AND REVIEW PANEL (Pages 167 - 182)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**14. HOUSING STRATEGY 2009-2012: 6 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT ON KEY ACTION PLAN (Pages 183 - 196)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**15. DRAFT REGULATORY FRAMEWORK ACTION PLAN (Pages 197 - 208)**

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

**16. HOUSING DIRECTORATE'S SERVICE STRATEGY ON HARASSMENT (Pages 209 - 228)**

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

**17. TENANT PARTICIPATION PROGRESS 2009 (Pages 229 - 234)**

(Mr R Jones – Tenant Participation Officer) To consider the attached report.

**18. 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.

**19. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next programmed meeting of the Panel will be held on Thursday 29 July 2010 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1 and then on:

Thursday 28 October 2010 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1;  
Thursday 27 January 2011 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1; and  
Thursday 28 April 2011 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1.

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**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 21 JANUARY 2010  
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING  
AT 7.00 - 9.30 PM**

**Members Present:** S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Brookes, K Chana, D Dodeja, Mrs A Grigg (Vice Chairman of Council), Mrs P Richardson, Mrs J H Whitehouse, J Wyatt and Mrs M Carter (Epping Forest Tenants and Leasholders Federation)

**Other members present:** D Stallan

**Apologies for Absence:**

**Officers Present** A Hall (Director of Housing), R Wilson (Assistant Director (Operations)) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

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

There were no substitute members present at the meeting.

**27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

**28. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**RESOLVED:**

That the notes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 15 December 2009 be agreed.

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

**(a) Terms of Reference**

The Panel's Terms of Reference were noted.

**(b) Work Programme**

**(i) Item 18 Housing Service Strategy on Harassment.**

The members were advised that this item would be put before the March 2010 meeting of the Panel.

**(ii) Item 19 Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme**

Officers had been awaiting new Government statutory guidance which had now been received. Therefore it was envisaged that the Allocations Scheme Review would be put before the March 2010 Panel meeting.

**30. PRESENTATION ON THE TSA'S DRAFT REGULATORY FRAMEWORK & SHORT NOTICE INSPECTIONS**

The Panel received a presentation from Mr Alan Hall, Director of Housing and Mr Roger Wilson, Assistant Director of Housing, regarding the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), Regulatory Framework and Short Notice Inspections.

The TSA came into effect on 1 December 2008 and replaced the regulatory functions of the former Housing Corporation. It would regulate local authority housing from April 2010.

The presentation outlined the following key aspects of the TSA's functions:

- (a) The TSA raised "the standard of services for tenants."
- (b) The TSA acts as a champion for tenants, standing up for their interests and aspirations.
- (c) The TSA created choice in the way housing was managed, the choices offered to tenants, the landlords who provided housing and the way housing providers raised funds.
- (d) The TSA had Regulation 10 Principles of Regulation:
  - National Standards – Based on clear criteria
  - National Standards – Clear, succinct
  - Required providers to agree local standards with their tenants
  - Understand and respond to particular tenants' needs
  - Promotion of transparency
  - Good Governance
  - Promotion of effective forms of independent validation, audit and benchmarking
  - Focus for 2010/11 – identifying/addressing worst performers
  - Supporting principle of "sector-led" improvement
  - Registration criteria – encouraging "new entrants."

**Short Notice Inspections**

- (e) Inspections would take place from April 2010
- (f) There would be a five day notice period, prior to an inspection taking place. The inspection would last three days.
- (g) The inspection would ordinarily be triggered by poor performance in a particular area but not necessarily.
- (h) The inspections would cover service areas like tenant participation, gas servicing, repairs, housing management, allocations and value for money.
- (i) The inspection would involve a draft report which was negotiable, a round table meeting and final report, 2-3 weeks later.

The Housing Directorate were making preparations. A Continuous Improvement Group was being set up to produce a Continuous Improvement Plan. It was noted

that the Housing Directorate already has some requirements in place. Housing Service Strategies on Tenant Participation and Equality and Diversity were in place as well as Housing Service Standards, the Charter Mark Award, the ISO Quality Assurance Standard and a good record of tenant satisfaction.

**RESOLVED:**

That the presentation concerning the Tenant Services Authority's Draft Regulatory Framework and Short Notice Inspections be noted.

**31. THE TENANT SERVICES AUTHORITY'S NEW DRAFT REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL HOUSING IN ENGLAND**

The Panel received a report from Mr R Wilson, Assistant Director of Housing, regarding The Tenant Services Authority's (TSA) new draft regulatory framework for social housing in England.

The Tenant Services Authority was the Government's new social housing regulator who's aim was the raising the standards of services for all social housing tenants.

The TSA were undertaking a statutory consultation on their new Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England which would commence from 1 April 2010. The consultation sought the views of housing providers on whether the proposals met the Government's objectives. The consultation period ended on 5 February 2010, following which a decision statement would be issued before the new powers were activated.

At its meeting on 15 December 2009, the Panel considered a draft report to the Housing Portfolio Holder on the Housing Service Standards 2009 and Housing Charter. It was further agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder that the standards and performance be reviewed again in 2010, or when required to comply with the new Regulatory Framework.

Under the new Regulatory Framework, the TSA had contracted the Audit Commission to undertake comprehensive short notice inspections on its behalf. It was expected that providers who were under-performing in certain areas would be inspected, with the emphasis being placed on homelessness, allocations, housing management, gas safety and repairs and maintenance. The Audit Commission would notify the Council 5 days in advance of their visit. Officers have set up a Continuous Improvement Group to draw up a Continuous Improvement Plan setting out all of the actions required in order to ensure that the Housing Directorate were postponed for the Short Notice Inspection regime.

A sub-group of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation had met and were recommending to the Federation a proposed response to the consultation paper. Mr R Wilson presented a proposed draft response to the consultation paper on behalf of the Council which was agreed by the Scrutiny Panel.

**RESOLVED:**

That the proposed response to the Tenant Services Authority's Draft Regulatory Framework prepared by the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) on behalf of the Council be agreed.

**32. REVIEW OF THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

The Panel received a report regarding the Review of the Homelessness Strategy.

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, Local Authorities have a duty to review and publish their Homelessness Strategy on at least a 5 yearly basis. As this area of work regularly changed it was agreed that the Council's Strategy would be reviewed every three years.

At its meeting on 30 July 2009, as part of its Work Programme, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered the Homelessness Strategy prior to its approval by the Cabinet. The Panel requested that it reviewed the strategy's Action Plan on a six monthly basis. This additional task had been added to the Panel's Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:**

That the 6 month Review of the Homelessness Strategy be noted.

**33. REVIEW OF THE SCOPE OF THE HOUSING APPEALS AND REVIEW PANEL**

The Panel received a report regarding the Review of the Scope of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel.

Following the formal business of a meeting of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel (HARP) on 20 August 2009, members of the Panel had an informal discussion with the Director of Housing and the Assistant Director (Democratic Services) about whether the scope of the housing appeals and reviews undertaken by the Panel, in accordance with its Terms of Reference, were too wide. Concern was expressed by members about the cost and the member and officer time involved about relatively minor matters. The HARP noted that no other Directorate had any appeals of officer decisions considered in the same way as officers of the Housing Directorate. It was therefore agreed that the Director of Housing should produce a report on this issue.

The draft report proposed that the HARP should only consider housing appeals and homelessness reviews for specific types of cases, that merit the officer and member resources involved, and where the outcome of a decision had a significant effect on the applicant/appellant. The draft report proposed a list of specific types of cases that the HARP would consider in future.

Following consultation with members of the HARP and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation the report would be considered by the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel in March 2010. This Panel would then report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then report to the Full Council meeting in April. The Chairman of the HARP had suggested that the Housing Scrutiny Panel may wish to consider the proposals at its next meeting in March 2010. The Panel agreed to add the item to its Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Review of the Scope of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel, be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel at its next meeting in March 2010 and added to the Panel's Work Programme accordingly.

**34. OPEN MARKET SHARED OWNERSHIP SCHEME**



The Panel received a report from Mr A Hall regarding the proposed Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme. This item was tabled at the meeting as it was of some urgency.

At its last meeting, the Panel considered the report of its Affordable Housing Sub-Group on possible ways of increasing the amount of affordable housing within the District. The Sub-Group's report and recommendations were being considered by the Cabinet on 1 February 2010. One of the recommendations was that the £350,000 budget provision agreed by the Cabinet to invest in the Open Market Shared Ownership scheme, should be retained within the Capital Programme. Also, that the Director of Housing should contact other Homebuy agents to explore the possibility of an existing Homebuy Agent working with the Council to operate the scheme in partnership with Moat Housing, or through a similar scheme to the Government's MyChoice Homebuy Scheme, with the Council undertaking the role of the Homes and Communities Agency.

However, since the meeting, the Director of Housing had approached two other Homebuy agents, both of whom had said that they were not interested in operating such a scheme. The Director had then approached the Council's remaining four preferred Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) Partners to gauge interest. Two had said they would not be interested, although the two agents were due to consider the issue at internal meetings in due course.

In view of the response, it was suggested that the Panel considered alternative recommendations to the Cabinet on the proposed use of the £350,000 capital budget for the Open Market Shared Ownership scheme in the event that no RSLs were interested in operating such a scheme. The Panel were presented with nine options for recommendation to the Cabinet. Following consideration the Panel chose Option 7, which read as follows:

***In the event that no RSLs are interested in operating an Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme, the £350,000 budget be used to supplement both the schemes referred to in Options 5 and 6 referred in the report with additional funding, and provide (lesser amounts of) both additional SHG and Home Ownership Grants.***

In the case of Options 5 and 6, the budget would supplement the proposed £375,000 for a housing association to purchase open market properties. This would enable a further 5/7 properties to be purchased and allocated to Council nominees at affordable rents and would supplement the proposed £170,000 budget for the provision of Home Ownership Grants enabling a further 6 Home Ownership Grants to be provided.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the possibility that no RSLs may be interested in working with the Council to provide the proposed Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme be noted;
- (2) That in the event that no RSLs are interested, an alternative recommendation be made to the Cabinet on the use of the existing £350,000 budget for the proposed Open Market Home Ownership Scheme;

(3) That the budget be used to supplement both the schemes outlined below with additional funding, and provide (lesser amounts of) both additional SHG and Home Ownership Grants:

(a) That the budget be used to supplement the proposed £375,000 budget for a housing association to purchase open market properties, enabling a further 5 or 7 properties to be purchased and allocated to Council nominees at affordable rents; and

(b) That the budget be used to supplement the proposed £170,000 budget for the provision of Home Ownership Grants which would enable a further 6 Home Ownership Grants to be provided;

(4) That a report proposing the recommendation be submitted to the Cabinet in advance of the meeting, based on the report to the Scrutiny Panel, with the report's text agreed with the Chairman of the Housing Scrutiny Panel; and

(5) That the Chairman of the Housing Scrutiny Panel present the alternative recommendation to the Cabinet when he presents the Affordable Housing Group's report.

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

There would be a verbal update from the Chairman of the Panel to the forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**36. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next scheduled meeting of the Panel would be on Thursday 25 March 2010 at 7.00p.m.

## 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 Standing Panel – 2009/10

| Item   | Report<br>Deadline /<br>Priority | Progress / Comments                  | Programme of<br>Future Meetings  |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| (1) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants      | High                             | <b>Completed</b> - July 2009 meeting | <del>30 July 2009</del><br><del>29 October 2009 –</del><br>Postponed<br><del>15 December 2009</del><br>21 January 2010<br>and<br>25 March 2010 |
| (2) Review of the Homelessness Strategy                        | High                             | <b>Completed</b> - July 2009 meeting |  |
| (3) Review of Housing Performance Indicators                   | Low                              | <b>Completed</b> - July 2009 meeting |  |
| (4) Older Peoples' Strategic Review – Response to Consultation | High                             | <b>Completed</b> - July 2009 meeting |  |
| (5) Private Sector Housing Strategy                            | High                             | <b>Completed</b> - July 2009 meeting |  |
| (6) Revised Criteria for the CARE Handyperson Scheme           | High                             | <b>Completed</b> - July 2009 meeting |  |
| (7) Presentation by In Touch Support                           | Medium                           | <b>Completed</b> - July 2009 meeting |  |
| (8) Review of Housing Standards                                | Medium                           | <b>Completed</b> - December 2009     |  |
| (9) Housing Service Strategy on Housing Allocations            | Medium                           | <b>Completed</b> - December 2009     |  |
| (10) Housing Service Strategy on Housing Advice                | Medium                           | <b>Completed</b> - December 2009     |  |

|   |        |   |  |
|---|--------|---|--|
| (11) Housing Service Strategy on Equality and Diversity   | Medium | <b>Completed</b> - December 2009  |  |
| (12) Six-monthly Progress report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan   | Low    | <b>Completed</b> - December 2009  |  |
| (13) Policy on Fire Escape Routes in Flats  | High   | <b>Completed</b> - December 2009  |  |
| (14) Affordable Housing Sub-Group:<br>(a) Increasing Affordable Housing<br>(b) Council House-building   | High   | <b>Completed</b> - December 2009  |  |
| (15) Homelessness Strategy – Action Plan Progress Report  | Low    | <b>Completed</b> - January 2010   |  |
| (16) Presentation on proposed new Regulatory Framework, Short-Notice Inspections and the Continuous Improvement Plan  | Low    | <b>Completed</b> - January 2010<br>Added to Work Programme at December 2009 meeting |  |
| (17) Council response to the TSA's Consultation Paper on its new Regulatory Framework   | Medium | <b>Completed</b> - January 2010   |  |
| (18) Consultation on whether or not the Housing Scrutiny Panel wishes to be formally consulted on proposed changes to the scope of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel | High   | <b>Completed</b> – January 2010<br>Added to Work Programme at January 2010 meeting  |  |

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|--|--------|---|
| (19) Proposed recommendation to Cabinet on the use of the existing budget for an Open Market Home Ownership Scheme if no RSLs wish to operate a scheme | High   | <b>Completed</b> – January 2010<br>Added to Work Programme at January 2010 meeting                        |
| (20) Briefing on the proposed Council rent increase for 2010/11  | Low    | <b>Completed</b> – January 2010<br>Added to Work Programme at January 2010 meeting                        |
| (21) Housing Service Strategy on Harassment  | Medium | <b>On agenda for this meeting</b> – March 2010<br>Originally scheduled for January 2010 meeting           |
| (22) Six-monthly Progress report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan  | Low    | <b>On agenda for this meeting</b> – March 2010  |
| (23) Six-monthly Progress report on Housing Strategy Action Plan   | Low    | <b>On agenda for this meeting</b> - March 2010  |
| (24) HRA Business Plan 2010/11   | High   | <b>On agenda for this meeting</b> - March 2010  |
| (25) Tenant Participation Progress Report  | Low    | <b>On agenda for this meeting</b> - March 2010  |
| (26) Progress report on the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme  | Low    | <b>On agenda for this meeting</b> - March 2010<br>Added to Work Programme at December 2009 meeting        |
| (27) Consultation on proposals to the Constitution and Members Services Scrutiny Panel relating to the scope of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel   | Medium | <b>On agenda for this meeting</b> - March 2010 meeting<br>Added to Work Programme at January 2010 meeting |

|  |        |  |  |
|--|--------|--|--|
| (28) Housing Allocations Scheme – Review Policy/Timetable  | High   | <b>On agenda for this meeting – March 2010</b><br>Added to Work Programme for March 2010 meeting   |  |
| (29) Options for cross-border nominations within the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium          | Medium | <b>On agenda for this meeting – March 2010</b><br>Added to Work Programme for March 2010 meeting   |  |
| (30) Whether the Scrutiny Panel would like a presentation on Homelessness Prevention at its next meeting | Low    | <b>On agenda for this meeting – March 2010</b><br>Added to Work Programme for March 2010 meeting   |  |
| (31) Housing Regulatory Framework Action Plan  | High   | <b>On agenda for this meeting – March 2010</b><br>Added to Work Programme for March 2010 meeting   |  |
| (32) HouseMark Benchmarking Report on Value for Money of Housing Services                                | Medium | <b>On agenda for this meeting – March 2010</b><br>Added to Work Programme for March 2010 meeting   |  |
| (33) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme   | High   | <b>Originally scheduled for October 2009 meeting. Now scheduled for June 2010 meeting –</b><br>Revised Government Guidance on Allocations was only received in December 2009, that needs to be taken into account for the Review. A separate report is being presented to the Scrutiny Panel in March 2010 on the proposed review process (See Item 28 above). |  |



## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 25 March 2010**

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

**Subject: Deferment of the Review of the Allocations Scheme**

**Officer contact for further information:  
R Wilson, Assistant Director of Housing (01992 56 4419)**

**Committee Secretary: M Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the reasons for the deferment of the Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme until its July 2010 meeting.**

### **Report:**

1. At its meeting on 21 January 2010, when considering its Work Programme, the Director of Housing explained to the Panel that he recommended a delay in considering the Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme for 2010. The Scheme is normally considered by the Panel in December each year and approved by the Cabinet in January with the updated Scheme coming into force on 1 April.

2. The reason for the delay this year is due to the Government's new statutory guidance on Social Housing Allocations for Local Authorities in England ("Fair and Flexible") not being received until late in January 2010.

3. Under the guidance, local authorities are now required to meet certain conditions, and have some additional flexibility when framing and implementing their schemes which include:

- Extending the external agencies they consult to include Social Care, Health, Probation, Children's Services and the Voluntary Sector.
- "Engaging fully" with the local community in developing allocation priorities, including applicants, the general public and the community and voluntary sector.
- Making appropriate information about allocations widely available in a way that is easy to access and understand including, how long applicants are likely to have to wait and the general profile of the housing stock.
- Undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment to consider the impact of the changes on people with the protected characteristics of age, race, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief or gender reassignment.
- Setting local priorities alongside the reasonable preference categories, such as promoting job-related moves and supporting those who are in work.

- Considering some preference to existing tenants who are willing to move to take up employment or training opportunities.
- Considering giving priority to attract essential workers into the District by giving them priority for a small number of properties.
- Considering if a small percentage of lets should be allocated to existing tenants who wish to transfer.

4. As can be seen, in order to comply with the requirements of the statutory guidance a number of actions need to be considered and/or undertaken, which will need some months to complete. Attached as an appendix to the agenda is an action plan listing the actions, the responsible officer and the timescale for completion. The Panel is therefore asked to note the reasons for the deferment of the review of the Allocations Scheme until its meeting on 29 July, with a new scheme being implemented with effect from 1 October 2010, and the subsequent review being undertaken by 1 April 2012.

5. Members are asked to note that although there is a legal requirement under the Housing Act 1996 to have an Allocations Scheme, the Council is not required to review the Scheme on an annual basis.

**Reason for decision:**

To review the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme in accordance with the Government's new Statutory Guidance.

**Options considered and rejected:**

To review the Housing Allocations Scheme prior to October 2010, not taking into account the Government's new statutory Guidance.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will be informed of the matter at their meeting on 23 March 2010; any comments they have will be reported verbally at the meeting.

**Resource implications:**

Budget provision: N/A  
 Personnel: N/A  
 Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A  
 Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1996

Background papers: Current Housing Allocations Scheme and the Governments Statutory Guidance.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A  
 Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A

## APPENDIX

| Action  | Responsible Officer  | Deadline (2010) |
|---|----------------------|-----------------|
| Draft the updated version of the Allocations Scheme   | R Wilson             | March           |
| Consult with partner agencies now including Health, Probation, Social Care and the Voluntary Sector | R Wilson             | 31 May          |
| Consultation through "Housing News" with all tenants and applicants                                 | C Sobey              | 31 May          |
| Consultation with the local community through "The Forester" magazine                               | C Sobey<br>J Boreham | 31 May          |
| Set up a Tenant Talk-back Panel to consider the Allocations Scheme                                  | R Jones              | 31 May          |
| Consideration of the Allocations Scheme by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation                  | R Jones              | 30 June         |
| Complete an Equality Impact Assessment on the Allocations Scheme                                    | R Wilson             | 30 June         |
| Consideration of the Allocations Scheme by the Housing Scrutiny Panel                               | R Wilson             | 29 July         |
| Consideration of the Allocations Scheme by the Cabinet  | R Wilson             | 13 September    |

| <b>Action</b>  | <b>Responsible Officer</b> | <b>Deadline (2010)</b> |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Implementation of the revised Allocations Scheme                                 | R Wilson                   | 1 October              |
| Make information available more widely in accordance with the Statutory Guidance | R Wilson<br>C Sobey        | 31 December            |
| Next review of the Allocations Scheme by the Housing Scrutiny Panel              | R Wilson                   | December (2011)        |

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of Meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

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

**Subject: Presentation on Homelessness Prevention**

**Officer contact for further information:**

**A Hall – Director of Housing (01992 56 4004)**

**Committee Secretary: M Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) That the Housing Scrutiny Panel receives a presentation from the Housing Options Manager at its next meeting, on “The Council’s Approach to Homelessness Prevention”, including initiatives on dealing with domestic violence; and**
- (2) That other Members of Council be invited to the presentation.**

### **Report:**

1. Following a suggestion from Cllr. Mrs L. Wagland, the Housing Portfolio Holder has suggested that the Housing Scrutiny Panel may find it useful to receive a presentation on the approach the Housing Directorate takes in respect of dealing with cases involving domestic violence. It is suggested that this could be expanded to include the Directorate’s overall approach to homelessness prevention, including the approach taken on domestic violence, and would be presented by Russell Wallace, Housing Options Manager. Other Members of Council could also be invited.
2. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider whether or not it would like to receive such a presentation at its next meeting, in July 2010.

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## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of Meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

**Subject: Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2009/10 (Key Action Plan) – Progress Report**

**Officer contact for further information: A Hall, Director of Housing (01992 56 4004)  
Committee Secretary: M Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Panel considers the second Six-Month Progress Report for the Key Action Plan contained within the HRA Business Plan 2009/10 and provides any feedback to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing accordingly.**

### **Report:**

1. In March 2009, the Council's latest Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan (2009/10) was produced, incorporating the Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan. This document set out the Council's objectives, strategies and plans as landlord, in relation to the management and maintenance of its own housing stock.
2. An important section of the HRA Business Plan is the Key Action Plan. This sets out the proposed actions the Council would be taking, primarily, over the next year. Having included the Key Action Plan within the Business Plan, it is good practice that the progress made with the stated actions is monitored; one of the Scrutiny Panel's Terms of Reference is to review progress during the year.
3. At its meeting in December 2009, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered its first Six-Month Progress Report on the actions contained within the Key Action Plan for 2009/10. A second progress report, as at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010, is attached as an appendix to this report for consideration.
4. It should be noted that a number of tasks included within the Key Action Plan relating to responsive repairs have not yet been completed, since they are included as part of the "Repairs Refresh Programme", involving the appointment a private repairs management company to manage the response repairs service, which has been agreed in principle by the Cabinet. A separate member-level Repairs Management Contract Advisory Group (including the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Housing Scrutiny Panel) has been formed to oversee the arrangements and good progress is being made.
5. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the Progress Report and to feed back to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing any comments it considers appropriate.
6. The HRA Business Plan for 2010/11, including the Key Action Plan for 2010/11, is reported to the Scrutiny Panel under a separate agenda item.

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HRA Business Plan 2009/10  
ACTION PLAN

| Action   | Corporate Housing Objective | Responsibility for Achievement                         | Target Date | Progress (as at 1 <sup>st</sup> March 2010)  |
|--|-----------------------------|--|-------------|--|
| <b>Housing General</b>   |                             |  |             |  |
| Analyse the information obtained from the census of Council tenants  | HO 2                        | Principal Housing Officer (Information/Strategy)       | Sept 2009   | <p><b>Achieved</b> – Data from the Census is now available (for those who provided information).</p> <p>A further survey of tenants is now required to obtain information relating to equalities, which will be undertaken in 2010/11.</p> <p><b>This has been added to the Action Plan for the HRA Business Plan 2010/11.</b></p>   |
| Complete the Customer Perspective Programme for the whole of the Housing Directorate, examining the all interfaces between Housing and customers | HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5        | Director of Housing                                    | Sept 2010   | <p><b>Ahead of Target</b> – 26 out of 28 separate housing functions have been examined, leading to 93 individual (mainly small) improvements through the Action Plan, most of which have been actioned. It is envisaged that the Programme will be completed by the end of April 2010, and the Action Plan will be reported to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, in accordance with the Charter Mark Assessor's recommendation.</p>   |
| Investigate the implications of the proposed withdrawal of support for the OHMS integrated housing system, but the new supplier, Northgate       | HO 1 / 2 / 3 /              | Asst. Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources) | Dec 2009    | <p><b>Achieved</b> – In 2008, Northgate announced that it would be withdrawing its support for the OHMS System in 2013. Following representations from the Council and other Northgate clients, the date of the withdrawal of support was put back to 2015. However, Northgate has recently announced that it will now continue to support OHMS indefinitely. An appraisal has been undertaken by the Housing Directorate on whether the Council should continue with OHMS, or procure a new system. This concluded that, for the foreseeable future, OHMS should be retained and developed further.</p> |

| <b>Housing Management</b>   |      |  |            |   |
|---|------|--|------------|---|
| Continue the Home Ownership Grants Scheme in 2009/10, enabling tenants to purchase their own home and vacate their Council property for occupation by a housing applicant | HO 1 | Housing Resources Manager                          | April 2010 | <b>Achieved and in progress</b> – The Scheme has been continued into 2009/10. A good response was received, with the Scheme oversubscribed. One of the 5 selected applicants for the £34,000 grant has completed, a further completion is imminent and the remaining three are still seeking properties to purchase on the open market. The Cabinet has agreed that 6-12 Home Ownership Grants of £28,000 each should be made available in 2010/11.   |
| Agree a policy for the approach to be taken on the enforcement of unauthorised parking estates, taking account of the difficulties encountered.                           | HO 2 | Asst. Director (Operations)                        | April 2009 | <b>Achieved</b> – Following lengthy deliberations by the Housing Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet an approach has been agreed, whereby each location will be considered on its merits, in consultation with ward members.   |
| Introduce a facility for tenants to apply for the Housing Register on-line  | HO 2 | Housing Options Manager                            | Sept 2009  | <b>Not Achieved</b> – It has been established that the Northgate OHMS Housing System is not capable of accepting Housing Register applications on-line (although interested applicants are able to download a hard copy application form to complete and return). Discussions have now commenced with Locata, the Council's choice based lettings (CBL) agency, and other councils in the CBL Consortium to consider the possibility of an on-line housing application being added to the choice based lettings system.<br><br><b>This has been added to the Action Plan for the HRA Business Plan 2010/11.</b> |
| <b>Tenant Participation</b>   |      |  |            |   |
| Facilitate the formation of two additional recognised tenants associations within the District  | HO 4 | Tenant Participation Officer                       | April 2009 | <b>Not Achieved</b> – Attempts have been made to establish tenants associations and/or tenants panels throughout the District, and it has been concluded that the Tenant Participation Officer should now only respond to interest from tenants and members, rather than further attempting pro-active action. However, the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation now has a good range of members.  |
| Undertake a more detailed and focussed survey on the information provided to tenants and their future needs   | HO 4 | Principal Housing Officer (Information / Strategy) | Sept 2009  | <b>No Longer Required</b> – This was originally included in response to a previous Tenants Satisfaction Survey. However, the most recent Tenants Satisfaction Survey suggests that this is no longer an issue.  |

|  |              |                                       |            |  |
|--|--------------|---------------------------------------|------------|--|
| Investigate the publication of a calendar for tenants, promoting the activities of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation | HO 4         | Tenant Participation Officer          | Dec 2009   | <b>Not Achieved</b> - It has been concluded that this is not the best use of resources allocated for tenant participation and is no longer being pursued.  |
| Introduce "Tenant Talkback Panels", providing fora to provide qualitative feedback on housing services                     | HO 2 / 3 / 4 | Tenant Participation Officer          | April 2010 | <p><b>In Progress</b> – A list of tenants interested in taking part in different panels has been formulated, and arrangements to hold Panel meetings are in progress</p> <p>Four Talkback Panels (TPs) are planned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Disability TP has been established and has met.</li> <li>• A Repairs and Maintenance TP has been established and its first meeting will be held in March 2010.</li> <li>• A Reading TP (which will comment on draft leaflets and documents for tenants) has been established and its first meeting will be held in early 2010/11.</li> <li>• An Allocations TP will be formed and meet around May 2010.</li> </ul> <p>Consideration is being given to the formation of a Housing Management TP.</p> <p><b>These have been added to the Action Plan for the HRA Business Plan 2010/11.</b></p> |
| <b>Supporting People and Supported Housing</b>   |              |                                       |            |  |
| Implement the findings of the Review of the Council's Careline Service undertaken in 2008                                  | HO 1 / 2     | Asst Director of Housing (Operations) | Sept 2009  | <p><b>In Progress</b>– The review concluded that the Careline Service should continue to be provided in-house, but that consideration should be given to increased use of the Careline centre, with an enlargement of the Careline premises. Works to enlarge the Careline Centre into a vacant adjacent house are in progress, and the Careline Centre is currently in temporary accommodation. Discussions have been held with Harlow DC, which intends to tender for the provision of Careline Services, and EFDC will be submitting a tender. After the Careline Centre has been enlarged, the Centre will undertake active monitoring of EFDC's CCTV cameras throughout the District.</p>   |

|  |          |   |            |  |
|--|----------|---|------------|--|
|  |          |   |            | <b>These latter two tasks have been added to the Action Plan for the HRA Business Plan 2010/11.</b>  |
| Seek accreditation of the Council's Careline Service from the Association of Social Alarm Providers (ASAP) | HO 2     | Housing Manager (Older People's Services) | Sept 2009  | <b>In Progress</b> – Good progress has been made, with the assistance of a consultant. It is envisaged that TSA accreditation will be achieved around September 2010, once the Careline Centre expansion has been completed.   |
| Consider the future of Jessopp Court, the Council's scheme for frail elderly people in Waltham Abbey       | HO 1 / 2 | Housing Manager (Older People's Services) | April 2010 | <b>In Progress</b> - Discussions are being held with Essex County Council Adult Social Care on the future of Jessopp Court. Essex CC is of the view that Jessopp Court is not suitable as an extra care scheme for older people, so other options will need to be considered<br>The Housing Portfolio Holder has agreed to a Strategic Review of the Council's Older People's Accommodation being undertaken, and a Consultant's Brief is currently being drafted.<br>The Housing Portfolio Holder has also agreed to the Council working in partnership with Essex CC on a PFI Bid to the Department of Health for the provision of an Extra Care Scheme in the District. If this is successful, one outcome of the Strategic Review may be that Jessopp Court is remodelled into a sheltered housing scheme. |
| <b>Housing Repairs and Maintenance</b>   |          |   |            |  |
| Implement a programme for repairs and maintenance expenditure over 5 and 30 years                          | HO 3     | Housing Assets Manager                    | Ongoing    | <b>Achieved</b> – A new 30-year programme has been created, based on detailed stock condition data collected in-house and from actual works completed under the Decent Homes Programme. The new 30-year programme forecasts expenditure needs over the same period based on an extended "Remaining Life" of each building component.   |
| Implement an upgrade to the latest version of Codeman software   | HO 3     | Housing Assets Manager                    | July 2009  | <b>In Progress</b> - Stock condition data has been saved to an Excel spreadsheet until a new stock asset database has been identified and implemented.   |

|   |          |  |           |   |
|---|----------|--|-----------|---|
| Publish clear service standards for planned maintenance, Decent Homes, repairs, Right to Repairs and Leaseholder responsibilities, which are available in printed leaflet form and on the web site. | HO 3     | Housing Assets Manager                   | July 2010 | <b>In Progress</b> - This is included as part of the "Repairs Refresh Programme", which commenced in July 2009, with the appointment of a specialist procurement consultant, who's role is to assist the Council in specifying the targets and responsibilities of the Repairs Management Contractor. A Repairs and Maintenance Tenant Talkback Panel has been arranged in March 2010 to discuss and agree tenant expectations. |
| Publish the Voids standards on the website and issue a copy to all tenants in advance of them undertaking an accompanied viewing or a void offer.   | HO 3     | Customer Repairs Manager                 | July 2010 | <b>Delayed progress</b> - This is included as part of the "Repairs Refresh Programme", which commenced in July 2009, with the appointment of a specialist procurement consultant, who's role is to assist the Council in specifying the targets and responsibilities of the Repairs Management Contractor.  |
| Undertake a review of the repairs responsibilities to ensure they dovetail with other service strategies ie ASBO, introductory tenancies, demoted tenancies   | HO 3     | Assistant Director of Housing (Property) | Dec 2010  | <b>Delayed progress</b> - This is included as part of the "Repairs Refresh Programme", which commenced in July 2009, with the appointment of a specialist procurement consultant, who's role is to assist the Council in specifying the targets and responsibilities of the Repairs Management Contractor.  |
| Relocate the Housing Repairs Section from the Civic Offices to the Epping Depot to operate alongside, and in conjunction with, the Building Maintenance Works Unit                                  | HO 1 / 3 | Assistant Director of Housing (Property) | Sept 2009 | <b>Achieved</b> - at the end of October 2009.   |
| Timetable at least one meeting each year with the Tenants & Leaseholders Federation to discuss the repairs and maintenance expenditure programme.   | HO 3 / 4 | Assistant Director of Housing (Property) | Ongoing   | <b>Achieved-</b> This is undertaken as part of the Business Planning process at the beginning of each financial year. The Business Plan was issued and then agreed by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in March 2009. The Federation will be consulted in March 2010 for the 2010/11 programme.  |
| Introduce Asbestos record cards in all properties, and maintain the records for contractors' and tenants' use.  | HO 3     | Customer Repairs Manager                 | Sept 2010 | <b>Delayed progress</b> - This is included as part of the "Repairs Refresh Programme", which commenced in July 2009, with the appointment of a specialist procurement consultant, who's role is to assist the Council in specifying the targets and responsibilities of the Repairs Management Contractor.  |

|   |          |  |          |   |
|---|----------|--|----------|---|
| Undertake periodic reviews of the outcome of difficult to let properties and seek ways of enhancing the services provided to these dwellings.   | HO 3     | Assistant Director of Housing (Property) | Dec 2009 | <b>Achieved</b> – This has been undertaken as part of the Voids Working Party meetings throughout the year.   |
| Explore options whereby an emphasis is put on “fix first time” for responsive repairs   | HO 1 / 3 | Assistant Director of Housing (Property) | Dec 2009 | <b>Partially Achieved</b> – Craftworkers are now undertaking inspections, which allows them to fix the repair at the first call. The systems are being developed to allow a better understanding of the materials that need to be carried on the vans so that targets can be set and monitored.   |
| Seek through the Essex Hub a framework agreement with specialist contractors for asbestos removal, door entry installations and maintenance, drainage clearance and renewals, PVCu window installations and maintenance as well as ad-hoc repairs where necessary | HO 1 / 3 | Assistant Director of Housing (Property) | Mar 2010 | <b>Partially achieved</b> –Framework agreements have been tendered and let for PVCu window maintenance and replacement. A Maintenance and installation of door entry systems is currently out to tender. Asbestos removal tender documents have been drawn up ready to tender. Other framework agreements are yet to be tendered.             |
| Continue feasibility studies into alternative fuel sources for properties in rural communities where mains gas is not available.  | HO 3     | Housing Assets Manager                   | Mar 2010 | <b>Partially achieved</b> – 4 properties in rural communities now have solar panels installed as part of the re-roofing programme linked to the energy efficiency programme. Electric boilers have been trailed successfully and are being installed in areas without mains gas. Grant funding is being sourced for external wall insulation. |
| Review all projects with a contract value in excess of £1m on completion to identify any lessons learnt.  | HO 3     | Housing Assets Manager                   | On-going | <b>Achieved</b> – This is undertaken in accordance with Contract Standing Orders. The next contract to be reviewed is the Springfields Improvement Scheme.  |
| Report on the outcome of future tenant satisfaction surveys for all void properties let.  | HO 3     | Housing Repairs Manager                  | Apr 2009 | <b>Achieved</b> – Void Property surveys have now been introduced. The results are being monitored and will inform decision making as part of the “Repairs Refresh Programme”  |
| Hold training sessions at empty properties to enable officers to gain a common understanding of specification requirements. To be undertaken annually.  | HO 3     | Housing Repairs Manager                  | On-going | <b>Achieved</b> – Generic Officers (Repairs and Voids Officers) are being introduced as part of the Repairs Service Restructure under the Repairs Refresh Programme. Former Repairs Officers will be trained on void property standards.  |

|  |          |  |             |   |
|--|----------|--|-------------|---|
| Seek to reduce the target response times for routine non-urgent repairs from 8-weeks to 4-weeks  | HO 3     | Assistant Director of Housing (Property) | Oct 2010    | <b>Partially achieved</b> – The target was reduced from 8-weeks to 6-weeks in April 2009. However, the move from 6-weeks to 4-weeks is included as part of the “Repairs Refresh Programme”, which commenced in July 2009, with the appointment of a specialist procurement consultant, who’s role is to assist the Council in specifying the targets and responsibilities of the Repairs Management Contractor. |
| Introduce generic repairs and voids officers.  | HO 3     | Housing Repairs Manager                  | Dec 2009    | <b>Achieved</b> – Generic Officers (Repairs and Voids Officers) are being introduced as part of the Repairs Service restructure under the Repairs Refresh Programme.  |
| Hold site visits at blocks of flats with tenant representatives to monitor repairs to, and condition of, communal areas                                    | HO 3     | Housing Repairs Manager                  | Apr 2010    | <b>Delayed progress</b> - This is included as part of the “Repairs Refresh Programme”, which commenced in July 2009, with the appointment of a specialist procurement consultant, who’s role is to assist the Council in specifying the targets and responsibilities of the Repairs Management Contractor.  |
| Appoint an External Management Contractor to oversee the combined Building Maintenance Works Unit and Repairs Team as agreed by the Cabinet in March 2008. | HO 1 / 3 | Assistant Director of Housing (Property) | August 2010 | <b>In progress</b> – 15 expressions of interest were received as a result of the OJEU advert. These will be vetted as part of the pre-qualification process, and tenders will be sought in April 2010. The Repairs Advisory Group is overseeing the appointment.  |
| Seek to include at least one local business on the list of tenderers for all future contracts.   | HO 3     | Housing Assets Manager                   | On-going    | <b>Achieved</b> – This is now undertaken as part of all tender opportunities.   |

### Key to Corporate Housing Objectives

- HO 1 - Value for Money
- HO 2 - Housing Management
- HO 3 - Repairs and Maintenance
- HO 4 - Tenant Participation
- HO 5 - Housing Finance





## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

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

**Subject: HouseMark Benchmarking Report on Value for Money of Housing Services (2008/9)**



**Officer contact for further information:**

**Alan Hall – Director of Housing (01992 564004)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the HouseMark Benchmarking Report on Value for Money of Housing Services (2008/9) be considered, and that the Housing Scrutiny Panel provides any comments on the Benchmarking Report to the Housing Portfolio Holder.**

### **Report:**

1. The Housing Directorate places great importance on benchmarking its housing performance and costs against other housing providers (both councils and registered social landlords). It benchmarks in two main ways.

#### *Annual Value for Money Review*

2. Each year, the Council compares its performance and costs for all of its main service areas with other groups of local authorities, namely others in the Council's "Nearest Neighbours" Group and other local authorities in Essex, using the Audit Commission's VFM Profile Tool. A Review Report is produced, which sets out:

- The Council's performance or cost for the indicator
- The Council's ranking, for each performance or cost indicator, compared to the other councils
- Details of the best performing authority
- A commentary from the relevant Service Director on each performance and cost indicator, including any proposed action to improve performance or reduce costs.

3. The Review is reported to the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel, which considers the relative performance and costs, as well as the Service Director's Commentary, and identifies any further action required – which may include a service review.

## *Housemark*

4. The Housing Directorate has been a member of “Housemark” for a number of years. Housemark is a national housing benchmarking organisation, which enables housing organisations to submit detailed information on their performance and costs, and then to compare these with other housing organisations nationally.

5. Housemark enables member organisations to compare themselves with user-defined data sets. For example, the Council can compare itself with all housing organisations nationally; all district councils; all local authorities; or all housing associations. Housemark can also define the locations (by regions) of those organisations to be included within the comparison, and can restrict the comparison to housing organisations of more or less than a defined number of properties.

6. In previous years, the Director of Housing has produced an annual Benchmarking Report, based on information obtained from Housemark’s web-tool, which compared how well the Council ranked against other local authorities and housing associations. The report was considered in detail by the Housing Scrutiny Panel and established that, generally, the Council performed extremely well compared with other housing organisations.

7. In 2009, all the required performance and cost data for the Council’s Housing Service relating to 2008/9 was uploaded to the Housemark website. This data was then verified by Housemark. In February 2010, Housemark produced (for the first time) its own independent and detailed Benchmarking Report for the Council for 2008/9. The report compared the Council to 37 other stock-retained councils across England.

8. In addition to the detailed benchmarking information, Housemark also provides a helpful Value for Money (VFM) Summary. The VFM Summary is organised in a way to illustrate how the Council’s housing performance – in terms of cost and quality - compares with other stock-retained local authorities, in respect of the four specific service areas of the TSA’s proposed National Standards, covering:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and Community

9. The VFM Summary places the Council’s performance within one of the four quartiles, as follows:

- |                                  |                                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Best quartile                  | Within the best 25% of councils  |
| • 2 <sup>nd</sup> Best Quartile  | Within the best 50% of councils  |
| • 2 <sup>nd</sup> Worst Quartile | Within the worst 50% of councils |
| • Worst Quartile                 | Within the worst 25% of councils |

10. Housemark’s VFM Summary is provided on the Appendix. The quartile performance, in respect of those cost and quality indicators for which the Council had data is summarised on the next page:

| <b>Summary of EFDC's Quartile Placement<br/>KPIs - Cost &amp; Quality</b> |                  |                     |
|---|------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Quartile</b>   | <b>Cost KPIs</b> | <b>Quality KPIs</b> |
| <b>Best</b>   | 4                | 6                   |
| <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Best</b>  | -                | 2                   |
| <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Worst</b>   | -                | -                   |
| <b>Worst</b>  | 1                | 1                   |

11. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the HouseMark Benchmarking Report on Value for Money of Housing Services (2008/9), and provide any comments on the Benchmarking Report to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

**HouseMark Value for Money Benchmarking Summary – 2008/9  
(Produced January 2010)**

| <b>TSA Standard</b>                             | <b>Cost KPI</b>  | <b>EFDC's<br/>Cost KPI<br/>Quartile</b> | <b>Quality KPI</b>  | <b>EFDC's<br/>Quality<br/>KPI<br/>Quartile</b> |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Tenant Involvement and Empowerment              | Direct cost per property of Resident Involvement               | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                 | Percentage of tenants satisfied that views are being taken into account       | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                        |
|   |  |   | Percentage of respondents who felt staff were able to deal with their problem | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                        |
| Home  | Direct cost per property of Responsive Repairs & Void Works    | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                 | Percentage of tenants satisfied with complaints handling                      | No Data  |
|   |  |   | Percentage of tenants satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service      | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                        |
|   |  |   | Repairs completed 'right first time'  | No Data  |
| Tenancy (Including Allocations, Rents & Tenure) | Direct cost per property of Major Works & Cyclical Maintenance | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                 | Percentage of tenants satisfied with overall quality of home                  | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                        |
|   |  |   | Percentage of dwellings failing to meet the Decent Home Standard              | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                        |
|   |  |   | Average time in days to re-let empty properties                               | <b>Worst</b><br>Quartile                       |
| Neighbourhood and Community                     | Direct cost per property of Housing Management                 | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                 | Percentage of tenants satisfied with overall service provided                 | <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Best</b><br>Quartile         |
|   |  |   | Current tenant rent arrears as % of rent due                                  | <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Best</b><br>Quartile         |
|   |  |   | Percentage of tenants satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live   | <b>Best</b><br>Quartile                        |
| Neighbourhood and Community                     | Direct costs per property of Estate Services                   | <b>Worst</b><br>Quartile                | Percentage of respondents satisfied with anti-social behaviour case handling  | No Data  |
|   |  |   | Direct costs per case of Anti-Social behaviour                                | No Data  |

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

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

**Subject: Housing Revenue Account (HRA)  
Business Plan 2010-2011**

**Officer contact for further information:**

**Alan Hall – Director of Housing (01992 564004)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2010/11, incorporating the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan 2009/10, attached as an Appendix to this report, be recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder for adoption.**

### **Background**

1. The Government's Communities and Local Government (DCLG) requires all local authorities to produce annual Business Plans for their Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs). The CLG's intention is to ensure that local authority housing is used and maintained to maximum effect. HRA Business Plans deal with councils' plans and performance for the delivery and quality of its housing services to tenants. Detailed guidance was issued by the former ODPM (the predecessor to the CLG), which prescribes the form in which business plans must be produced, and includes the requirement for clear repair and maintenance strategies to be set out and, ideally, for detailed financial forecasts to be produced for thirty years hence.

2. In 2003, the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan was assessed by the Government Office as fully "fit for purpose". For a Business Plan to be designated as "fit for purpose", it has to meet stringent "fit for purpose" criteria laid down by the ODPM/DCLG.

### **HRA Business Plan 2010/11**

3. The latest draft HRA Business Plan 2010/11 is attached. The Council's Audit and Governance Committee requires that all of the Council's Business Plans are completed and published by 31 March each year. Therefore, all the statistics and information within the Business Plan relating to the "last financial year", and the most up to date information, relates to 2008/9, which is the last year that full year statistics are available.

4. The development of the Business Plan and the main changes this year include:

- Updated statistics for 2008/9
- General updated information throughout the Business Plan to ensure that it remains current
- Updated summary of key activities and achievements in 2009/10 (Section 3.5)
- Updated Key Housing Priorities (Section 3.6)

- New Section on Benchmarking Performance and Costs (including Housemark's Summary Benchmarking Report) (Section 6.5)
- Substantially updated Chapter on Diversity and Equality in the provision of Housing Services, including the Diversity Profile of the Council's Tenants and an Ethnicity Profile of the Council's Housing Applicants and Applicants Accommodated (Chapter 7)
- Updated Housing Risk Register (Section 10.4)
- Revised Financial Plan (Chapter 11)
- New Action Plan (Chapter 13)
- An updated Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan (Appendix 1)
- An updated Plain English Summary, incorporating the above changes

### **Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan 2010/11**

5. An important part of the HRA Business Plan relates to the Council's objectives, strategies and plans relating to the repair and maintenance of the Council's housing stock over the next 30 years. This includes the Council's progress with meeting the Government's decent homes standard, which sets out a criteria against which local authorities must assess whether or not each of their homes are "decent". The Government has given local authorities a target of ensuring that all their homes are decent by December 2010. As in previous years, the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan forms Appendix 1 to the main HRA Business Plan.

6. It should be noted that the approach taken to the production of the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan has changed this year. Instead of providing detailed information on the overall approach taken repairs and maintenance, the document has been reduced in size and now primarily reports on the previous year, proposals for next year and the Action Plan.

7. The other information, which rarely changes significantly, will be formulated into a Housing Service Strategy on Repairs and Maintenance, in a similar way to all the other ongoing housing services strategies, during 2010/11.

### **30-Year Financial Plan**

8. Another important part of the HRA Business Plan is the Financial Plan - which is provided at Chapter 11 and Appendix 6 - and considers projected income and expenditure for the HRA over a 30-year period. The Financial Plan shows that there is sufficient income to meet the necessary level of expenditure on management, repairs and maintenance for the foreseeable future. The HRA is in a much healthier state than last year, since the HRA is now estimated to fall into deficit in Year 28, compared to the forecast of Year 20 in last year's Financial Plan. In any event, before that time, any number of the financial assumptions could vary significantly.

### **Scrutiny Panel**

9. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and recommend the HRA Business Plan 2010/11, incorporating the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan, to the Housing Portfolio Holder for adoption.

10. The draft HRA Business Plan is also due to be discussed by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation at their meeting on 22 March 2010. Their comments on the Business Plan will be reported orally at the meeting

# Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2010 - 2011



Director of Housing  
Alan Hall FCIH MCMI



Epping Forest  
District Council

March 2010

**Copies of this Business Plan are available in Large print.**

**Please ring 01992 564292 for a large print copy.**



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# Plain English Summary

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## 1. Introduction

This is a Plain English Summary of the tenth Housing Revenue Account Business Plan that we have produced. It is provided, as a “stand-alone” document to all the Council’s Housing staff, on an annual basis. This is to ensure that they are aware of the main points of the Business Plan, how well the Council’s Housing Service is performing and what our main objectives and priorities are for the coming year. It is also useful for our tenants to read, for the same reason.

In very simple terms, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is the “bank account” that we keep to record income and expenditure on our Council homes. It is different from the “bank account” that we keep to record our income and expenditure on other Council services, which is called the General Fund. There are strict rules that say councils cannot pass money between the two accounts.

The main Business Plan provides a helpful “Glossary of Terms” as an appendix, which explains all of the technical words that we refer to. Another appendix gives a “Key Contact List”, to enable readers to speak to someone to get more information about specific issues referred to in the Business Plan.

In the Business Plan, we:

- cover all of the important issues relating to the way we manage and maintain the Council’s homes;
- set out our aims and objectives for the housing service that we provide, and explain our priorities;
- explain the current position and our performance as landlord in previous years;
- estimate the money that we need over the next 30 years to manage our tenants’ homes and ensure that they are properly maintained; and
- compare how much money we need with the amount that will probably be available.

The Government requires all councils to produce HRA Business Plans – but we find it very useful to have a Business Plan anyway, because we think it’s important to plan for the future.

We have talked to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation about the Business Plan, who have confirmed their support for the objectives and proposals

## 2. Who makes the decisions ?

We have a “Cabinet” of senior elected councillors who make most of the Council’s important decisions. They are guided by the “Housing Portfolio Holder”, who is a member of the Cabinet with special responsibility for housing matters. He/she makes most of the decisions on housing.

Council officers are professional people who advise councillors on housing matters, carry out their decisions, and manage the Council on their behalf. The most senior officer is the Chief Executive. The Director of Housing is responsible for managing and maintaining the Council’s homes. The Director of Finance/ICT is responsible for managing the Council’s finances.

## 3. Our housing objectives

We have five main objectives for housing. Each one has a number of more detailed objectives, that are explained in the main Business Plan. The main ones can be summarised as follows:

- Manage our homes efficiently and effectively;
- Provide a high quality housing service, having due regard to the cost of providing the service.
- Ensure that all our tenants live in a decent home, and that we properly maintain our homes;
- Help tenants and leaseholders get involved with decisions about their housing. Provide them with clear information, and consult them on things that affect them;
- Manage the Council’s money effectively and efficiently.

#### **4. About the Council's housing**

In April 2009, we owned around 6,515 homes, excluding our Homeless Persons Hostel and some other homes not counted. Some interesting information about these is given below:

- Around 2,175 are in Loughton, and about 1,600 are in Waltham Abbey. Around 490 Council homes are in "sheltered housing", receiving a support service and having an alarm system;
- Around 6,150 Council homes have been sold since 1977, most under the Right to Buy. We have around 930 flats and maisonettes that have been leased, again, mainly under the Right to Buy. We still have certain responsibilities for these homes, including certain repairs and housing services, which the leaseholders pay for; and
- In April 2009, we had 75 empty homes, 10% less than the previous year
- The value of the Council's housing stock in April 2008 was £633 million

In November 2007, we completely changed how we allocate Council homes, by giving housing applicants much more choice about which home is let to them, using an approach called "choice based lettings". We work with our five neighbouring councils and the housing associations that work in our area to operate the scheme jointly. This reduces the costs of the scheme.

We have a computer system that covers all of the main housing services. This gives a lot of information to housing managers, to help them monitor how our housing services are being provided and see where there are problems that need to be dealt with. Many housing services can now be obtained from our housing website, including reporting repairs and paying rent. In 2010/11, we will be introducing an electronic records and document management system in our Housing Directorate. This will mean that all of our housing files will be computerised, so that our staff can easily look at files, and receive and respond to post, electronically from their desks.

#### **5. Our Achievements Last Year**

In 2009/10, our key housing achievements as a landlord were:

- We made very good progress with our Repairs Refresh Programme. This is our project to improve our Housing Repairs Service. We expect to achieve all 4 of our key targets for response repairs by the end of 2009/10
- We restructured our Housing Repairs Service to provide a more streamlined and efficient approach, putting the tenant at the heart of the our service
- We achieved our objective of having **no** non-decent homes by the end of March 2010. This was earlier than when the Government expects all councils to have no non-decent homes
- We completed a major £4m improvement scheme at Springfields, Waltham Abbey
- We introduced a number of new "Tenant Talkback Panels". These are to find out what tenants think about different housing services

#### **6. Involving tenants and leaseholders**

We have worked hard to enable tenants to become involved with decisions about their housing, and things that affect them, if they want to. We have a Tenant Participation Officer, who has set up a number of tenants associations around the District – there are currently 5 recognised tenants associations, but more are being developed. We have written "Tenant Participation Agreements" with these tenants associations, that explain the help we will give them. It also explains how we will consult the tenants in their areas about housing issues that affect them.

We have also set up a Leaseholders Association that represents all of the Council's leaseholders, a Sheltered Housing Forum comprising representatives from the Council's sheltered housing schemes, and a Rural Tenants Forum to represent the views of tenants in the villages of the District. They all meet regularly with Council officers.

A district-wide Tenants and Leaseholders Federation has been formed, that has a committee to which two representatives from each of the tenants associations, the Leaseholders Association, the Sheltered Housing Forum and the Rural Tenants Forum are invited. The Federation meets every six weeks with the Housing Portfolio Holder and senior housing officers. The Federation is asked their views on possible changes to housing policies and procedures, and tells us what they think about the housing service. We also have a Tenant Participation Agreement with the Federation.

## 7. Ensuring all tenants live in a “decent home”

Probably the most important part of the HRA Business Plan, is the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan. This is one of the appendices and includes a detailed section that explains how we will ensure that all our tenants continue to live in a “decent home”.

The Government has set a “Decent Home Standard”. They say that tenants’ homes are decent if they:

- meet the *legal* standard of condition; **and**
- are in reasonable condition. This means that it must not have:
  - any important parts of the building in an old or poor condition
  - or*
  - two or more other parts of the building that are old and need to be replaced or repaired; **and**
- have reasonably modern facilities. This means that the home must not lack more than two things you would expect to see in a modern home (e.g. modern kitchens and bathrooms); **and**
- keep people warm enough. This means it must have effective insulation and heating.

The Government has set all councils and housing associations a target. They was to make sure that all of our homes are decent by December 2010. We achieved this target 9 months early, in April 2010.

We will plan and ensure that we never have any non-decent homes. We will do this by improving and repairing properties before they become non-decent.

## 8. Supporting People

In April 2003, the Government introduced a new “supporting people” budget. This brought together all the money that was previously spent by councils, housing associations and others on “supported housing” into one “pot” covering the whole county. Supported housing is where the tenants need help - for example, sheltered housing for the elderly or housing for physically disabled people.

Previously, most of the costs of this help was included within individual tenants’ rents. However, from April 2003, tenants living in supported housing have had to pay a separate charge for this help. Tenants receiving housing benefit do not have to pay anything, and there are safeguards to make sure that tenants in supported housing before March 2003 do not pay any more for the help they get than they did previously.

We provide our own Careline Service to all of our sheltered housing schemes, and to 2,384 older people living in non-sheltered housing. Many of these are not Council tenants, and own their own homes. Careline provides a 24-hour speech alarm monitoring service to deal with any emergencies. We also provide a “Telecare” Service. This uses technology to monitor older people in a number of ways. For example, it can detect if an older person has not moved in their home for a long time, or if they have fallen over.

## 9. Working with other organisations

We work with many other organisations to properly manage and maintain our homes and provide housing services to our tenants. These include the Essex Social Care, Essex Police, health organisations and the citizens advice bureau in the District.

## 10. People needing housing

In early 2010, we completed a new “Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)”, which helps us assess how many new homes are required in the District, including affordable homes

The SHMA found that:

- The population of our District rose by 8.5% between 2001 and 2006
- Around 7,100 households in Epping Forest are considered to be unsuitably housed
- There are around 1,300 households in housing need in Epping Forest
- There will be a projected shortfall of 5,700 affordable homes in Epping Forest between 2007 and 2021

There are around 450 new affordable homes currently with outline or detailed planning permission. Over 200 of these new homes are currently being built. A further 255 new affordable homes are currently being considered by developers, although it is unlikely that all of these will receive planning permission.

There were around 4,600 applicants on the Council's Housing Register in March 2009. This was an increase of around 630 households over the previous year.

Last year (2008/9), we let around 530 Council properties to housing applicants. This was less than the previous year. A further 60 applicants were housed by housing associations. This was also less than the previous year.

## **11. Providing a Quality Housing Service**

We do a number of things to make sure that we provide a high quality housing service. This has been recognised in a number of ways:

- The whole of our Housing Service (apart from our Private Sector Housing Service) has been awarded the important Charter Mark Award. This is a national award that confirms that we provide an excellent service to our customers. It is judged by an independent assessor.
- The whole of our Housing Service has been awarded the ISO 9001:2000 "quality assurance accreditation". This confirms that we provide a consistently high quality housing service. This is also judged by an independent assessor
- The whole Council has the Investors in People award. This confirms that our staff know what our plans are, and that we help our staff to improve themselves.

We have 9 "Key Performance Indicators" for monitoring the performance of the Council as a landlord. At the beginning of the year, we set ourselves performance targets to meet. Based on our performance in the first 9 months of the current year, we expect to achieve all the targets, except one.

## **12. Tenant satisfaction**

We carry out a very detailed Tenant Satisfaction Survey every 2 years. We last undertook our Satisfaction Survey in 2008. This is to find out what tenants think about the housing service we provide. It was done by an independent market research company. A good response was received, with over half of all tenants surveyed responding. We found that:

- 84% of tenants are generally satisfied with the overall housing service provided by the Council - this compares with 85% two years earlier (although the latest survey had to exclude sheltered housing tenants, who historically have high levels of satisfaction).
- 86% of tenants are satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service (12% higher than similar councils surveyed). The Council ranked a strong first in its group of similar councils, for all 6 aspects of the repairs and maintenance service measured.
- 12% more of the Council's tenants said that it was easy to get hold of the right person to discuss a housing issue, compared to the group of similar councils.
- 75% of the Council's tenants were satisfied with the final outcome of their contact with the Housing Directorate - 10% higher than the rest of the group of similar councils.
- 62% of tenants were satisfied that their views are being taken into account by the Council as their landlord - an improvement of 14% since 2006 .

The consultants undertaking the survey concluded that overall tenant satisfaction with the landlord service provided by the Council remains high - and significantly above that reported by most other landlords. The high level of tenant satisfaction with Councils' repairs service and the customer service provided by its staff underpins the unusually high level of overall satisfaction amongst the Council's tenants.

### **13. Providing Value for Money and comparing the Council with other landlords**

Earlier this year, the Audit Commission (the Government Agency that, amongst other things, checks the Council's finances) carried out an assessment of the way the Council uses its resources. They told the Council that, overall, it meets minimum requirements and performs adequately in the way that it uses its resources.

"Value for Money" looks at an organisation's performance and costs, compared with similar organisations. In simple terms, high performance and low costs usually suggest that an organisation gives good value for money. Low performance and high costs usually suggest that poor value for money is being given.

We regularly compare our performance and costs with other organisations, in a number of ways. The most useful way is through a "benchmarking" club, called HouseMark.

In February 2010, HouseMark produced a Benchmarking Report on how well we compare with 37 other councils throughout England. These were all councils that still have their own housing stock. This Report told us that, for 4 out of 5 important areas of housing, our costs are amongst the 25% of councils with the lowest costs. It also told us that, for 6 out of 9 important areas of housing, our performance was amongst the 25% of councils with the best performance.

Over the a 4-year period, our Housing Service has saved around £1.15 million by working even more efficiently.

### **14. Equality and Diversity**

We know that we live in a diverse community and want to ensure that we provide services that do not discriminate against groups of people. As well as generally promoting equality in the way we provide our services, the Council has a number of corporate policies relating to race, disability and gender equalities.

We have two particular strategies to ensure diversity and equality in the way we provide the housing service, and to deal with harassment in housing. We have also looked in detail at our policies relating to specific housing services, and produced "Equality Impact Assessments" for each housing service.

Last year, we carried out a survey of all our tenants. Amongst other things, we asked them a number of questions to find out how diverse and different the people who live in our homes are. We asked them questions about their ethnic group, disabilities, gender (sex) and if English is their main language. We now have useful information, which is included in the main HRA Business Plan.

We comply with the Human Rights Commission's Racial Equality Code of Practice in Rented Housing and have an Equal Opportunities Statement in the Provision of Housing Services.

### **15. Setting tenants' rents**

The Government has told all councils that the rents they charge for their homes should be almost the same as the same types of homes owned by housing associations, in the same area by a certain date. However, the Government keeps changing this "target date". They have also said that everyone's rent should be calculated in a similar way. They should mainly be based on:

- the property's value;
- average local wages; and
- the number of bedrooms.

We started calculating rents in this new way from April 2003. At that time, we produced a "target rent" for each property. This could have been higher or lower than the previous rent. The actual rents that tenants pay have been increased, or decreased, up to this target rent since 2003.

## 16. The future of Council housing

The Government has said that councils must carefully consider the options open to them to select the most appropriate ownership and management of their homes, in order to get the most money to maintain them.

This could include transferring council homes to a housing association (called “large scale voluntary transfer” - LSVT), or it could involve councils setting up their own company to manage and maintain their homes (called an “arms length management organisation”) - some councils that do this can get extra money from the Government. Either of these options would need to be agreed by the majority of tenants. Or, it may be that it is best for the Council to keep its homes.

In 2002, we appointed consultants to look into this for us. This is called a “housing stock options appraisal”. We asked them to do four things:

- Look at the available options;
- Work out how much could be spent on managing and maintaining tenants’ homes for each option;
- Talk to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and our tenants to get their views on the options;
- Send information to all of our tenants and leaseholders about the options, and ask them to fill in a survey form telling us what they think.

The consultants completed their work in 2004. They told us that, bearing in mind tenants’ views, the best option for the Council was to keep the housing stock and not to transfer it to a housing association, or set up an arms length management organisation. The Council’s Cabinet agreed with this view, and decided that the Council should keep its housing stock for the time being. Nothing has changed since that time to suggest that the Council should follow a different course of action.

However, we have transferred two sheltered housing schemes (Robert Daniels Court, Theydon Bois and Wickfields, Chigwell) to a housing association. This is because both schemes were in need of major improvements, and we worked out that the overall cost to the Council would be less if the housing associations carried out the improvements.

## 17. Risk Management

Risk management is the process of looking at risks to an organisation, and working out what bad things could happen as a result of doing things in a certain way. It also considers how likely these bad things are to occur and, if they do, what the effects would be.

The Council takes risk management very seriously. We have a group of officers that meets regularly to assess and record risks. This record is called the Risk Register. The Housing Directorate has its own Risk Register. We have identified many risks in our Risk Register. This includes 10 **Key** Housing Risks, which are the most serious. For each of these we have considered, firstly, how likely the risk is to happen and, secondly, if it does, the impact that it will have.

We have looked more carefully at those risks that are more likely and/or will have a higher impact. We have drawn up an action plan to reduce these risks as much as possible.

We also have a “Housing Business Continuity Plan” which explains what we would do if something serious happened to the Housing Service. For example, if the Civic Offices or housing offices were badly damaged, or if we lost a lot of staff, perhaps through serious sickness levels.

We also have a Housing Emergency Plan, which explains what we would do in either a routine or major emergency. For example, if lots of people lost their homes and needed somewhere to stay temporarily.

## 18. The overall financial picture

**We have worked out how much we will get from rent and other money over the next 30 years.** We have compared this with how much we need to spend on running the housing service over the same period.

This has shown us that, although there may not be enough money available over the whole of the next 30 years, there should be enough money to run the housing service for at least the next 28 years – 8 years later than predicted last year. Since this is a long time for councils, there is nothing for us to worry about at the moment.



## **19. Action Plan**

The Business Plan has an “Action Plan” which explains what we will be doing, and when, over the next year:

- to meet our objectives;
- improve our housing services; and
- to make the changes we have to deal with because of new laws or Government policies.

## **20. Key housing priorities**

Section 3 above says what our housing objectives are. But we can never do everything we want to. So, we have to decide which things are the most important, that will help us the most to meet our housing objectives. These are called our “Key Housing Priorities”.

Our “Key Housing Priorities” for the next year (2010/11) are to:

- Continue to manage and maintain our homes effectively and efficiently
- Respond effectively to the requirements of the Tenant Services Authority’s new “Housing Regulatory Framework”
- Complete our “Repairs Refresh Programme”. This includes appointing a private contractor to manage the way that our Housing Repairs Service is provided
- Carry out a review of our sheltered accommodation for older people
- Start building new Council houses - This needs the Government to change accounting regulations to make it worthwhile
- Further improve our HomeOption Scheme – our “choice based lettings scheme”.
- Try to get the Government’s new Customer Service Standard Award (which replaces the Charter Mark that we have at the moment)

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Introduction

This is the tenth annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan that the Council has produced. It complies with the requirements of the Government's financial framework for the HRA.

This Business Plan has been produced in accordance with both the "Guidance on Business Plans" and the guidance on "Effective Housing Strategies and Plans" issued by the predecessor to the Department for Communities and Local Government in June 2000 and April 2002. The Plan has been developed by a corporate team of officers from Housing and Finance/ICT. The Plan was adopted by the Council's Housing Portfolio Holder after consultation with the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

An important part of this Business Plan relates to the Council's objectives, strategies, plans and standards relating to the repair and maintenance of the Council's housing stock, and how the Government's Decent Homes Standard will be met. In view of its importance, as in previous years, the Council has produced a separate Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan, which complements and is an integral part of the HRA Business Plan. The Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan is attached as Appendix 1.

It is a requirement of the Council's Audit and Governance Committee that all of the Council's Business Plans are completed and published by 31 March each year - before the start of the following financial year.

In order to assist readers, a comprehensive Glossary of Terms is provided at Appendix 2. A Key Contact List is given at Appendix 3.

A Plain English Summary has been provided at the beginning of the Business Plan, which is also produced separately as a "stand-alone" document. It is provided to all the Council's Housing staff, on an annual basis, to ensure that they are aware of the main points of the Business Plan, how well the Council's Housing Service is performing and what are the Council's main objectives and priorities for the coming year. It is also useful for the Council's tenants to read, for the same reason.

## 1.2 Fit for Purpose Standard

In May 2003, the Council's HRA Business Plan was assessed as being fully "fit for purpose" by the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East). For the HRA Business Plan to be designated as "fit for purpose", it had to meet stringent "fit for purpose" criteria laid down by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG). There were 33 separate criteria against which HRA Business Plans were assessed. Councils had to meet every criterion, in full, to be designated as fit for purpose.

Having an HRA Business Plan that is assessed as fit for purpose also brings a number of other benefits for the Council. For example, it is not necessary for the Council to submit copies of the Business Plan to the Government Office for assessment each year.

## 1.3 Links with the Council's Housing Strategy

In October 2009, the Council published its latest *Housing Strategy 2009-2012*, which followed an extensive consultation exercise. The Housing Strategy assesses the overall housing needs of the District, and sets out the Council's objectives and plans for meeting those needs. In addition, the Council also contributes towards the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy of the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region. Since around 14% of the District's properties are currently owned by the Council, the management and maintenance of its stock plays an important part in meeting the Council's strategic objectives for housing. In particular, there are important overlaps between the two documents in the following areas:

- Provision of affordable housing for rent
- Meeting the Decent Homes Standard and the Decent Homes Targets
- Restructuring and convergence of social housing rents
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour

## 1.4 Purpose of the Business Plan

The purpose of this Business Plan is to:

- Set out the Council's overall medium term aims and objectives for the housing service, as landlord
- Analyse the current position
- Plan how to achieve the objectives, through the formulation of an Action Plan
- Provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating progress in delivering the Business Plan

## 1.5 Development of the Business Plan in 2010

The Council has consistently developed and updated its Business Plan, since the time the first one was produced in 2001. All the statistics and information within this latest Business Plan referred to as the "last financial year" - and the most up to date information - relates to 2008/9, which is the last year that full year statistics are available.

The development of the Business Plan and the main changes this year include:

- Updated statistics for 2008/9
- General updated information throughout the Business Plan to ensure that it remains current
- Updated summary of key activities and achievements in 2009/10 ([Section 3.5](#))
- Updated Key Housing Priorities ([Section 3.6](#))
- New Section on Benchmarking Performance and Costs (including Housemark's Summary Benchmarking Report) ([Section 6.5](#))
- Substantially updated Chapter on Diversity and Equality in the provision of Housing Services, including the Diversity Profile of the Council's Tenants and an Ethnicity Profile of the Council's Housing Applicants and Applicants Accommodated ([Chapter 7](#))
- Updated Housing Risk Register ([Section 10.4](#))
- Revised Financial Plan (Chapter 11)
- New Action Plan (Chapter 13)
- An updated Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan (Appendix 1)
- An updated Plain English Summary, incorporating the above changes

It should be noted that the approach taken to the production of the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan has changed this year. Instead of providing detailed information on the overall approach taken repairs and maintenance, the document has been reduced in size and now primarily reports on the previous year, proposals for next year and the Action Plan.

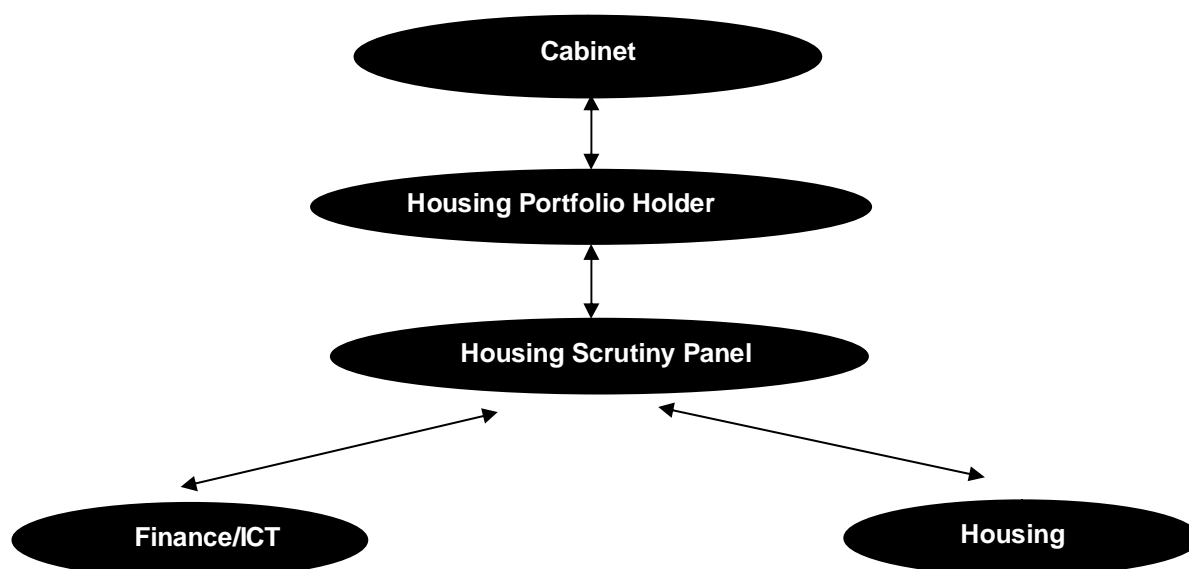
The other information, which rarely changes significantly, will be formulated into a Housing Service Strategy on Repairs and Maintenance, in a similar way to all the other ongoing housing services strategies, during 2010/11.

## 1.6 HRA Commercial Properties

The Council owns a number of freehold commercial properties that are accounted for within the HRA, since they are held under Housing Act powers. However, since the planning and development proposals for the management and maintenance of these commercial properties are included within the Council's Asset Management Plan, which is produced separately, they have not been included within this HRA Business Plan.

## 1.7 Management Structure – Policy and Priority Setting

The HRA Business Plan is a corporate document, with officers from different services having responsibility for its production and ensuring its delivery. The hierarchy of responsibility can be summarised, as shown on the next page:



|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>Cabinet</i>                  | Comprises senior councillors. Overall responsible for policy making and setting priorities  |
| <i>Housing Portfolio Holder</i> | Responsible for approving the Business Plan and recommending to the Cabinet policy changes and priorities.  |
| <i>Housing Scrutiny Panel</i>   | Responsible for scrutinising and commenting on the draft HRA Business Plan before approval, and for formally monitoring progress with the Key Action Plan on a 6-monthly basis  |
| <i>Housing</i>                  | Lead directorate for producing the Business Plan and delivering the elements of the Plan relating to HRA residential properties, including the implementation of policy and achieving the Council's agreed priorities |
| <i>Finance</i>                  | Responsible for the production of all the Business Plan's financial forecasts   |

### 1.8 Comments of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation

Section 4.8 explains the role of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The Federation has been consulted on this latest version of the Business Plan. Having considered the Business Plan, the Federation said:

**[ To be inserted - The Federation's comments on last year's HRA Business Plan were -**

- Once again, the Business Plan is comprehensive, well thought out, interesting and well written;
- It is clear and easy to read, especially the Plain English Summary, which helps to put the detailed Business Plan in context;
- We agree and support the objectives, the key housing priorities and the action plan;
- We noted that the revised Financial Plan does not identify a deficit on the Housing Revenue Account for 20 years, and accepted that this situation is likely to change based on the variety of financial assumptions, particularly in this current economic climate;
- We are pleased to see that the Council are on target to meet the Decent Homes Standards in the coming year (by April 2010), and recognise from the financial plan that programmes of work are focused on this target;

## 2. Strategic Context and Linkage to Other Plans

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### 2.1 The Epping Forest District

The Epping Forest District comprises a mix of rural and urban character, covering an area of 131 square miles, with a population of around 120,000. There is no major centre of the District. There are around 12 towns and larger villages, ranging in population size from 2,000 to 30,000. It is an attractive Metropolitan Green Belt area, with good road and rail links to London, so is popular with commuters.

The southern parts of the District border Greater London and are more populous and urbanised, including Loughton, Chigwell, Buckhurst Hill and Waltham Abbey. There was a total of 53,525 dwellings in the District as at April 2009, of which 12% were Council-owned.

The District falls within the East of England and the Secretary of State's East of England Plan (Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) 14) sets out the proposed number of additional homes that should be provided within the Region and the District. The Secretary of State has declared that an additional 3,500 homes should be provided within the District by 2021, together with an unspecified additional number of homes within the District to assist with the planned growth of neighbouring Harlow.

### 2.2 Housing Service Planning Matrix

The HRA Business Plan is only one of a range of complementary and inter-related strategic documents and plans produced by the Council. In producing this Business Plan, careful regard has been had to relevant corporate objectives and strategies and housing objectives and strategies. This section of the Business Plan sets out where the Plan sits in relation to other strategies and plans, and how they inter-relate.

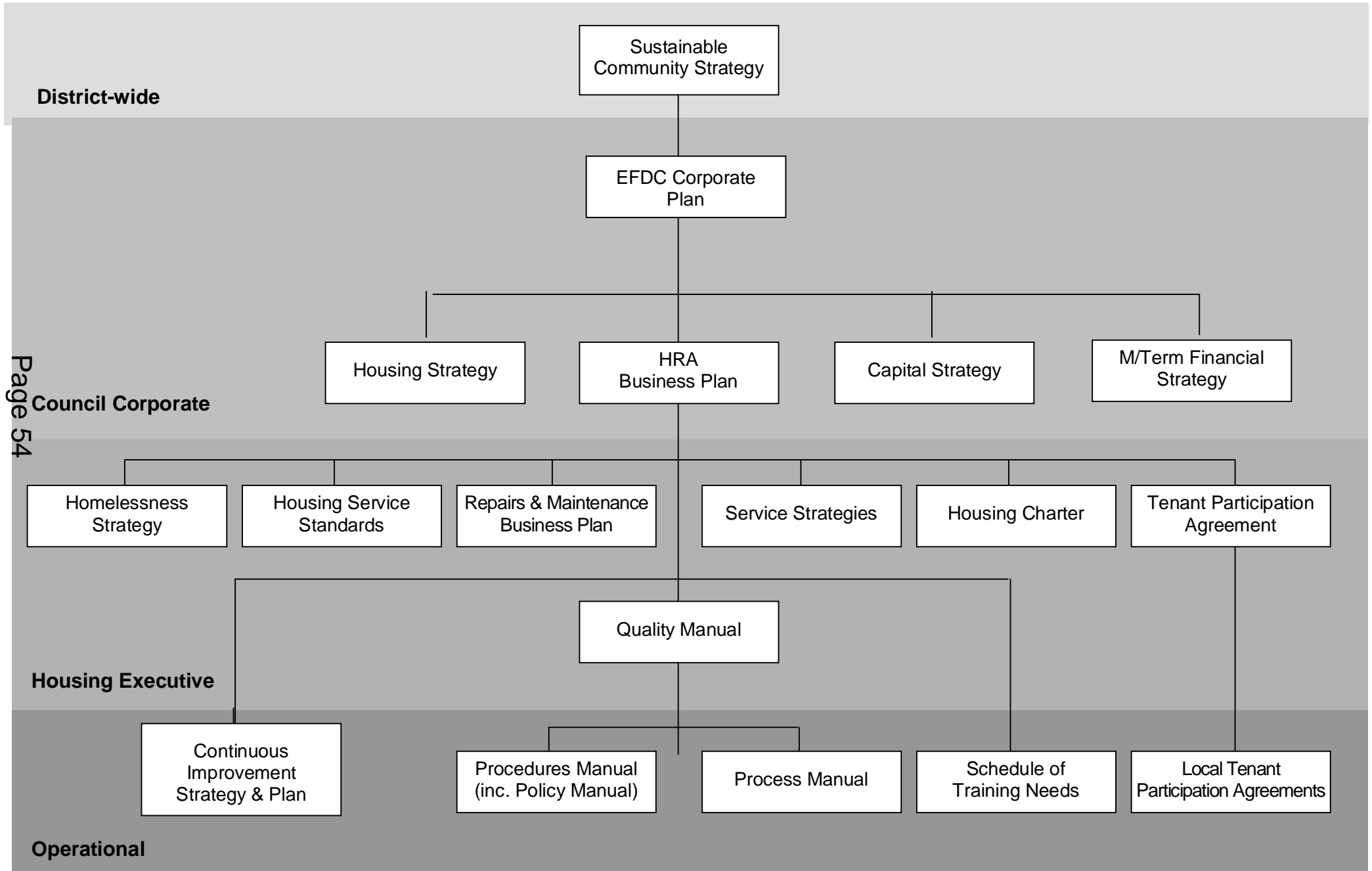
The Housing Planning Matrix reproduced on the next page illustrates, in graphical form, how the Council's housing services are planned and delivered.

A brief explanation of the main strategies and plans, including a number not shown on the matrix, is set out below.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b><i>Sustainable Community Strategy</i></b> | The long term vision for the District, produced by the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership. The LSP comprises all of the statutory agencies working in the District, including the Council, together with representatives of the voluntary sector. The LSP is currently producing a new Sustainable Community Strategy, which is expected to be adopted around June 2010. |
| <b><i>Council / Corporate Plan</i></b>       | 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. This current Council Plan expires in 2010, and a new Corporate Plan is currently being drafted, which is expected to be adopted around June 2010.  |
| <b><i>Housing Strategy</i></b>               | See <a href="#">Section 1.3</a> above.  |
| <b><i>Capital Strategy</i></b>               | 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. The Strategy is updated annually.   |
| <b><i>Medium Term Financial Strategy</i></b> | Sets out the approach the Council intends to take in relation to revenue and capital expenditure, income and fees and charges, for both the HRA and the General Fund.   |
| <b><i>Homelessness Strategy</i></b>          | The Council's statutory strategy, last updated in 2009, which reviews the Council's approach to homelessness, and sets out the Council's plans for dealing with homelessness.   |
| <b><i>Housing Service Standards</i></b>      | A set of housing standards that clients of the Housing Directorate can expect in relation to the delivery of their housing service.   |

# Housing Directorate

## Service Planning Matrix



|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Housing Service Strategies</b>     | A series of separate documents, produced to a common format, that set out how individual housing services and strategies are delivered in detail (eg. rent arrears, tenant participation, empty properties). They provide detailed objectives, policies, targets, performance information and financial/staffing resource availability.  |
| <b>Housing Charter</b>                | Sets out the principles by which housing services will be delivered from the clients' point of view and what clients can expect.   |
| <b>Tenant Participation Agreement</b> | An agreement (compact) between the Council (as landlord) and the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation (on behalf of the Council's tenants and leaseholders), first signed in March 2000 and updated in 2002, 2006 and, most recently, January 2009 for a three year period. It sets out the approach the Council and the Federation will take to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are able to participate in the delivery of their housing services, receive good quality information and are consulted on housing issues. The Council has also entered into six Local Tenant Participation Agreements with individual recognised tenants associations on how tenant participation will be delivered locally (see <a href="#">Section 4.8</a> ). |

### 2.3 Capital Strategy 2009/13 - Housing as a Corporate Priority for Investment

The Council's Capital Strategy 2009/12, last updated in September 2009, sets out the Council's eight key strategic priorities for capital investment, in a ranked priority order. Since its introduction, "Improving the Council's housing stock" has been ranked as one of the highest key strategic priorities for investment.

## 3. Business Plan Objectives

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### 3.1 The Council's Corporate Medium Term Aims

The Council has three medium term aims and priorities, which are set out in the Council Plan 2006-2010. They are:

**(1) The District is a safe, healthy and attractive place**

- (a) Maintain the special character and advantage of the District, and address local environmental issues
- (b) Address housing need
- (c) Create safe communities
- (d) Encourage sustainable economic development
- (e) Address leisure need

**(2) The Council is an organisation that listens and leads, to resolve local issues**

- (a) Political leaders give clear direction
- (b) Communicate with the public
- (c) Prioritise objectives and services
- (d) Co-operate and plan with partners

**(3) The Council provides affordable improving services**

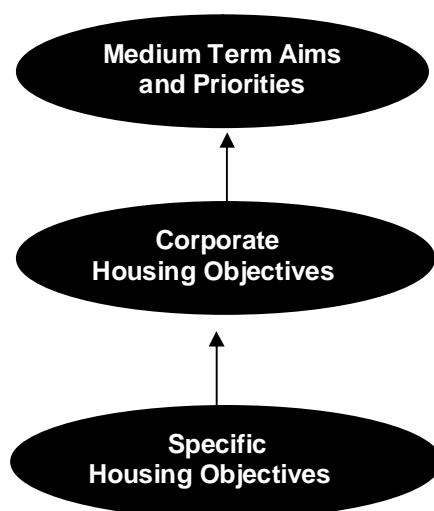
- (a) Identify and target resources: realise capacity and manage performance
- (b) Procure services in the most beneficial and cost effective way
- (c) Develop services, staff and the working environment

These are currently being reviewed for the Council's proposed new Corporate Plan 2010-14.

### 3.2 Hierarchy of Objectives

In order to make the best use of its housing assets and deliver an effective housing service, in consultation with representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation where appropriate, the Council has set

Business Plan Objectives at various levels within the organisation, from the high level medium term aims and priorities to individual housing objectives. The hierarchy of objectives can be summarised as follows:



### 3.3 Corporate Housing Objectives

The Council's Corporate Housing Objectives set out the ultimate objectives that the Council strives to achieve on housing issues. The Corporate Housing Objectives relevant to this Business Plan are:

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>HO1 – Value for Money</b>         | Provide a high quality housing service, having due regard to the cost of providing the service.   |
| <b>HO2 - Housing Management</b>      | Manage the Council's housing stock efficiently and effectively, obtaining good value for money, to deliver high quality housing services.   |
| <b>HO3 - Repairs and Maintenance</b> | Ensure that all tenants live in a decent home, and that the Council maintains its properties and housing estates to a standard that protects and enhances their value, and provides a safe and satisfactory environment for tenants and leaseholders.   |
| <b>HO4 - Tenant Participation</b>    | Enable the Council's tenants and leaseholders to participate in the delivery of their housing service, through the receipt of good quality information, adequate and appropriate consultation on relevant housing issues and opportunities to provide feedback to the Council, in accordance with the <i>Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement</i> . |
| <b>HO5 - Housing Finance</b>         | Manage the Council's financial housing resources effectively, efficiently and prudently, through the maximisation of rental and other income, Government grants and subsidies, and capital receipts, together with the formulation of effective revenue and capital spending priorities and plans and achieve good financial performance against targets.   |

### 3.4 Specific Housing Objectives

In pursuit of the Council's Corporate Housing Objectives, the Council has more detailed Specific Housing Objectives. The Specific Housing Objectives of this Business Plan are as follows:

(a) *Value for Money:*

- (a) Provide consistent quality housing services
- (b) Understand the relationship between housing performance and the cost of service provision
- (c) Involve representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in consideration of housing performance and new policy development.



- (d) Seek to continuously reduce costs, whilst maintaining or improving performance

*(b) Housing Management:*

- (a) Provide a decentralised housing management service through two area housing offices based in Epping and Loughton and an Estate Office at Limes Farm, Chigwell.
- (b) Ensure that the Council's housing estates provide an attractive environment for local residents.
- (c) Review the Council's *Housing Allocations Scheme* annually to ensure it continues to be appropriate and gives choice to applicants, following consultation with registered social landlords, local councils and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.
- (d) Keep the number of empty Council properties, the period they are left empty, and the associated rental loss to a minimum.
- (e) Keep underoccupation of the Council's housing stock to a minimum.
- (f) Minimise the extent of breaches of tenancy conditions.
- (g) Take firm action against anti social behaviour, through notification, mediation or legal action as necessary.
- (h) Ensure that current rent arrears do not exceed 2.0% of the annual debit.

*(c) Repairs and Maintenance:*

These objectives are set out in detail as part of the Council's *Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan* attached as Appendix 1 to this Business Plan.

*(d) Tenant Participation:*

- (a) Consult individuals, groups and organisations on important matters relating to the provision of housing services, particularly on issues where clients have an element of choice or where decisions will have a major effect on them.
- (b) Comply with the Council's *Housing Charter* relating to the approach and philosophy towards the provision of housing services.
- (c) Comply with the commitments set out in the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.
- (d) Provide information to tenants that is timely, in plain English, of good quality and tailored to both the general and individual needs of tenants.
- (e) Recognise the special needs of certain tenants and respond positively to those needs.
- (f) Obtain feedback from tenants, in a variety of ways, on the Council's performance in the delivery of housing services.
- (g) Encourage, support and develop tenants associations within the District.
- (h) Keep the Council's tenant participation structure under review.
- (i) Consult tenants on major improvement schemes, housing initiatives and matters of general housing management to ensure full awareness of proposals and to obtain their views.
- (j) Encourage, support, consult and develop the District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and work in partnership with the Federation to maximise the benefits that can be achieved from tenant participation to improve the delivery of housing services.
- (l) Consult the Federation on the Council's housing services and policies in accordance with the District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement.
- (m) Ensure that appropriate training is made available for tenants.

(f) *Housing Finance:*

- (a) Manage the Council's financial housing resources effectively, efficiently and prudently.
- (b) Maximise the Council's entitlement to Government grants and subsidies.
- (c) Keep under review housing management and maintenance expenditure to ensure that expenditure within the Housing Revenue Account does not exceed income.
- (d) Plan to ensure that the HRA remains in surplus, each year, for a period of at least 20 years.
- (e) Consider the level of fees and charges to be made for housing services on an annual basis.
- (f) Ensure that working balances for the Housing Revenue Account are not forecast to fall below £3m or to exceed £4m at the end of any five-year forecast period.

### **3.5 Summary of Key Activities and Achievements in 2009/10**

The key housing achievements and activities in 2009/10, relating to this Business Plan, can be summarised as follows:

- Very good progress was made with the Repairs Refresh Programme, to improve the Council's Housing Repairs Service, resulting in all 4 key targets for response repairs expected to be achieved by the end of 2009/10
- The Council's Housing Repairs Service was re-structured to provide a more streamlined, customer-focussed and co-ordinated approach
- The Government's, and the Council's objective of having no non-decent homes was achieved
- A major £4m improvement scheme at Springfields, Waltham Abbey was completed
- A number of new Tenant Talkback Panels were introduced

### **3.6 Key Housing Priorities and Action Plan to Meet the Objectives**

The Council's Key Housing Priorities for the next year (2010/11) are set out below.

- Continue to manage and maintain our homes effectively and efficiently
- Respond effectively to the requirements of the Tenant Services Authority's new Housing Regulatory Framework
- Complete the implementation of the Repairs Refresh Programme, including the appointment of a private repairs management contractor to deliver the Housing Repairs Service, through an innovative "in-sourcing" approach
- Undertake a Strategic Review of the Council's Older People's Accommodation
- Commence a new Council House-building Programme (subject to the Government changing accounting regulations to make it viable for the Council)
- Further develop HomeOption, the Council's choice based lettings scheme.
- Respond to the expected Government's offer to leave the Housing Subsidy System, in return for taking on other local authorities housing debt
- Seek the Government's new Customer Service Standard Award (which replaces the Charter Mark)

There are a number of factors and sources that have influenced the Key Housing Priorities, which were formulated in conjunction with the District-wide Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

The Key Housing Priorities were selected by the Council having regard to:

- The views of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation
- National and regional housing policies and priorities
- The objectives, targets and action plans within the Council's Housing Strategy
- The recommendations of the Council's Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing, based on the "Business Plan Analysis" within Chapter 4 of the Business Plan
- Achieving value for money

The Action Plan to meet the Council's objectives is set out in Chapter 13.

## 4. Business Plan Analysis

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### 4.1 Introduction

In formulating the objectives and plans in respect of the HRA, the Council's strengths and weaknesses relating to HRA activities have been examined. At the same time, an analysis has been undertaken of the impact that the external environment has, or will have, on the HRA, and available options have been identified and analysed, in order to formulate cohesive and achievable strategies.

### 4.2 Information Sources

In order to formulate this Business Plan, a number of data sources have been studied. Some of the more relevant data has been included within the Business Plan itself; other data has been used for reference. The main sources of information are as follows:

(a) *Internal:*

- Housing Strategy
- Property attributes database
- Stock Condition Survey
- District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement
- Historical HRA data
- EFDC Council Plan
- EFDC Risk Register
- Housing stock information
- Council house sales statistics
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Local Tenant Participation Agreements
- Tenants and Leaseholders Federation
- Housing Service Plans/Strategies

(b) *External:*

- Government Comprehensive Spending Review
- Halifax House Price Index
- CLG Guidance on HRA Accounts
- CLG "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future"
- CLG Guidance on Business Plans
- CLG Guidance on Stock Options Appraisals
- Housing Green Paper
- The Council's Use of Resources Assessment
- Housing & Regeneration Act 2008

### 4.3 The Council's Housing Stock

The Council owned the following HRA stock as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009, for which the Council's Housing Directorate is responsible for management and maintenance:

- 6,514 residential properties <sup>(\*)</sup>
- 932 leasehold properties
- 2,918 garages
- 1 Homeless Persons Hostel comprising 38 rooms and 10 chalets

A number of these properties were transferred to the Council from the former Greater London Council (GLC) in 1980. The housing stock continues to decline due to the effects of the Right to Buy; 6,147 properties have been sold since 1977 (See [Section 4.12](#) below).

An analysis of the Council's housing stock as at April 2009 (excluding the 48 rooms at the Council's Hostel, 6 residential scheme managers' properties and 23 properties "out of charge") is detailed below.

| <b>COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK BY TYPE AND YEAR</b><br>(Excluding Homeless Persons Hostel) |              |              |              |              |              |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|  | April 2009   | April 2008   | April 2007   | April 2006   | April 2005   |
| <b>Houses</b>  | 2,740        | 2,743        | 2,755        | 2,765        | 2,789        |
| <b>Flats</b>   | 2,464        | 2,471        | 2,476        | 2,507        | 2,538        |
| <b>Maisonettes</b>   | 519          | 520          | 525          | 521          | 525          |
| <b>Bungalows</b>   | 791          | 791          | 793          | 789          | 790          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>6,514</b> | <b>6,525</b> | <b>6,549</b> | <b>6,582</b> | <b>6,642</b> |

| <b>COMPARISON OF PRE AND POST WAR COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK BY TYPE</b><br>(As at 1st April 2009) |            |       |              |      |              |
|---|------------|-------|--------------|------|--------------|
|   | Pre-1944   |       | Post 1945    |      | TOTAL        |
|   | No.        | %     | No.          | %    |              |
| <b>Houses</b>   | 355        | 5 %   | 2,385        | 37 % | <b>2,740</b> |
| <b>Flats</b>  | 13         | < 1 % | 2,451        | 38 % | <b>2,464</b> |
| <b>Maisonettes</b>  | 0          | 0     | 519          | 8 %  | <b>519</b>   |
| <b>Bungalows</b>  | 12         | < 1 % | 779          | 12 % | <b>791</b>   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>380</b> |       | <b>6,134</b> |      | <b>6,514</b> |

| <b>PROPERTY MIX OF COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK BY BEDROOM SIZE</b><br>(As at 1st April 2009) |              |      |
|--|--------------|------|
|  | No.          | %    |
| <b>Bedsits</b>   | 324          | 5 %  |
| <b>1 Bedroom</b>   | 2,323        | 36 % |
| <b>2 Bedroom</b>   | 1,814        | 28 % |
| <b>3 Bedroom</b>   | 1,891        | 29 % |
| <b>4/5 Bedroom</b>   | 162          | 2 %  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>6,514</b> |      |

| <b>GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK</b><br>(As at 1st April 2009) |                           |             |              |             |               |             |                              |             |
|---|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|------------------------------|-------------|
|   | Buckhurst Hill / Chigwell |             | Loughton     |             | Waltham Abbey |             | Epping / Ongar / Rural Areas |             |
|   | No.                       | %           | No.          | %           | No.           | %           | No.                          | %           |
| <b>Houses</b>   | 189                       | 7 %         | 936          | 34 %        | 602           | 22 %        | 1,013                        | 37 %        |
| <b>Flats</b>  | 315                       | 13 %        | 904          | 37 %        | 782           | 32 %        | 463                          | 19 %        |
| <b>Maisonettes</b>  | 254                       | 49 %        | 189          | 36 %        | 64            | 12 %        | 12                           | 2 %         |
| <b>Bungalows</b>  | 15                        | 2 %         | 146          | 19 %        | 145           | 18 %        | 485                          | 61 %        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>773</b>                |             | <b>2,175</b> |             | <b>1593</b>   |             | <b>1,973</b>                 |             |
| <b>% of Total</b>   |                           | <b>12 %</b> |              | <b>33 %</b> |               | <b>24 %</b> |                              | <b>30 %</b> |

#### 4.4 Stock Valuation

Under CLG guidelines, the valuation of residential properties is based on Social Housing - Existing Use (SH-EH) value. In 2001, the Council first commissioned the Valuation Office to undertake a formal valuation of the Council's housing stock, as at April 2000. Following desk-top revaluations being undertaken between 2002 and 2005, in 2006, the Valuation Office undertook a full revaluation as at 1 April 2005. Further desk-top valuations have been undertaken since 2006.

The HRA Stock Valuation for residential dwellings as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 was £633 million.

## 4.5 Overview of the Management of the Council's Housing Stock

### (a) Introduction

The Council's housing stock is a major asset, and it is therefore essential that it is properly managed and maintained. This section of the Business Plan sets out how the Council's stock is managed.

### (b) Housing Directorate

The lead directorate for the management and maintenance of the Council's housing stock is Housing, under the management of the Director of Housing.

The permanent Staff Establishment of the Housing Directorate comprises 211 full and part-time members of staff. Of these, only 11 private sector housing staff are involved in non-HRA activities. Appendix 4 sets out the Staffing Structure of the senior management of Housing, together with the main responsibilities of each of the nine sections.

Most of the staff within Housing are centrally based at the Civic Offices in Epping. However, the following services are decentralised.

**Area Housing Office (South)** Based in the heart of The Broadway Shopping Centre, Loughton, the office provides a comprehensive housing and estate management service to tenants in the south of the District (See [Section 4.6\(a\)](#) below).

**Limes Farm Estate Office** Based on the Limes Farm Estate, Chigwell, the Estate Office provides a localised housing and estate management service to the tenants of the Estate. The office is open every morning during the week, managed by the Assistant Area Housing Manager.

**Careline Control** The Council provides an older peoples alarm network, Careline, which is managed from Careline Control based at Parsonage Court, Loughton. The service is managed by the Housing Manager (Older People's Services), based at Careline Control (See [Section 4.6\(k\)](#) below).

**Sheltered Housing** The Council has 13 sheltered housing schemes for older and frail older people, each managed by a Scheme Manager. In addition, 3 Area Scheme Managers provide a visiting service to older tenants on housing estates (See [Section 4.6\(m\)](#) below).

### (c) Corporate Executive Forum

The Corporate Executive Forum (CEF), comprising the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive, is responsible for the overall management of the Authority.

### (d) Management Board

The Management Board comprises the members of CEF and five Service Directors. Its purpose is to ensure a corporate approach to the delivery of Council services. The Management Board meets on a fortnightly basis.

### (e) Support Services

The Housing Directorate is supported by a number of other services within the Council to deliver its housing management and maintenance. The following lists the main support services:

**Accountancy** The Council's Finance & ICT Directorate provides a comprehensive accountancy service under the management of the Director of Finance & ICT, including the provision of financial advice, financial planning, budget formulation and monitoring, invoicing, payments, sundry debtors and creditors.

**Audit** The Council's audit function is undertaken by the Chief Internal Auditor in accordance with the Council's Audit Plan.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b><i>Estates and Valuation</i></b>                            | The Estates and Valuations Division manages and co-ordinates the maintenance of HRA commercial properties.  |
| <b><i>Grounds Maintenance</i></b>                              | The Council's grounds maintenance is undertaken by the Environment and Street Scene Directorate. The arboricultural contract is undertaken by a private contractor.   |
| <b><i>Housing Benefits</i></b>                                 | Housing Benefits is administered within Finance under the management of the Asst Director of Finance & ICT (Benefits).  |
| <b><i>Information &amp; Communication Technology (ICT)</i></b> | Although the database for the integrated housing system is supported by the Housing Directorate, the network is managed by the Finance and ICT Directorate.   |
| <b><i>Legal</i></b>  | The Corporate Support Directorate provides a comprehensive legal service to Housing including conveyancing, litigation, advocacy, contract administration and legal advice.   |
| <b><i>Human Resources</i></b>                                  | The Corporate Support Services Directorate is responsible for strategic HR issues, industrial relations, recruitment and other HR operations.   |
| <b><i>Performance Management</i></b>                           | The Performance Improvement Unit, within the Office of the Deputy Chief Executive, is responsible for the co-ordination of performance management data.   |
| <b><i>Public Relations &amp; Marketing</i></b>                 | Although the Housing Directorate has an in-house housing information service, a corporate public relations service is provided by the Public Relations and Marketing Section within the Office of the Deputy Chief Executive. |

#### **4.6 Delivery of Housing Services**

##### *(a) Estate Management*

Estate management is undertaken by the two Area Housing Offices under the direction of the Area Housing Managers. The Area Housing Office (North), based at the Civic Offices, Epping, manages around 3,580 properties in the north of the District, including the towns of Epping, Waltham Abbey and Ongar. Most of the properties in the rural part of the District are also managed by the Area Housing Office (North). As outlined above, the Area Housing Office (South) is based in The Broadway Shopping Centre, Loughton and manages around 2,970 properties in Loughton, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and the immediately surrounding areas. The office also provides a cash office facility, managed by Finance, for the payment of all Council charges, including rents.

Within the Area Housing Offices, Housing Officers (Management) manage around 800 properties each. They are responsible for dealing with breaches of tenancy conditions, including rent arrears recovery and estate management. In addition to ad-hoc estate inspections, staff in the Area Housing Offices undertake an annual programme of planned estate inspections covering the whole of the District.

The Council undertakes the cleaning/cleansing of estate and sheltered housing schemes in-house, and employs three full time caretakers for two large estates in the District and 14 full and part-time cleaners.

##### *(b) Rent Collection*

The collectable rent debit in 2008/9 was £26.9m (an increase of 3.9% from 2007/8). Rent is collected through a variety of methods. Due to the rural nature of the District, Post Office Giro is extensively used to enable tenants to pay their rent at local post offices. In addition, the Council's rent collection administrator, Allpay, provides a number of rent payment points in convenient locations (e.g. supermarkets, garages etc.) throughout the District. The Council also provides three cash desks based in Epping, Waltham Abbey and Loughton. Direct debit and standing orders are also offered to tenants, as well as a facility for rent payments to be made by debit card, or through the internet, or by text.

The rent collection rate in 2008/9 was 99.24%, slightly lower than the collection rate of 99.41% in 2007/8.

### *(c) Current and Former Rent Arrears*

The Council's approach towards rent arrears recovery is set out in the Housing Service Strategy on Rent Arrears. The Council has a historically good record of rent arrears recovery, especially when compared to the national trend of rent arrears increases. The level of current rent arrears amounted to £429,136 as at 5 April 2009, representing 1.62% of the annual debit – an increase on the 1.52% rent arrears in 2007/8.

Former tenant arrears amounted to £324,992 as at 5 April 2009, of which £106,415 were due to former dwellings arrears (the rest due to former garage, housing benefit, court costs and tolerated trespasser arrears).

During 2008/9, £68,806 of former tenant arrears was written off. Former tenant arrears of £109,094 were collected in 2008/9, an increase of 28.0% on the amount collected in 2007/8.

### *(d) Anti-Social Behaviour*

Although serious anti-social behaviour amongst the Council's tenants is uncommon, there has been a marked increase in the number of anti-social behaviour cases in recent years. The Council therefore takes seriously its responsibility to minimise such behaviour, through the enforcement of its tenancy conditions and other available remedies. Often, such behaviour can be curtailed simply by a housing officer visiting or writing to the alleged perpetrators. Alternatively, the Council facilitates mediation by an independent third party. However, if the anti-social behaviour is serious or continues, the Council uses one or more of the following remedies:

- Repossession – Under the Housing Act 1996, the Council can seek to repossess a property if a tenant, resident or visitor causes (or is likely to cause) a nuisance to other residents in the locality, or if they are convicted of using their property for illegal purposes, or convicted of an arrestable offence in or near the property.
- Demoted Tenancy Orders (DTOs) – The Council can seek from the court a DTO if a tenant is causing anti-social behaviour. If granted, a DTO removes the tenant's security of tenure for a period of one year. If there are further incidences of anti-social behaviour within that period, the Council can obtain return to court and obtain a possession order without having to give any grounds. The Council has resolved to seek DTOs in appropriate cases.
- Introductory Tenancies (ITs) – The Council started to use ITs in 2006, following an extensive consultation exercise with all tenants and partners in 2005. All new tenants are now given an IT (instead of a secure tenancy) for the first year of their tenancy. If the new tenant causes anti-social behaviour, or breaches any other tenancy conditions within that period, the Council can obtain a possession order, without having to give any grounds. If there are no breaches within that year, the tenancy automatically converts to a secure tenancy.
- Injunctions - Also under the Housing Act 1996, the Council can seek an injunction from the courts to prohibit a person from causing a nuisance to other residents in the area, or using premises for illegal purposes. However, these can only be granted if violence is used or threatened, and if there would be a significant risk of harm if an injunction was not granted.
- Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBO's) – Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, the Council or the Police, in consultation with each other, can seek an ASBO from the courts if there is ongoing criminal type behaviour. The person must be over 10 years of age and be acting anti-socially towards others, causing harassment, alarm or distress. The ASBO prohibits the person from continuing with the anti social behaviour. A breach of the order is a criminal offence, with a maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment.

### *(e) Empty Properties*

In order to maximise rental income and effectively meet housing need, it is essential that the number of empty properties, and the associated re-let period, is kept to a minimum. There were 75 empty properties as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, representing a decrease of 11 properties (13%) over the previous year's number of 86. The rental loss from empty properties in 2007/8 amounted to 0.85% of the annual debit.

*(f) Difficult to Let Properties – Low Demand*

Generally, the Council does not experience any of the problems faced by many northern authorities of “low demand” and has a high demand for most of its properties. However, some difficulties are experienced in letting certain types of properties in sheltered housing and schemes for frail older people (“Part 2.5”). As at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, there were only 11 vacant properties meeting the “difficult to let” criteria (all flats at the Council’s scheme for frail older people at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey and bedsits in sheltered housing schemes).

*(g) Choice Based Lettings (HomeOptions Scheme)*

The Government, through the Homelessness Act 2002 and its Five-year Housing Plan, “Homes for All”, is encouraging local authorities to introduce “choice based lettings” by 2010, whereby housing applicants are able to choose the property that is let to them, rather than being “allocated” properties. Offers of accommodation are made to applicants who have expressed in specific vacant properties who are in the highest priority band, in date order.

In November 2007, the Council successfully introduced its HomeOptions Scheme, a choice based lettings scheme operated in partnership with five neighbouring councils (Brentwood, Uttlesford, Chelmsford, East Herts and Broxbourne). The scheme is operated by Locata, a choice based lettings agency. The six councils were successful in obtaining £96,000 funding from the former ODPM in 2005 to jointly commission the scheme.

*(h) Review of the Housing Register*

In order to ensure that the Housing Register is up to date, reviews of applicants that have not expressed any interest in properties through the HomeOptions choice based lettings schemes are undertaken on an ongoing basis.

*(i) Homeless Persons Hostel*

The Council’s Homeless Persons Hostel in North Weald comprises 38 rooms and 10 “chalets” with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. Managed by a Hostel Manager, who is supported by two Assistant Hostel Managers, it provides an invaluable facility to provide temporary accommodation to homeless families, to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

*(j) Leasehold Services and Service Charges*

The Council had 932 properties leased under the Right to Buy as at 31 March 2009, compared to 928 properties the previous year. 4 properties were leased between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. Leaseholders are charged two main types of service charges; annual charges are made for the provision of ongoing communal services (eg cleaning, grounds maintenance, responsive repairs etc); charges are also made for larger planned repairs and improvements following consultation in accordance with the Housing Act 1985.

*(k) Careline Service*

The Council operates an alarm network for older people (Careline Service) to the following categories of older people in the District (as at 1 April 2009):

|                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Council tenants   | 1,231        |
| Private occupiers | 1,069        |
| RSL tenants       | 84           |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>2,384</b> |

The number of users receiving the service decreased by around 10% during 2008/9. The monitoring and response service is provided by Careline to private occupiers on a permanent basis, and to other residents when their Scheme Manager goes off duty. The Careline Service is available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year and is based at Parsonage Court, Loughton. Response times are monitored and, in 2008/9, 98.6% of all calls were responded to within 30 seconds (exactly the same as in 2007/8). The average time to respond to calls was 7.2 seconds (again, exactly the same as in 2007/8).



Charges to Council tenants for the service are included within the “support charge” applied through the Supporting People programme (See [Section 4.9](#)). Charges are also made to private occupiers to meet the costs of the initial alarm purchase and to contribute towards the running costs of the Careline Service.

One of the outcomes of the Review of the Careline Service undertaken in 2008/9 was that the Careline Service should seek to provide other out-of-office hours services for the Council (e.g. repairs reporting and CCTV monitoring), and that it should also seek to provide the service to other landlords, especially when tenders are invited, in order to increase the viability of the Careline Service.

*(l) Telecare*

Telecare is an initiative being pursued by Essex County Council's Adult Social Care Service and a number of service providers, including Epping Forest DC, in order to keep the costs of 24-hour care provided to older people to a minimum. It utilises technology to monitor the well-being of older people in their own homes. The County Council provides significant funding for the initiative. This Council's Careline Service has trained assessors who are able to provide a wide range of telecare sensors to assist people to live independently.

*(m) Sheltered Housing & “Very Sheltered” Housing*

The Council has 487 sheltered housing properties within 12 sheltered and grouped housing schemes throughout the District, with each one managed by a Scheme Manager. From April 2003, sheltered housing tenants have paid a “support charge” that represents the costs of providing them with the sheltered housing service.

The Council also owns and maintains a “Part 2½” scheme for frail older people in Waltham Abbey, which is managed by Essex Adult Social Care under a partnership arrangement.

In addition, three “Area Scheme Managers” visit 310 older people in properties situated within general needs housing estates that have been designated as especially suitable for older people. Visits are made on a “call category” basis, dependent on the assessed level of risk, as follows:

| <b>BREAKDOWN OF CALL CATEGORIES FOR PROPERTIES DESIGNATED AS SPECIALLY SUITABLE FOR THE ELDERLY (As at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009)</b> |                            |            |
|---|----------------------------|------------|
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Frequency of Visits</b> | <b>No.</b> |
| <b>A</b>  | Once every week            | 22         |
| <b>B</b>  | Once every fortnight       | 34         |
| <b>C</b>  | Once every month           | 254        |

*(n) Housing ICT Strategy*

The Housing Directorate has a Housing ICT Strategy that is reviewed bi-annually, and sets out the vision and objectives for developing its information systems to improve further the Council's Housing Service.

The Council utilises the Open Housing Management System (OHMS), an integrated housing computer system, from Northgate. The system integrates seven separate modules (e.g. rents, allocations, repairs etc), enabling staff users to access different areas of information and to provide a one-stop approach to the provision of information to tenants and applicants. The system also gives essential management and performance indicator information.

The Council has provided an interactive housing service on the Council's website for many years, in order to increase the accessibility to housing services for tenants via the internet. This includes the following sections:

- HomeOptions – the Council's choice based lettings system, enabling housing applicants to express interests in up to three vacant properties every fortnight
- HomeSwapper – the Council's web-based mutual exchange system, enabling tenants to provide details of their property and to both attract and seek mutual exchanges
- “Repairs Reporter” – an on-line repairs reporting facility, enabling tenants to report repairs 24 hours per day, with user friendly graphics of property components.

- "A-Z of Housing Services" – providing a description of each housing service provided (eg "Abandoned Vehicles"), the ability to send an e-mail to the appropriate person dealing with that service and the ability to request any leaflets relating to the service.
- "Contact Us" - listing the main sections and offering the ability to send an e-mail by launching the users' e-mail software with a pre-addressed e-mail.
- "Housing Publications" - enabling users to download certain publications and to request any housing leaflets through the completion of an on-line form.
- "Latest News" - providing regularly updated housing-related press releases and information.
- "Feedback" – enabling tenants and other housing clients to provide feedback on housing services and the housing website.
- "Consultation" - where consultation documents and plans can be viewed and downloaded.
- "Payments" – enabling tenants to pay rent and other housing charges via the internet.

#### 4.7 Partnership Working

The Council cannot deliver its Business Plan alone, in many cases it must work in partnership with other organisations. Examples of effective partnership are as follows:

*Citizens Advice Bureau* The CAB in the District provides an invaluable additional advice service for the Council's tenants. Good working relationships have been built up over a number of years. Quarterly Liaison Meetings are held between senior CAB staff and senior housing officers.

*Older People's Joint Management Team* The OPJMT comprises representatives of statutory and voluntary organisations involved with elderly people at the local level, including the Council. Meeting on a regular basis, the OPJMT oversees the co-ordination of joint care provided to elderly people and identifies and develops new initiatives.

*Essex County Council* The Council works closely with Essex Adult Social Care and Children and Young Peoples Services in respect of all client groups. Particularly intense co-operation is undertaken in respect of anti-social behaviour and allocations of accommodation to vulnerable people. The Council works in partnership with the County Council's Supporting People Commissioning Team on the development of the supporting people programme at both the strategic and operational level.

*Essex Police* The Council works closely with Essex Police on a number of issues. These are mainly in relation to dealing with anti social behaviour, crime prevention, the management of dangerous offenders, responding to "hate incidents" and the removal of abandoned vehicles. The Council and Essex Police have agreed a joint protocol for the use of anti social behaviour orders, and jointly fund a number of police community support officers.

*London Commuter Belt Group* In view of the growing importance of working sub-regionally on housing issues, the Council, together with 4 other Essex authorities, all the Hertfordshire authorities and the RSLs that operate within the London Commuter Belt Sub Region have formed a Sub-Regional Housing Group. The Sub-Regional Group has produced its own Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, which includes a detailed Action Plan. The Council also works with local authorities in the eastern area of the Sub-Region on a number of specific initiatives, including choice based lettings and the strategic housing market assessment.

*Tenants and Leaseholders Federation* The Federation comprises representatives of the five recognised tenants associations within the District, the district-wide Leaseholders Association, Sheltered Forum and Rural Tenants Forum, that meets every six weeks. It is consulted on, and provides feedback on housing issues, and monitors the Council's housing performance (see [Section 4.8](#) below).

*Voluntary Action Epping Forest* This is the umbrella organisation for voluntary organisations in the District. The Housing Directorate works with VAEF on a number of projects to benefit the Council's tenants, including a scheme to assist older tenants with gardening.

#### **4.8 Tenant and Leaseholder Participation and Consultation**

The Council is committed to involving tenants with the delivery of their housing services and has made good progress with developing tenant participation. The Council has a detailed Tenant Participation Strategy (which is regularly reviewed) and has a dedicated Tenant Participation Officer to deliver the commitments set out in the Tenant Participation Agreement (see below) and to further develop tenant participation in the District.

The Council has facilitated the formation of seven recognised tenants association and one tenants panel throughout the District, although one association has subsequently been disbanded and another was for a sheltered housing scheme that was transferred under a small-scale stock transfer, leaving five associations and one panel currently in existence. In addition, the Council has established the district-wide Leaseholders Association, which represents the views of the Council's leaseholders and with whom the Council can consult on leasehold issues, including service charges. In 2004, the Council also established the Epping Forest Sheltered Forum, comprising representatives from most of the Council's sheltered housing schemes across the District.

In 2006/7, the Council established the Rural Tenants Forum to represent the tenants of the more rural parts of the District, not large enough to sustain their own residents organisations. Representatives from 12 different rural villages/parishes have joined the Forum, which meets four times each year. The Forum also has representation on the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

A number of years ago, the Council established the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, which represents all the Council's tenants and leaseholders, with whom the Council consults and briefs on matters of interest. The Federation has an Executive Committee, comprising two representatives from each of the five recognised tenants associations, and two representatives from the Tenants Panel, Leaseholders Association, the Sheltered Forum and the Rural Tenants Forum. The Federation meets with the Housing Portfolio Holder and senior housing officers every six weeks, and is chaired by one of the Federation's representatives.

The Federation is consulted by the Housing Portfolio Holder and senior housing officers on all proposed changes to housing policy or procedures that affect all (or the majority of) tenants, before decisions are made. The Federation's comments on such proposals are included in reports to Portfolio Holders and the Cabinet. The Chairman of the Federation is also a member of the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel.

The Council's first District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement (Compact) between the Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation was signed in March 2000. Following regular reviews and consultation with all tenants, the Agreement has been updated and signed in November 2003, January 2006 and January 2009. The Agreement is a statement of commitment by both the Council and the Federation, which sets out in writing the intentions of the Council and the Federation in the approach they will take for;

- the provision of information to tenants
- consultation with tenants on housing policy issues
- the operation of the Federation.

The Agreement has been drafted in accordance with the guidelines set out in the "*National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts*" produced by the former ODPM.

In addition, *Local* Tenant Participation Agreements are signed each year with each of the recognised tenants associations. A unique Leaseholders Participation Agreement has also been signed between the Council and the Leaseholders Association, which sets out how leaseholders will be informed of, and consulted on, relevant issues.

The Council has a good record of consulting tenants and others on housing issues that affect them, both at the District level and at the local level. Elsewhere in this Business Plan, details are given of the consultation undertaken on:

- Tenant satisfaction
- New housing policies
- Tenant Participation Agreement
- Stock Options Appraisal

- “Consultation” Section of Housing Website
- Tenants & Leaseholders Federation
- This Business Plan

#### 4.9 Supporting People

The Government’s “Supporting People” programme has been in place since April 2003. Under this regime, the costs of support services in respect of Council tenants have not been met by the HRA, but from the Supporting People Budget, managed by the county-wide Supporting People Commissioning Body.

The main effects on the HRA have been as follows:

- The Council receives Supporting People Grant from the Commissioning Body for most of its support costs, except for tenants of sheltered housing schemes who took up occupation after 1 March 2003 who are not in receipt of housing benefit, who have to pay the charge themselves.
- The Council must meet the cost of “transitional supporting people protection”. This is an allowance given to tenants of sheltered housing schemes who are not in receipt of housing benefit, and is equivalent to the difference between their (higher) support charge and the previous “scheme manager charge” that they paid. This transitional protection is applied until the tenant vacated the property.

Decisions on inflationary increases in grant are made by the Commissioning Body each year. Some years, there has been no increase; any increases are usually lower than the cost of inflation.

#### 4.10 Fees and Charges

In addition to rents, the Council makes a number of other charges for housing services, which are reviewed annually in November by members in order to feed into the budget making process. Generally, fees and charges are increased annually in line with inflation. The general increase applied for 2010/11 is 5%. However, each charge is considered on its own merits and variations are made to this approach for strategic reasons.

#### 4.11 Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements

Probably the most important elements of this Business Plan are the:

- analysis of the condition of the Council’s housing stock
- plans to ensure that all the Council’s properties continue to meet the Government’s “Decent Home Standard”
- assessment of the likely availability of funding for repairs, maintenance and improvements
- assessment of priorities for repairs, maintenance and improvements to meet the Government’s Decent Home Targets
- formulation of standards and policies for repairs, maintenance and improvements

In view of this importance, the Council has developed a Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan which, although a free standing document, forms an integral part of the overall HRA Business Plan. The Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan is attached as Appendix 1. During 2010/11, a separate Housing Service Strategy on Repairs and Maintenance will be produced, setting out the Council’s general approach to repairs and maintenance.

#### 4.12 Right to Buy and Rent to Mortgage Sales

Under the Housing Act 1985, the Council is required to sell Council properties to eligible sitting tenants at a discount. Local authorities also have discretion to sell properties on a voluntary basis outside the right to buy provisions. A number of years ago, the Council operated such a voluntary sales policy, but no longer does so. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 1977 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 (32 years), the Council has received 11,555 applications to purchase, resulting in 6,147 sales (53%), of which 4,591 were under the right to buy.

In 2008/9, 29 applications to purchase under the right to buy were received (38 less than in 2007/8), which resulted in 7 sales (compared to 28 sales in 2007/8 and 46 in 2006/7). The average open market valuation in 2008/9 was £174,000 per property, compared to £155,090 in 2007/8. The current maximum right to buy discount for the Council’s region is £34,000, which was the actual discount provided for all sales in 2008/9. The average purchase price was £140,000 per property (compared with £121,411 per property in 2007/8).

#### **4.13 The District's Housing Needs Relevant to the HRA Business Plan**

##### *(a) Introduction*

It is important that the HRA Business Plan reflects the known housing need in the area and the predictions of how this might be expected to change in the future. In particular, if the projected housing need is low or diminishing, it could affect future rental income streams. However, the District does have a high level of housing need, that cannot be met by the current and projected supply of affordable accommodation. Unlike other areas of the country, it is predicted that this position will not change in either the short or longer term.

##### *(b) Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs)*

The Government has issued guidance to all local authorities that they should undertake strategic housing market assessments, in collaboration with other local authorities that operate within the same housing market.

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing defines housing need as 'the quantity of housing required for households who are unable to access suitable housing without financial assistance' and housing demand as 'the quantity of housing that households are willing and able to buy or rent'. Housing market areas are 'geographical areas defined by household demand and preferences for housing. They reflect the key functional linkages between places where people live and work'.

Strategic Housing Market Assessments help local authorities and regional bodies to develop a shared evidence base to inform the development of spatial housing policies. In addition, they help to inform decisions about the policies required in housing strategies.

Strategic housing market assessments do not provide definitive estimates of housing need, demand and market conditions. However, they do provide valuable insights into how housing markets operate, both now and in the future.

The Epping Forest District Council is within the London Commuter Belt (LCB) Sub Region for housing purposes. Six districts of the Sub Region, including Epping Forest, joined to form the 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, the former Housing Corporation, HM Land Registry and the Office for National Statistics, along with a qualitative consultation programme with a wide range of stakeholders.

The Key Findings of the (SHMA), relevant to this Business Plan are that:

- The key factors that characterise the SHMA area are:
  - Its proximity to London;
  - Its house prices;
  - The diversity of the area that appeals to both residents and migrant households.
- 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 around 7,100 households in Epping Forest are considered to be unsuitably housed
- There are 1,300 households in housing need in Epping Forest
- Epping Forest has the largest mis-match between the 2004-based household growth projections to 2026 (8,200 households) and the East of England dwelling allocation (3,500 dwellings)
- There will be a projected shortfall of 5,700 affordable homes in Epping Forest between 2007 and 2021

##### *(c) New Affordable Housing Provision*

At the time of writing, the Council's monitoring arrangements for new affordable housing provision identify the following:

- 208 properties on 5 development sites are currently on site
- 231 properties on 7 development sites have detailed planning permission, but have not yet started on site
- An estimated 10 properties on 1 development site has outline planning permission
- Developers are giving active consideration to the development of a further 225 properties on 6 sites in the District, although it is unlikely that all these developments will receive planning permission

*(d) Housing Register Data*

The numbers of applicants on the Housing Register confirm the levels of households seeking social housing in the District. The following table illustrates the levels of need over the past two years, based on the numbers registered on the Housing Register.

| <b>COMPARISON OF HOUSING NEED<br/>(2008 – 2009)</b> |                       |                       |                                     |                 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
|   | <b>March<br/>2009</b> | <b>March<br/>2008</b> | <b>Difference<br/>(2008 – 2009)</b> |                 |
|   |                       |                       | <b>(Nos.)</b>                       | <b>%</b>        |
| <b>1 Bed</b>  | 2,749                 | 2,464                 | + 285                               | + 11.5 %        |
| <b>2 bed</b>  | 1,181                 | 942                   | + 239                               | + 25.4 %        |
| <b>3 bed</b>  | 585                   | 500                   | + 85                                | + 17.0 %        |
| <b>4 Bed</b>  | 80                    | 55                    | + 25                                | + 45.5 %        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>4,595</b>          | <b>3,961</b>          | <b>+ 634</b>                        | <b>+ 16.0 %</b> |

*(e) Social Housing Turnover*

Social housing turnover (in both the Council's own stock and that of registered social landlords) has also been taken into account in the preparation of this Business Plan. The following table compares turnover of Housing Register, homeless and other applicants for vacancies in the Council's housing stock over the last two years. As can be seen, turnover reduced by 16 % in 2008/9, compared to the previous year.

| <b>HRA HOUSING STOCK TURNOVER<br/>(2007/8 and 2008/9)</b> |               |               |
|---|---------------|---------------|
|   | <b>2007/8</b> | <b>2008/9</b> |
| <b>Housing Register (inc homeless)</b>                    | 502           | 400           |
| <b>Mutual exchanges</b>                                   | 118           | 121           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>620</b>    | <b>521</b>    |

In addition, 61 applicants were nominated and accepted in 2008/9 for vacancies in stock owned by registered social landlords, compared with 88 in 2007/8.

*(f) Local Housing Market*

Local market factors can have a significant bearing on future housing demand and/or the sustainability of current rent structures. Indeed, the Council's future rent levels under the Government's proposed rent reforms are affected by property values.

The recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) established that the average property price in Epping Forest in 2008 (Quarter 1) was around £365,000. The average property price rose by 133% between 2000 and 2008 (Quarter 1) – the highest increase in the SHMA Area.

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 which is, by far, the highest ratio in the SHMA Area.

#### **4.14 Staff Training and Development**

The Council operates a comprehensive Performance Development Review (PDR) process. Formal, structured PDR interviews are held between line managers and all their staff on an annual basis. The PDR process covers:

- Performance over the previous year (including achievements, progress on meeting targets, obstacles encountered and areas of weakness)
- Personal development, and training received, over the previous year
- Assessment of areas for development over the forthcoming year, including training needs, with targets
- Formulation of a Personal Action Plan for the forthcoming year, with targets.

The training needs of all housing staff are then collated annually into a Schedule of Identified Training Needs, which is then monitored by line managers throughout the year. As training needs are met, a record is kept for each member of staff in the Schedule of Completed Training Needs.

The Council also has a Corporate Training Programme and a Member Training Programme, which is formulated each year following an assessment of the most common identified training needs. The Programme comprises a range of training courses, from one day courses to twelve day supervisor/management development programmes held over the period of a year.

#### **4.15 The External Environment**

In order to ensure a robust Business Plan, in addition to analysing the “internal environment” within which the Council operates, it is essential to also analyse the “external environment” which, although outside the Council’s control, has an effect on the Council. The following external issues have been identified as having an effect on the Council and have been taken into account in the formulation of this HRA Business Plan:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b><i>Housing Regulatory Framework</i></b>  | During 209/10, the Tenant Services Authority consulted extensively on the introduction of a new Housing Regulatory Framework. The new Framework will be introduced from April 2010. There are a number of new requirements with which the Council will need to comply.                                 |
| <b><i>Proposed reforms of the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy System</i></b>                  | Following a consultation exercise, the Government intends to issue an “offer” to all stock-holding councils, inviting them to leave the HRA System, in return for taking on housing debt from other local authorities.   |
| <b><i>Housing Green Paper – “Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable”</i></b> | Outlines the Government’s plans for delivering more homes, including social housing, backed by ambitious building targets, increased investment, and new ways of identifying and using land for development.   |
| <b><i>“Ends &amp; Means: The future Roles of Social Housing in England”</i></b>               | Commissioned by the Government, which reported in February 2007. Undertaken by Professor John Hills, it establishes the context and assessed the current state of social housing against criteria such as quality, affordability, social inclusion and opportunities for social and economic mobility. |
| <b><i>The “Credit Crunch”</i></b>   | This has a major effect on the Council, both in terms of the Council’s finances (e.g. lower interest rates) and the Council’s tenants and housing applicants   |
| <b><i>Rent Restructuring</i></b>  | This Government regime has an effect on the level of rents that the Council can charge and the amount of subsidy that is paid to the Government, due to the Council being in “negative subsidy”  |

## **5. Provision of Quality Housing Services**

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### **5.1 Charter Mark – Housing Directorate**

In November 2004, the whole of the Council’s Housing Service was awarded the Cabinet Office’s prestigious Charter Mark Award for a three year period. The Charter Mark was awarded to the Housing Service for a further three years in 2007. The Charter Mark is the national standard for customer service for organisations delivering public services. It is independently and rigorously evaluated and assessed. To meet the standard, organisations must demonstrate that they: listen to their customers; learn what aspects of their

service are most important to them; deliver a service that is tailored to customers' needs; and continuously improve. Very few local authority housing departments nationally have achieved the Charter Mark for the whole of their Housing Service. Having a Charter Mark gives confidence to the Council's tenants, applicants and other clients that the Housing Directorate provides a customer-focused service to them that also strives to continuously improve.

The Charter Mark has now been replaced with the Customer Service Standard Award, which the Housing Directorate will be seeking in 2010, prior to its Charter Mark status lapsing.

## 5.2 ISO 9001:2000 Quality Accreditation – Housing Directorate

It is essential that the Council has processes and procedures in place to ensure that quality housing services are provided to its clients on a consistent basis. Therefore, the Housing Directorate has invested a lot of time and effort to ensure that a robust and properly audited system is in place to ensure that quality services are provided.

ISO 9001:2000 is an internationally recognised quality assurance accreditation that confirms that, following a rigorous assessment by a licensed external assessor, the service provided is of a consistently high quality. Since 2002, the whole of the Housing Directorate has been accredited with the ISO 9001:2000 Quality Award. The accreditation includes the following specific areas of the Housing Directorate's work:

- Housing Repairs
- Housing Assets
- Housing Management
- Housing Needs
- Older Peoples Housing (incorporating Careline and Sheltered Housing)
- Housing Resources (incorporating House Sales, Leasehold Services, Housing Information & Strategy, Rents Administration and Support Services)
- Private Sector Housing

The external assessments of the Housing Directorate were carried out by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance, who undertook a number of visits, audits, inspections and site visits as part of their overall initial assessment. The award lasts for three years, during which time regular audits/inspections are undertaken by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance to ensure that the standards and quality are maintained. The Council was re-accredited with the status for a further three years in May 2008.

The Housing Directorate's Quality Management System comprises:

- A **Process Manual**, that sets out the main processes carried out by the Housing Directorate
- A **Quality Manual**, that sets out the approach taken to ensure consistent quality
- A **Policy Manual** that provides a record of all the agreed Council policies relating to housing
- A **Procedures Manual**, documenting every individual task undertaken by Housing Directorate staff (totalling almost 800 tasks)
- **Regular internal audits** by Council staff, formally trained and certificated to undertake ISO 9001:2000 internal audits.

Epping Forest was one of the first local authorities in the country to receive the award for *all* of its public sector housing services.

## 5.3 Tenant Satisfaction

The Council is encouraged by the Government to undertake a detailed Tenants Satisfaction Survey every two years (previously every three years). The Council's first survey was undertaken in 2001, with the latest undertaken in 2008. The next survey will be undertaken during in 2010.

The findings of the last survey were analysed by the independent consultancy that undertook the survey, the National Housing Federation (NHF), who produced both a detailed report on the findings, as well as an Executive Summary. The main headline results from last survey are set out below.



A standard questionnaire and survey process called "STATUS" was used. STATUS is a standardised tenant satisfaction postal survey that was developed by the National Housing Federation (NHF). The STATUS questionnaire is endorsed by the Government's Communities and Local Government (CLG).

The STATUS questionnaire is designed to be used by social landlords to survey tenants in general needs housing. It is designed to be a baseline survey, which can be repeated over a number of years. It allows for comparison of data between different social landlords and provides a valuable tool to help social landlords achieve best value and continuous improvement in service delivery.

Around 1,500 tenants (25% of all the Council's tenants) were randomly selected by the NHF to be surveyed. An exceptionally high response for a postal survey of 53% was received, giving a 3% margin of error at the 95% confidence level. This means that if the Council surveyed all 100% 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.

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."*

Overall satisfaction with the housing service remains consistently high, decreasing very slightly from 85% in 2006 to 84% being satisfied in 2008, resulting in top quartile performance. It is considered that satisfaction levels would be even higher, if sheltered housing tenants had not, for the first time, been excluded from the survey, since such tenants are historically known to have high satisfaction levels.

At a more detailed level, 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.

In terms of quality of contact with the Council, as many as 12% more of the Council's 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.

In relation to tenant participation and consultation, 62% were satisfied that their views are being taken into account by the Council as their landlord. This is considered to be a very positive response, showing an improvement of 14% compared to responses to the 2006 survey.

#### **5.4 Customer Perspective Programme**

As a front line service, the provision of a high quality housing service to our customers that meets their needs, properly informs them of the service being received and provides them with sufficient information to make appropriate choices is essential.

In continuous pursuit of customer excellence, over the last couple of years, the Housing Directorate has been undertaking a "Customer Perspective Programme". The purpose of the Programme is to look at how the housing service is provided to customers (tenants, housing applicants and others) *from their perspective*.

A group has been set up, chaired by the Director of Housing, comprising staff from each of the sections in the Housing Directorate and the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The group has been considering and analysing all aspects of "interfaces" that individual sections of the Housing Directorate have with customers, and consider where and how the service can be improved further. This may be in relation to leaflets, forms and other information given to customers, procedures that they are expected to follow and policies that the Council operates.

Each meeting of the Customer Perspective Group concentrates on a specific aspect of front line Housing Services. In advance of the meeting, the Housing Manager responsible for the function being challenged is

asked to circulate to the Group copies of documents given to customers. The Housing Manager then attends the meeting and explains all the various customer interfaces in relation to the Section's work.

The Group then discusses with the representative any suggestions for improving the experience of customers. Agreed suggestions are then incorporated within a Customer Perspective Action Plan, the progress of which is regularly monitored.

### 5.5 Investors in People

Investors in People is a nationally recognised standard for employers, whereby an external assessor analyses the organisation's:

- Approach to planning, ensuring that there are clear aims and objectives which are understood by everyone
- Commitment to developing its people, in order to achieve its aims and objectives
- Development of its staff
- Understanding of the impact its investment in people has on its performance

In 2002/3, the whole of the Council was first awarded "Investors in People" status, including the Housing Directorate. In 2005 and 2008, the "Investors in People" status was awarded for further three-year periods.

### 5.6 Project Management

All special (i.e. non routine) housing projects are detailed in the Housing Directorate's Special Projects Plan. This is a project management tool (using Microsoft Project software) that, for each project, sets out:

- The task
- The officer responsible
- The baseline period for commencement and completion of the task
- The latest anticipated completion date of the task
- The percentage of the task completed to date
- Critical paths and linkage with other task

Housing Managers provide information on progress with each project for which they are responsible on a quarterly basis. The Project Plan is then updated and reviewed at a quarterly meeting of housing managers, chaired by the Director of Housing.

A similar plan, the Annual Events Plan, details all activities that must be undertaken by the Housing Directorate on a periodic basis (eg annually, quarterly etc) and is also updated and monitored quarterly at the same meeting.

### 5.7 Performance Indicators and 2010/11 Targets

The Council uses a range of performance indicators to monitor its housing performance. There are three main types:

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| National Indicators   | Defined by the Government, that must be collected by all local authorities - There are 3 related to the Council's HRA landlord services  |
| Local Indicators      | Defined and monitored by the Council, as being key indicators related to the Council's business – There are 6 related to the Council's HRA landlord services   |
| Management Indicators | Defined and monitored by the Director of Housing, as being indicators that provide important management information on the service, that are used to identify problem areas and the need for improvement – There are over 100 management indicators related to the Council's HRA landlord services |

The Council refers to all the National and Local indicators as "Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)". [Appendix 5](#) sets out the Council's KPIs relating to the Council's HRA landlord services for 2010/11, as well the associated targets and performance (up to Quarter 3) for 2009/10. Of the Council's 9 KPIs for HRA landlord services, it is anticipated that only one KPI Target for 2009/10 will not be met.

## 6. Value for Money

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### 6.1 Corporate Approach to Value for Money and Use of Resources

Since early 2006, the Council has adopted a corporate approach to ensuring value for money in the delivery of its services.

The Audit Commission undertakes an annual Use of Resources (UoR) Assessment, which evaluates how well councils manage and use their financial resources. The assessment focuses on the importance of having sound and strategic financial management, to ensure that resources are available to support the Council's priorities and improve services, covering five themes. One of the five themes is "Value for Money" (VFM).

The Council has set up a Use of Resources (officer) Working Party to oversee improvements in the Council's use of resources, through reference to the latest Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) and Performance Characteristics, and the Council's latest Audit Score Feedback.

In February 2010, the Audit Commission reported on its latest UoR Assessment for the Council. Overall, out of a possible score of 1-4, it gave the Council a score of "2 – Meets minimum requirements and performs adequately".

### 6.2 Corporate Value for Money Strategy and Value for Money Review

In 2006, the Council's Cabinet adopted a corporate Value for Money Strategy. The Strategy's Policy Statement recognises the Council's responsibilities as a custodian of public funds to strive for value for money in the delivery of services.

It explains that the Council seeks to achieve, and where possible improve, value for money by ensuring that:

- Costs compare well with other local authorities, and where appropriate other sectors, allowing for external factors
- Costs are commensurate with service delivery, performance and outcomes achieved
- Costs reflect policy decisions
- Performance in relation to value for money is monitored and reviewed
- Improved value for money and efficiency gains are achieved
- Full long term costs are taken into account when making procurement and other spending decisions.

The strategy sets out the Council's approach to achieving these aims, together with the responsibilities of members and officers for the delivery of value for money.

In July 2008, the Council undertook a detailed Value for Money Review. The purpose of the VFM Review was to:

- Examine and comment on the Council's costs, as stated in the Audit Commission's Value for Money (VFM) Profile Tool, and how they compare with other local authorities in comparator groups;
- Examine and comment on the Council's performance in respect of the performance data within the Audit Commission's VFM Profile Tool;
- Reach conclusions on the Audit Commission's value for money assessment of the Council
- Consider the nature and limitations of the comparative data, particularly issues that could significantly affect the data and the Council's ranking;
- Assess EFDC's Council Tax levels; consider how they compare with other councils; and consider the value for money provided by the Council from the "citizen's perspective"; and
- Consider the most cost effective future strategy to continuously improve value for money in terms of reduced costs, higher performance, or both.

The VFM Review concluded – for the Council as a whole - that:

*“ Although there are examples of both good and poor performance at individual service level, overall, both EFDC’s performance and rate of performance - compared with other local authorities - is average.”*

In terms of its focus for VFM in the future, the Council concluded that:

- Although the Council’s net costs are comparatively high (using the Audit Commission’s VFM Profiles Tool) there is no need to reduce the Council’s overall costs, but
- There is a need to improve the Council’s overall performance and the performance in specific areas.

Therefore, the Council concluded that although it will continue to seek and implement efficiency gains - and reduce costs at service levels where possible - rather than reduce costs, it will then continue to re-invest the savings, in a targeted way, to help improve performance further.

### **6.3 Performance Management**

In order to ensure that clients are receiving good levels of service, and to identify any deteriorating performance at an early stage so that actions can be put in place to remedy emerging problems, it is essential to have effective systems to monitor performance. The Council therefore has a corporate Performance Management Framework.

The Housing Directorate also has its own Performance Management System, that complements the corporate framework, to monitor key areas of performance throughout the year. Under the regime, performance indicators are collected and collated on a quarterly basis (sometimes more frequently),

Progress on the achievement of National Indicators and Local Indicators (referred to as “Key Performance Indicators”) are then monitored quarterly by the Council’s Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel.

Formal performance management meetings are held at the end of each quarter, between the Director of Housing, the relevant Asst Director of Housing and the Housing Manager responsible for the area of activity. Actual quarterly performance is then compared with the targets for the year and areas of under-performance are identified and discussed with the Housing Manager, with an action plan agreed to improve performance in the following quarter.

From April 2010/11, quarterly performance management reports will be considered by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The Federation has selected around 35 “Tenant-Selected Indicators”, which it considers to be the most important indicators from tenants’ perspective. The reports will show performance during the quarter, against the targets set at the beginning of the year.

Performance against these Tenant-Selected Indicators for 2009/10 will also be reported to all tenants around June 2010, in a special issue of the Council’s tenants’ magazine, “Housing News”. Annual performance reports will be issued thereafter.

### **6.4 Value for Money Analysis - Corporate**

It is important that the Council has information on its costs, and knows how these compare to other organisations and how they relate to the quality of the Council’s services. Stated linkages of performance and associated costs with the Council’s overall objectives, contained within the Council Plan, are also important.

In order to better understand the Council’s unit costs for services and how they relate to the Council’s performance and compare with other organisations, since 2006, the Council has developed a unique Value for Money (VFM) Analysis, which in the past the Audit Commission has recommended to other organisations as good practice. The purpose of the VFM Analysis is to provide an initial “indicator” of the relationship between performance and costs for services, to prompt discussion, and to identify areas where further - more detailed and targeted analysis - may be required, which may then lead to a need for some form of corrective action or additional resource allocation.

The VFM Analysis is separated into the nine Council Services that have NIs and LPIs. Most Services are then broken down into distinct areas of activity within the Service, for which NIs, LPIs and cost information are available. When looking at the information for each service, there are three distinct groupings of data, relating to each service area activity, as follows:

- Clutches of NIs, and LPIs
- Clutches of cost information
- A short commentary on the relationship between performance and cost

In accordance with the Council's Value for Money Strategy, the VFM Analysis is considered annually by a member-level scrutiny panel, who then identify if a more detailed service review is required of particular service areas, through a member-level task and finish group or other means.

## **6.5 Benchmarking Housing Performance and Costs**

The Council places great importance on benchmarking its housing performance and costs against other housing providers (both councils and registered social landlords). It benchmarks in two main ways.

### *Annual Value for Money Review*

Each year, the Council compares its performance and costs for all of its main service areas with other groups of local authorities, namely others in the Council's "Nearest Neighbours" Group and other local authorities in Essex, using the Audit Commission's VFM Profile Tool. A Review Report is produced, which sets out:

- The Council's performance or cost for the indicator
- The Council's ranking, for each performance or cost indicator, compared to the other councils
- Details of the best performing authority
- A commentary from the relevant Service Director on each performance and cost indicator, including any proposed action to improve performance or reduce costs.

The Review is reported to the Council's Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel, which considers the relative performance and costs, as well as the Service Director's Commentary, and identifies any further action required – which may include a service review.

### *Housemark*

The Council has been a member of "Housemark" for a number of years. Housemark is a national housing benchmarking organisation, which enables housing organisations to submit detailed information on their performance and costs, and then to compare these with other housing organisations nationally.

Housemark enables member organisations to compare themselves with user-defined data sets. For example, the Council can compare itself with all housing organisations nationally; all district councils; all local authorities; or all housing associations. Housemark can also define the locations (by regions) of those organisations to be included within the comparison, and can restrict the comparison to housing organisations of more or less than a defined number of properties.

In previous years, the Director of Housing has produced an annual Benchmarking Report, based on information obtained from Housemark's web-tool, which compared how well the Council ranked against other local authorities and housing associations. The report was considered in detail by the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and established that, generally, the Council performed extremely well compared with other housing organisations.

In 2009, all the required performance and cost data for the Housing Directorate relating to 2008/9 was uploaded to the Housemark website. This data was then verified by Housemark. In February 2010, Housemark produced (for the first time) its own independent and detailed Benchmarking Report for the Council for 2008/9. The report compared the Council to 37 other stock-retained councils across England.

In addition, for the first time, and in recognition of the expectation of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) that, in future, landlords will need to benchmark on a cross-sectoral basis, Housemark also provided a cross-sector comparison with 273 other landlords, using the wealth of data that Housemark collects for:

- Local authority landlords
- Arms length management organisations (ALMOs)
- “Traditional” housing associations; and
- Stock transfer housing associations (LSVTs)

In addition to the detailed benchmarking information, Housemark also provides a helpful Value for Money (VFM) Summary. The VFM Summary is organised in a way to illustrate how the Council’s performance – in terms of cost and quality - compares with other stock-retained local authorities, in respect of the four specific service areas of the TSA’s proposed National Standards, covering:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and Community

The VFM Summary places the Council’s performance within one of the four quartiles, as follows:

- Best quartile Within the best 25% of councils
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Best Quartile Within the best 50% of councils
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Worst Quartile Within the worst 50% of councils
- Worst Quartile Within the worst 25% of councils

Housemark’s VFM Summary for the Council is reproduced below:

| <b>HouseMark Value for Money Benchmarking Summary – 2008/9<br/>(Produced January 2010)</b> |  |   |   |  |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| <b>TSA Standard</b>  | <b>Cost KPI</b>  | <b>EFDC’s<br/>Cost KPI<br/>Quartile</b> | <b>Quality KPI</b>  | <b>EFDC’s<br/>Quality<br/>KPI<br/>Quartile</b> |
| Tenant Involvement and Empowerment   | Direct cost per property of Resident Involvement               | <b>Best Quartile</b>                    | Percentage of tenants satisfied that views are being taken into account       | <b>Best Quartile</b>                           |
|  |  |   | Percentage of respondents who felt staff were able to deal with their problem | <b>Best Quartile</b>                           |
|  |  |   | Percentage of tenants satisfied with complaints handling                      | No Data  |
| Home   | Direct cost per property of Responsive Repairs & Void Works    | <b>Best Quartile</b>                    | Percentage of tenants satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service      | <b>Best Quartile</b>                           |
|  |  |   | Repairs completed ‘right first time’  | No Data  |
|  | Direct cost per property of Major Works & Cyclical Maintenance | <b>Best Quartile</b>                    | Percentage of tenants satisfied with overall quality of home                  | <b>Best Quartile</b>                           |
|  |  |   | Percentage of dwellings failing to meet the Decent Home Standard              | <b>Best Quartile</b>                           |
| Tenancy (Including Allocations, Rents & Tenure)  | Direct cost per property of Housing Management                 | <b>Best Quartile</b>                    | Average time in days to re-let empty properties                               | <b>Worst Quartile</b>                          |
|  |  |   | Percentage of tenants satisfied with overall service provided                 | <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Best Quartile</b>            |
|  |  |   | Current tenant rent arrears as % of rent due                                  | <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Best Quartile</b>            |
| Neighbourhood and Community  | Direct costs per property of Estate Services                   | <b>Worst Quartile</b>                   | Percentage of tenants satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live   | <b>Best Quartile</b>                           |
|  | Direct costs per case of Anti-Social behaviour                 | No Data                                 | Percentage of respondents satisfied with anti-social behaviour case handling  | No Data  |

The quartile performance, in respect of those cost and quality indicators for which the Council had data, can be summarised as follows:

| Summary of EFDC's Quartile Placement<br>KPIs - Cost & Quality |           |              |
|---|-----------|--------------|
| Quartile  | Cost KPIs | Quality KPIs |
| Best  | 4         | 6            |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Best  | -         | 2            |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Worst   | -         | -            |
| Worst   | 1         | 1            |

## 6.6 Housing Value for Money Strategy and Achieving Efficiencies

Although the Council's Housing Service is covered by the Council's Corporate Value for Money Strategy, it has been recognised that it would be helpful for the Housing Directorate to formulate a Housing Value for Money Strategy, setting out the Directorate's approach to achieving Value for Money, and its initiatives for achieving efficiency savings on a continuous basis. It is planned to publish a Housing Value for Money Strategy in early 2010/11.

At the Quarterly Performance Management Meetings held between the Director of Housing, Asst Directors of Housing and individual housing managers (referred to in [Section 6.3](#) above), initiatives for achieving efficiency savings are identified, monitored and calculated.

For the 4-year period 2004/5-2007/8, the Housing Directorate made cumulative efficiency savings of around £1.15m.

## 7. Diversity & Equality in the Provision of Housing Services

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### 7.1 Corporate Approach to Diversity and Equality

The Council is sensitive to the needs of the diverse communities that it serves, and is committed to provide facilities and services that are free from unlawful discrimination. The Council recognises its position as a large provider of services and employer in the District and its particular role in the community. It is committed to providing services to the community that reflect the needs and diversity of all its customers and service users. The Council recognises that discrimination in society exists and seek to provide services fairly to all.

The Council promotes equality of provision in Council services, provided either directly by the Council, its contractors, partners or related agencies

Additionally, many individual services produce their own service equality statements, giving details of how their services comply with equal opportunities best practice.

The Council has therefore adopted an Equality Policy covering the "six main strands" of diversity.

### 7.2 The Council's Approach to the Equality Framework for Local Government

The Council's progress in delivering equality of opportunity is assessed against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). The EFLG was introduced from 1 April 2009, and replaced the previous Equality Standard for Local Government, which provided a framework for delivering continuous improvement in relation to fair employment outcomes and equal access to services. The new Equality Framework aims to

- Level 1 – ‘Developing’ (equivalent to Levels 1 and 2 of the former Equality Standard);
- Level 2 – ‘Achieving’ (equivalent to Levels 3 of the former Equality Standard); and
- Level 3 – ‘Excellent’ (equivalent to Levels 4 and 5 of the former Equality Standard).

There are five performance areas within the EFLG, all of which need to be achieved within each of the three levels:

- (a) Knowledge of communities and equality mapping;
- (b) Place-shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment;
- (c) Community engagement and satisfaction;
- (d) Responsive service and customer care; and
- (e) A modern and diverse workforce.

The Council has set a corporate target to achieve Level 2 (‘Achieving’) of the EFLG in 2010/11.

### **7.3 External Assessment and Peer Challenge Against the Equality Framework**

In January 2009, the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) and Improvement East launched the ‘Meeting The Equality Challenge’ regional support programme, aimed at all local authorities across the region. The aim of the programme is to provide support to local authorities in moving to the new Equality Framework, and to make progress on achieving improvement across the levels of the EFLG. The support programme includes provision for peer support for local authorities, and is fully funded by EERA.. The Council is participating in the regional support programme.

Within the Equality Framework, there is a requirement that local authorities reporting their performance at the ‘Achieving’ or ‘Excellent’ levels, have undertaken an agreed external assessment to validate their achievements. As part of the regional support programme, the Council will be participating in an informal equality and diversity peer challenge during March 2010. It is considered that the peer challenge process is essential to the establishment of the authority’s base-line position, and that the results would enable the development and prioritisation of appropriate action to take the Council forward against the Equality Framework.

The informal peer challenge process will give an opportunity for the identification of the Council’s successes and future challenges as it progresses against the Equality Framework. The process will consider what has been achieved, what the Council’s challenges are, and the barriers that may hinder progress to embed equality and diversity throughout the organisation.

A report on the outcomes of the informal peer challenge will be made to a future meeting of the Council’s Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel.

### **7.4 The Housing Directorate’s Approach to Diversity and Equality**

In pursuance of this corporate commitment, the Council has formulated and adopted two relevant housing service strategies relating to diversity and equality:

- Housing Service Strategy on Diversity and Equality
- Housing Service Strategy on Harassment

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

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

Progress with the action plan is regularly monitored. In addition, Equality Impact Assessments have been produced in respect of the following housing-related services, which also include action plans:



- Housing Strategy and Development
- Housing Information and Tenant Participation
- Housing Needs
- Housing Management
- Housing Repairs and Maintenance
- Older People's Housing Services

Equality Impact Assessments are also produced as part of any proposed major policy changes considered by the Cabinet.

The Council has introduced a "Hate Management Panel" comprising representatives of the Police, Social Care and the Council, which oversees and develops policy relating to the management of hate incidents (eg racial and homophobic harassment), and meets on a regular basis to discuss reported hate incidents, and to agree and monitor an action plan for each case.

### 7.5 Diversity Profile of the Council's Tenants

In 2008/9, the Housing Directorate undertook a full Census of all its tenants, in order to obtain data on household composition and other information. Part of the Census collected data on a variety of equality and diversity information.

A total of 3,808 returns were received from the 6,552 households occupying Council properties at the time, representing a good response rate of 58%. The returns gave equalities data on 4,607 tenants and other occupants of the Council's properties.

The following provides a summary of the returns, giving a good indication of the overall profile of the occupants of the Council's properties:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Gender</i>                              | 60% of occupants are female; 40% are male   |
| <i>Disability</i>                          | 1,081 occupants (23%) consider that they have some sort of disability   |
| <i>Hearing Problems</i>                    | 30 occupants (0.6%) have a hearing problem; 5 occupants read sign language and 25 lip read  |
| <i>Sight Problems</i>                      | 216 occupants (4.7%) have a sight problem; 1 occupant reads Braille, 209 occupants (4.5%) would prefer to read documents in large print, and 6 occupants would welcome information provide in an audio form   |
| <i>Ethnicity</i>                           | 4,293 occupants (96%) of those who state their ethnicity are White British. The next highest ethnic group are White Irish, Asian and other White races (2.6%)   |
| <i>English not 1<sup>st</sup> language</i> | 28 occupants (0.6%) do not have English as their first language. The 2 <sup>nd</sup> most common first language after English is Turkish, which is spoken as a first language by 8 occupants (0.17%). Seven other languages are the first language of the 20 remaining occupants (0.43%) who do not have English as their first language. |

The Council recognises that the data collected does not cover the "six strands" of diversity covered by the Equalities Bill, currently passing through Parliament. It is therefore intended to undertake a full 100% postal survey of all the Council's tenants and occupants in 2010/11, in order to capture more comprehensive equality and diversity data for the future (see Key Action Plan at Chapter 13).

### 7.6 Ethnicity of the Council's Housing Applicants and Applicants Accommodated

Part of the Council's Policy Statement for Equal Opportunities in the Provision of Housing Services includes a requirement for an annual review of the ethnicity of applicants on the Housing Register, compared with the ethnicity of those allocated accommodation. The reason for the review is to identify whether or not there are any indications to suggest the Council may be discriminating against any one ethnic group. The annual review is undertaken by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, and was last undertaken in July 2009.

The breakdown of the ethnic origin of applicants on the Housing Register for both 2007/8 and 2008/9 is set out below.

| <b>Ethic Origin of Housing Applicants</b> |                    |                    |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Ethnic Group</b>                       | <b>2007/08 (%)</b> | <b>2008/09 (%)</b> |
| White British/Irish                       | 77.8               | 78.0               |
| Bangladesh/Pakistan/India                 | 0.8                | 0.8                |
| African/Caribbean                         | 1.8                | 3.0                |
| Mixed Race                                | 0.4                | 1.2                |
| Other                                     | 4.2                | 5.0                |
| Not Stated                                | 15.0               | 12.0               |

The breakdown of the ethnic origin of Housing Register applicants allocated Council accommodation in 2007/8 and 2008/9 is set out below:

| <b>Ethic Origin of Housing Applicants Accommodated</b> |                    |                    |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Ethnic Group</b>                                    | <b>2007/08 (%)</b> | <b>2008/09 (%)</b> |
| White British/Irish                                    | 76.0               | 82.0               |
| Bangladesh/Pakistan/India                              | 0.4                | 0.2                |
| African/Caribbean                                      | 2.2                | 1.0                |
| Mixed Race   | 0.2                | 0.8                |
| Other  | 3.1                | 3.0                |
| Not Stated   | 18.1               | 13.0               |

On review, the Housing Scrutiny Panel concluded that, generally, the data confirms that the ethnicity of applicants allocated Council accommodation is similar to the ethnicity of those applicants on the Housing Register. It also concluded that, although a large number of housing applicants chose not to disclose their ethnicity, it is evident that the ethnicity of applicants on the Housing Register generally mirrors the allocation of vacancies and that the Council can be reasonably confident that its Allocations Scheme does not racially discriminate, either directly or indirectly. As a result, the Scrutiny Panel concluded that that no adjustments to the Allocations Scheme were required to avoid direct or indirect racial discrimination.

## 8. Rents Strategy

### 8.1 Background

The Government has previously determined that rent setting by local authorities and RSLs be based on a common system based on relative property values and local earnings; rents should move towards comparable rents 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 detailing a standard methodology (or formula) for use by both RSL's and local authorities for the 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 earnings;
- a bedroom factor so that, all other things being equal, smaller properties have lower rents.

The formula also takes account of national average Council and RSL rent levels and produces a target rent for each property, which local authorities originally had to seek to achieve by a specified date. However, this

date has been changed by the Government on a number of occasions. Originally, the date for “convergence” was 2012, in 2008/9, the date was changed to 2023, and in 2009/10, the date was changed again to 2012.

Under the rent reforms, the Government has also stated that local authority rent guidelines should rise by no more than 1% per annum in real terms, meaning that the target rent for each property will increase in line with the average for the local authority sector. However, no tenant should be subject to a change in their rent as a result of the combined influence of restructuring and convergence of more, or less, than £2 a week in any year above the normal increase for inflation.

## **8.2 Valuation**

The relative property values are based on ‘existing use value’. The valuation base was set at January 1999. The Valuation Office, on behalf of the Council, valued 198 separate “beacon properties” (many of which were used for the resource account valuation) for this rent restructuring exercise. Each beacon property is an example of a main property type owned by the Council in each of the main towns and villages and are representative of the total housing stock. These valuations were then used for all the other similar properties sharing the same characteristics and location.

These valuations are not revisited, unless an individual property’s characteristics have considerably changed.

## **8.3 Implementation**

The Council introduced its Rents Strategy, to implement the rent restructuring requirements, from April 2003, at the same time as introducing separate service charges and support charges (see below).

## **8.4 Strategic Approach**

When the Council first introduced its Rents Strategy, there were various options open to the Council in terms of achieving the implementation of target rents. However, the Council was mindful that rent restructuring would increase rents for the majority of tenants in real terms. Therefore, it was considered that the fairest way forward would be to implement rent changes by equal amounts over the remaining convergence period. This applies to both rent increases and rent reductions.

## **8.5 Service Charges**

Target rents (and therefore the actual restructured rents) can only take into account all property related services and those services that may relate to a group of dwellings. Examples of services covered by target rents include:

- Repairs and maintenance
- Management of properties
- Publicity and consultation
- Administration of rents

Examples of services not covered include:

- Grounds maintenance
- Cleaning of communal areas
- Lighting of communal areas
- Supporting people costs

The other services not covered by rent restructuring are subject to further Government guidance on their treatment. This guidance advocates the separation of service charges from rents, to enable a more transparent charging regime for tenants. Although not compulsory, the Council has followed the guidance and a number of years ago separated out the costs of services relating to non-property related services for all its blocks of flats, and applied separate service charges to tenants. Under the Government’s guidance, service charges cannot be increased by more than RPI + ½%.

## **8.6 Support Charges**

From April 2003, following the introduction of the Government’s Supporting People programme, the Council has separated out from its rents the revenue costs of providing supported housing (e.g. sheltered housing) and made a separate support charge. Under the Supporting People arrangements, the Council receives reimbursement for these charges, for all tenants in receipt of housing benefit, from Essex County Council as the Supporting People Administering Authority. Tenants not in receipt of housing benefit must pay the

charge themselves, although the Council will meet the cost of “transitional protection” in perpetuity for tenants in occupation prior to 1 March 2003, which amounts to the difference between the former “scheme manager charge” tenants were paying prior to introduction of supporting people and the new support charge.

Due to real term reductions in the amount of grant that the Essex Supporting People Team has received from the Government for a number of years, the amount of supporting people grant provided to supported housing providers in Essex (including this Council) has, generally, been less than the actual cost of the service.

## 9. Housing Stock Option Appraisals

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### 9.1 Introduction

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, including 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.

### 9.2 Housing Stock Options Appraisal 2002/4

In 2002, the Council appointed Beha Williams Norman Ltd (BWNL), specialist housing consultants, to undertake a detailed Housing Stock Options Appraisal. The Options Appraisal was undertaken in two initial stages, as set out below, followed by a third stage of further tenant consultation.

The Housing Stock Options Appraisal 2002/4 considered five main options:

- Large scale stock transfer (LSVT)
- The formation of an arms length management company
- Use of the private finance initiative
- Securitisation (a private sector financing technique which involves the sale of the future rental income in return for finance)
- Retention of the stock

The Council was committed to ensuring that tenants were involved with the appraisal process. Therefore, the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation were fully involved from the outset (including the appointment of consultant). In the first instance, BWNL were asked to undertake a two-stage approach to the Options Appraisal, as set out below, in an attempt to enable a clear picture to emerge not only of the financial effects, but also of the attitudes of tenants and members to the alternative options:

*Stage 1* A detailed financial appraisal of the options, which included an indicative valuation of the stock based on cash flow forecasts, stock condition and “catch up repairs”, and an analysis of each of the options.

*Stage 2* (a) Postal surveys of all the Council’s tenants and leaseholders, seeking their views on whether they would be interested in considering (without commitment) any of the alternative options to stock retention. This included examples of what benefits could result, and balanced information on the main issues to consider; and

(b) A survey of members to gauge their informal views on the issues.

### 9.3 Findings and Conclusions of the Initial Stock Options Report (Stages 1 and 2)

BWNL's Initial Report was completed at the end of 2002 and provided a detailed financial appraisal of the options (Stage 1), together with the results of the Stage 2 Tenants and Leaseholders Attitudes Survey. The report also provided detailed conclusions and findings. In summary, at that time, BWNL concluded that although the Council could meet the decent homes standard, it was unlikely to have sufficient resources to be able to bring all of its housing stock into a fully maintained condition in the foreseeable future, and that stock transfer was probably the best financial option. However, the results of the Stage 2 Tenants and

Leaseholders Attitude Survey showed a clear preference for the Council to retain its housing stock. Therefore, BWNL recommended that a further in depth consultation exercise should be undertaken with a selection of tenants to explain the issues relating to stock retention and stock transfer in more detail, and to gauge their subsequent views, through the appointment of an Independent Tenant Adviser (ITA) familiar with this type of exercise. This was agreed by both the Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation,

Insights were therefore appointed as Independent Tenant Adviser, in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and undertook the further consultation during 2003 in a number of different ways.

#### **9.4 Summary of the Findings of the Further Tenant Consultation by Insights**

The report from Insights on their further consultation was received in February 2004. Their main findings were as follows:

- 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.
- Tenants felt they had already told the Council their views and wished the Council to stop asking the same questions

#### **9.5 Update Report by BWNL**

In view of the Council's decision to undertake the further consultation of tenants before reaching a decision on the preferred option, BWNL were re-appointed to undertake a further appraisal of the options and produce an "Update Report", taking into account the developments that had occurred over the previous year, both at the national and local level. In particular, BWNL appraised the following developments that had occurred since their Initial Report.

- The Government's policy document, "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future"
- The effects of the Government changes to the local authority housing capital finance regime.
- The implications of the Government's changes to the housing subsidy system and, in particular, the effect of the new way in which management and maintenance allowances are calculated.
- The effects of the Council's debt free status.

BWNL's main conclusions were as follows:

- The Council, under current arrangements, can meet the Government's Decent Homes Target .
- With the additional resources through the new management & maintenance allowances for Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Subsidy (£1.7m per annum), the HRA can sustain itself for the short to medium term future and allow contributions of some £15 million to be made towards capital programmes over the next 20 years.
- The level of resources available for investment in the housing stock has also changed as a result of the Council becoming debt-free (an additional £8.6m over the next three years). Nevertheless, a shortfall of some £12 million remains in the level of resources needed to meet the full investment programme over the next 10 years.
- Since the Council has resources to achieve investment levels well above the basic Decent Homes Standard, it is 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.

BWNL therefore recommended that the Council should continue with the existing arrangements for management and ownership of the housing stock, at least for the time being, but review the situation in the light of any further developments in Government housing policy or local circumstances, and in any event in five years time.

## 9.6 Council Decision on the Preferred Option

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation considered the findings and recommendations of the two consultants' reports and recommended to the Council that the housing stock should be retained. The Options Appraisal and the views of the Federation were considered by one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the 4 March 2004, when the Committee agreed to recommend the stock retention option to the Cabinet in April 2004. The Cabinet agreed with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's recommendation

The Council's Stock Options Appraisal was signed-off in September 2004.

## 9.7 Small Scale Voluntary Transfers

### (a) Introduction

It is clearly important that the Major Repairs Allowance and other available resources are invested to produce optimum benefit. The ODPM's Guidance on Business Plans therefore emphasises the importance of local authorities carrying out detailed investment appraisals looking at strategic options for a particular group of properties, or in a selected estate or area, for incorporation within the overall Business Plan.

Separate from LSVT, the Council has successfully undertaken four small scale transfers over the years. The first at Green Close, Epping Green and Pancroft / The Mead, Abridge in the 1990's, enabling two former sites of PRC properties to be redeveloped by RSLs. The most recent stock transfers have been of sheltered housing schemes:

### (b) Small Scale Voluntary Transfer - Robert Daniels Court, Theydon Bois

In January 2001, following a detailed Options Appraisal, the Council agreed to undertake an extension/conversion scheme at Robert Daniels Court, Theydon Bois (one of the Council's sheltered housing schemes for the elderly) through a small scale voluntary transfer to an RSL.

Robert Daniels Court comprises predominantly bedsits, which had become difficult to let (with vacancies in some cases in excess of a year) since they no longer met the needs and aspirations of the latest generation of elderly people. Moreover, since the elderly residents had combined bedrooms/lounges and had to share communal bathroom facilities, the quality of accommodation was not as high as that provided at other Council sheltered schemes.

A Detailed Feasibility Study was completed in March 2000 to undertake a major improvement scheme, predominantly providing an extension of nine flats and the conversion of the 28 bedsits into 19 self contained flats

A detailed Options Appraisal concluded that the cost to the Council overall of undertaking the scheme through a stock transfer would be around £400,000 less than if the Council undertook the scheme itself. This is because, although the HRA would lose rental income of around £350,000 over the next 30 years through transfer (at net present value), there would be a saving of around £750,000 in the capital cost. As part of the Options Appraisal, the tenants were consulted on the options which established support from the tenants for such an approach.

In view of the significant financial saving to the Council, it was agreed to undertake a small scale voluntary stock transfer. Following a competitive exercise involving three RSLs, a Selection Panel selected Home Housing to work with the Council and tenants to effect the transfer. A formal consultation exercise was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Act 1985, which resulted in a positive ballot. The transfer successfully took place in August 2004.

### (c) Small Scale Voluntary Transfer – Wickfields, Chigwell

Following the success of the stock transfer of Robert Daniels Court, in 2005, the Council undertook an options appraisal to assess the most cost effective way of improving another sheltered housing scheme at Wickfields, Chigwell, which comprises 16 bedsits, 8 self contained flats and the former Scheme Manager's house. The options appraisal estimated the costs of the improvement/conversion scheme at £1.67m, excluding professional fees and revenue costs. The options appraisal concluded that the cost to the Council would be far less if the improvement scheme was undertaken through a stock transfer to a housing

association, than if the Council undertook the improvement scheme itself. Not only would the total capital cost to the Council (including fees etc) of £1.1m be £800,000 less, the overall cost to the Council over a 30 year period (expressed as the net present value (NPV) ), would also be around £1.4m less.

As a result, all the residents were formally balloted on a stock transfer, again to Home Housing, in order to facilitate the improvements. The majority of tenants were in favour and, accordingly, the stock transfer took place in October 2006. The improvement scheme was completed in late 2007.

## 10. Risk Management

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### 10.1 Introduction

Risk management can be defined as the consideration of the social, economic, political and other factors involved in risk analysis, to determine both the acceptability of damage that could result from an event or exposure and what action, if any, should be taken to minimise the risk of that damage.

### 10.2 Corporate Risk Register

A corporate Risk Management & Assurance Group has been established, made up of officers from each Council Service, to produce and regularly review a Corporate Risk Register, and to collate service based risk assessments. The Asst Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources) is the representative of the Housing Directorate on the Group. The Corporate Risk Register is also periodically reviewed by the Council's Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee.

### 10.3 Housing Risk Register

In 2005, the Housing Directorate produced its first Housing Risk Register, which is updated annually and identifies the strategic and operational risks affecting the Housing Directorate. Strategic risks are those that have an effect on the Council as a whole, where individuals, sections or even the whole of the Housing Directorate have no total control over the outcome of risk management. Operational risks are those that affect individuals or sections of the Housing Directorate, or the Housing Directorate as a whole, and will have little or no impact on other services of the Council. The Housing Risk Register is reviewed and updated annually.

Within the Housing Directorate, all managers have responsibility and accountability for identifying, assessing and managing the risks that threaten their own area of activity.

Information is provided in the Housing Risk Register on the following for each risk:

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b><i>Vulnerability</i></b> | A description of why and how the Housing Directorate is vulnerable to the risk   |
| <b><i>Trigger</i></b>       | The identification of what occurrence(s) may set off the risk. There may be more than one trigger for each risk.   |
| <b><i>Consequence</i></b>   | An assessment of the consequences if the risk is triggered, which may include multiple consequences. Some consequences may be local or operational, some may be strategic. |
| <b><i>Action Plan</i></b>   | Details of what actions are, or need to be, taken in order to minimise the risk.   |

Risk management is applied to each of the identified risks, through exploring the best options to reduce either likelihood or impact or both. Not all risks can be reduced, but they can be managed. Any new actions than need to be taken are included within the Housing Special Projects Plan. Periodic actions are included within the Housing Annual Events Plan (See Section 8.4)

The main risks within the Housing Risk Register are included within the Council's Corporate Risk Register.

## 10.4 Key Housing Operational Risks and Housing Risk Matrix

The Housing Risk Register identifies 10 **Key** Housing Operational Risks” and a further 11 other housing operational risks. For each risk, the entry in the Risk Register provides information on:

- A description of the risk (vulnerability)
- Identification of the trigger(s) that are the most likely to result in the risk arising
- The consequence of the risk
- The actions taken / to be taken to minimise the risk
- The responsible officer
- The assessment of the degree of risk, in terms of likelihood and impact

The risk assessment makes the following judgements in terms of likelihood and impact:

**Likelihood:**

A - Very High  
B - High  
C - Significant

**Impact**

D - Low  
E - Very Low  
F - Almost Impossible

1 - Catastrophic  
2 - Critical  
3 - Marginal  
4 - Negligible

A summary of the Key Housing Operational Risks, showing the current risk assessment, is given below,.

| Key Housing Operational Risks 2010/11 |                    |  |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| No.                                   | Current Risk Score | Vulnerability / Risk   |
| 1                                     | 2E                 | Inability to meet Decent Homes target for Council-owned stock by 2010  |
| 2                                     | 1E                 | That the HRA goes into deficit.  |
| 3                                     | 2D                 | Lack of suitable temporary accommodation for residents of sheltered schemes and Norway House in the event of an incident.  |
| 4                                     | 2D                 | Some services are delivered through decentralised offices.   |
| 5                                     | 2C                 | All day-to-day management of the Housing Service is recorded and monitored on the OHMS database, which is provided through one supplier (Northgate) and interfaces with other Council IT systems (e.g. Academy).                                       |
| 6                                     | 3D                 | Some services are provided by contractors and consultants working on the Council's behalf using a variety of forms of contract, sometimes with non-standard conditions inserted.   |
| 7                                     | 2E                 | The Council has a duty of care to the health and safety and welfare of staff, tenants and contractors.   |
| 8                                     | 2C                 | The Careline Service is provided via the Piper Network Controller (PNC), which is provided by one supplier – Tunstall Telecom. Alarm systems are located in residents' homes where the Council has no control over the security and integrity property |
| 9                                     | 2E                 | Rent, council tax payments etc. are made at cash desks in Broadway Housing Office and Civic Offices.   |
| 10                                    | 2D                 | Officers meet with the public, both in interview rooms and at tenants homes.   |

In the Risk Register, these risk assessments have been plotted within a Risk Matrix. Those risks with a high likelihood and/or impact will have further scrutiny and action.



## 10.5 Housing Business Continuity Plan

As part of the Housing Directorate' approach to risk management, a Housing Business Continuity Plan has been produced, which complements the Council's Corporate Business Continuity Plan. This sets out in detail:

- Roles and responsibilities of senior staff with corporate management responsibility, and individual service areas
- Working practices by individual service area
- Anticipated threats to service delivery, including the full or partial loss of staff, accommodation, ICT facilities and paper records for each of the sections within the Housing Directorate
- The approach to be taken in the event of a flu pandemic
- Ways of minimising the threat/risk
- Disaster recovery and priorities - service-wide and for each section
- Initial actions to be taken within the first week following a disaster

## 10.6 Housing Emergency Plan

Separate from the Housing Business Continuity Plan (which considers the way the Housing Directorate will respond to a disaster affecting the Council as an organisation), a Housing Emergency Plan has been produced, which complements the Council's main Emergency Plan, and prescribes the Housing Directorate's arrangements for preparing for, and dealing with, housing-related emergencies that affect the local community. The Housing Emergency Plan also provides essential information that is likely to be required by housing staff in the event of emergencies.

The Housing Emergency Plan covers both minor emergencies out of office hours and major emergencies in or out of office hours. A major emergency is defined as any circumstance where the lives or safety of the public, or their property, may be considered to be endangered by any incident of such magnitude as to be beyond the normal resources of the emergency services, and requires the additional manpower of the District Council. An out of hours minor emergency is defined as an event that cannot wait to be dealt with until the following working day.

The main types of emergencies that may occur and needing a response by the Housing Directorate are:

- Major Emergencies
- Homelessness
- Careline faults
- Minor housing maintenance
- Evacuation / Re-housing
- Severe weather and associated repairs

In the event of a major emergency, the Council's Emergency Response Team (ERT) will be activated. The Director and two Assistant Directors of Housing are the representatives for the Housing Directorate on the ERT. They will provide the link between the ERT and housing staff dealing with the emergency and will normally be based at the Emergency Control Centre in the Civic Offices. The Asst Director of Housing (Operations) will normally lead on the establishment and operation of a rest centre.

# 11. Financial Plan

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## 11.1 Introduction

The Council's consultants Accra Consulting have prepared the Financial Plan on behalf of the Council, which has been based on the revised budgets for the HRA for 2009/10, and the proposed budgets for 2010/11. Where appropriate, updated financial data has been used to ensure that the model is as accurate as possible, including final subsidy determinations and budgets for 2010/11.

## 11.2 CLG Reforms of HRA Finance

It should be noted that projections for future rent increases and subsidy payments are estimated, since no guidance has been given by the CLG. However, this has become even more uncertain as the subsidy system and HRA Finance has been subject to a thorough review. A consultation exercise was undertaken by the CLG in July 2009. The second round of consultation, which is due in March 2010, should detail the

basis for local authorities to withdraw voluntarily from the subsidy system, potentially for an initial one-off payment, of assessed apportionment of the national housing debt.

Therefore, a review of these projections will be required once the consultation is released. The Council has agreed that its Finance Cabinet Committee should consider the CLG's "offer" in detail when it is received, and to advise the Cabinet and the full Council on whether or not to accept the offer. This will be an important decision, since it will affect the Council's HRA, and its ability to fund the proper and effective management and maintenance of its housing stock.

Since the CLG's "offer" has not been received at the time of formulating this latest HRA Business Plan, the Financial Plan ignores this option, and assumes that the status quo will continue.

### **11.3 The 30-Year Financial Plan – Whole of the HRA**

The Council's 30-Year Financial Plan for the whole of the HRA is shown at [Appendix 6](#). The latest review of the Financial Plan has identified that the HRA should remain in surplus until 2036/37 (Year 28). This is a significant improvement on the position forecast in last year's 30-Year Financial Plan, which assessed that the HRA would only remain in surplus until 2027/28 (Year 20 of last year's Plan).

### **11.4 Underlying Assumptions**

The figures within the Financial Plan have been based on the revised out-turn for the HRA for the financial year 2009/10. Where appropriate, updated financial data has been used to ensure that the Financial Plan is as accurate as possible, including final subsidy determinations and budgets for 2010/11.

#### *Interest Rates*

The recommended rate for RPI of 2% has been used throughout the Plan, with the exception of formula rental increases for 2010/11 (-1.4%; RPI for September 2009). The consolidated interest rates have been provided by the Council's Finance and ICT Directorate, at 1.5% and 1.8% for the two years respectively. The rates are predicted to increase to 4.5% over 3 years and are then constant throughout the remainder of the Plan to form a basis of consistency, corresponding with RPI.

Interest on HRA balances is estimated at 2.3%, again constant throughout the Plan.

#### *Average Rents and Increases*

The average rent of £74.81 is net of current service charges as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, based on a 52 week rent year, although 53 weeks are accounted for, where appropriate.

There is little in the way of firm guidance from the Government with regard to the treatment of future rent increases. Existing guidance is that actual rents are to converge with formula rents by 2011/12.

The latest subsidy determination has thrown further doubt on this, since guideline rents have been modelled to converge by 2013/14, later than last year's date of 2023/24. As the determination is for one year only, pending the final conclusion of the ongoing review, this is very much subject to reassessment.

An across-the-board increase of 2.4% has therefore been assumed, giving an average rent in 2010/11 of £76.61.

Future rent increases are protected by a limit of RPI + 0.5% + £2.00, in accordance with Government guidance.

From the latest subsidy determination, the average formula rent for 2010/11 is £83.81, some £7.20 different from the projected average actual rent. The limit rent of £78.84 is not exceeded.

Rent increases have been modelled in the Financial Plan, within the above constraints, from 2011/12 to converge with formula rents by 2016/17, which increase by 0.5% above RPI.

#### *Voids and Bad Debts*

The figures relate to those in the 2009/10 budget, which translate to:

| Type             |         |                        |
|------------------|---------|------------------------|
| <b>Voids</b>     | 0.71 %  |                        |
| <b>Bad Debts</b> | £55,000 | then 0.18% from Year 7 |

These percentages remain consistent throughout the Financial Plan.

#### *Miscellaneous Income*

The following are additional sources of income for the HRA:

| Source of Income                | Amount (2009/10) | Assumed Increases (Future Years)     |
|---------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Business Premises               | 1,584,000        | 1% for years 1 to 5 then RPI less 1% |
| Garages                         | 825,000          | RPI Only                             |
| Miscellaneous income            | 1,447,470        | RPI Only                             |
| Rent/Wayleaves                  | 9,000            | RPI Only                             |
| Mortgage Interest               | 2,600            | Reducing to Nil in 9 years           |
| Sheltered charges               | 472,540          | Cash limied                          |
| Contributions from General Fund | 298,000          | RPI Only                             |

Due to leap years and calendar timings, the Plan accounts for the additional week's rental income within this section, that will be generated every six years, the first being 2012/13.

#### *Right To Buy*

The following levels of Right to Buy per annum have been projected:

| Year/s  | Sales / annum |
|---------|---------------|
| 1 – 2   | 7             |
| 3 – 4   | 10            |
| 5 – 10  | 15            |
| 11 – 15 | 10            |
| 16 – 20 | 8             |
| 21 – 25 | 4             |
| 26 - 30 | 2             |

This will leave the Council with 97% of its existing stock at the conclusion of the Plan.

#### *Other Stock Changes*

There are no further stock reductions in the Plan.

#### *Subsidy*

#### Management and Maintenance Allowances

With the review of management and maintenance allowances concluded and identified in the latest determinations, the 2010/11 final allowances have been included. The position is as follows:

| Allowance  | Actual Allowance (p/property) | Target Allowance (p/property) |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Management &amp; Maintenance - Repairs</b>    | £1,091.56                     | £1,090.48                     |
| <b>Management &amp; Maintenance - Management</b> | £536.61                       | £532.89                       |

Both allowances are now lower than target, and convergence has been modelled over the next 8 years.

Target allowances have been forecast to increase by RPI only.

### Rent Restructuring

The formula rent real increase has been included at 0.5%, in accordance with Government guidance. Both the limit rent and the guideline rent have been modelled to converge with the formula rent by 2016/17.

The subsidy determination continues the “Caps and Limits” adjustment to the guideline rent. In effect, this looks to address the restrictions that have been placed on the Council, such that it was not able to increase rents to achieve formula rent convergence.

A reduction of £1.57 against guideline rent has been modelled, reducing up to 2016/17.

### Supported Borrowing Approvals

These are not included, due to the Council’s debt free status.

### Major Repairs Allowance

The 2010/11 MRA of £735.44 has been used in these projections and will increase by RPI only.

### *Supervision and Management Costs*

The costs identified in the Plan for general and special management costs reflect those in the 2009/10 projections and 2010/11 budgets.

Costs are projected to increase by RPI + 0.5%, to reflect probable pay awards and other service cost increases above the standard rate of inflation. This is higher than provided for in increases to subsidy allowances. This is at a future cost to the Council, but offers a form of contingency, especially as related income through service charges increases by RPI only.

### *Rent Rebates*

There are no current or future costs projected.

### *Responsive Repair Costs*

The Council currently operates a Housing Repairs Fund, which is funded by fixed contributions from the HRA and accounts for all revenue repairs expenditure. The Financial Plan assumes HRA contributions of £5.6m per annum until 2015/16, after which they are increased to around £6.6m per annum.

### *Catch and Major Works and Improvements*

The Council’s Stock Condition Survey was undertaken in June 2002, by market leaders Savills, based on 7,132 properties. This has been since updated by officers where possible and recorded on an asset management database.

In addition, the costs submitted to the Cabinet for Years 1 to 5 for the Council’s Capital Programme have been used, which will cover more than the cost of continuing to achieve the Government’s Decent Homes Standard.

From Year 6 onwards, 75% of the Stock Condition Survey has been used, as an assumed level of expenditure to continue to meet the Decent Homes Standard, having uplifted the June 2009 costs by 2.5%, as the basis of projecting forward from 2014/15.

Where appropriate, these figures have been amended for stock sensitivities. Fees of 3% have been added from Year 6 to reflect current levels of procurement and Disabled Adaptations are provided for at £400,000 per year.

Major Repair costs have assumed to increase by RPI only, matching projected MRA increases.

## **11.5 Sensitivities**

The following chart shows how the projected outcomes change, while applying sensitivities which are considered to be appropriate:

| <b>Sensitivity</b>  | <b>HRA Balanced to:</b> | <b>Decent Homes Funded to:</b> |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Base</b>   | <b>Yr 28</b>            | <b>Yr 20</b>                   |
| Rents and Subsidy Converge by 2023/24                     | Yr 28                   | Yr 19                          |
| Rents Converge by 2023/24 but Subsidy 2016/17             | Yr 28                   | Yr 20                          |
| Revenue Repairs Reduced by £50 per Property From Year 8   | Yr 30                   | Yr 25                          |
| RPI of 2.5% From Year 3                                   | Yr 30                   | Yr 25                          |
| RPI of 3.5% From Year 3                                   | Yr 30                   | Yr 18                          |
| Management Costs and Service Charges Increase by RPI Only | Yr 30                   | Yr 24                          |
| Capital Repairs Real Inflation 0.5% Year 6 Onwards        | Yr 28                   | Yr 18                          |
| Capital Repairs Real Inflation 1% Year 6 Onwards          | Yr 28                   | Yr 16                          |

## 12. Reviewing the Business Plan

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### 12.1 Introduction

The HRA Business Plan is a dynamic, working document. Consequently, it is essential that it is reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

In addition, it is very important that progress on the Action Plan and the achievement of performance targets are reviewed throughout the year.

### 12.2 Financial Monitoring

The Financial Plans for 2010/11 will be monitored throughout the year by officers, the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Cabinet as appropriate.

### 12.3 Monitoring the Business Plan's Action Plan

Chapter 13 of this Business Plan sets out a detailed Action Plan. It is important that progress with the Action Plan is monitored. This is done at two levels.

At officer level, the actions are incorporated within the Housing Directorate's Special Project Plan referred to in [Section 5.6](#) above. At member level, the Housing Scrutiny Panel receives and considers a six-month progress report on the Action Plan, in October and March each year.

### 12.4 The HRA Business Plan Review process

The review process will commence in January 2010, which will result in the production of a draft HRA Business Plan and Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan 2011/12, on which the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and Housing Scrutiny Panel will be consulted, prior to the final version being approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder around the end of March 2010.

## 13. Action Plan

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### 13.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 sets out the Council's Corporate and Specific Housing Objectives. The table on the following pages sets out the Council's Action Plan for meeting those objectives over the next few years. The Action Plan is "SMART" (specific – measurable – agreed – realistic – timebound).

**HRA Business Plan 2010/11  
ACTION PLAN**

| Action   | Corporate Housing Objectives | Responsibility for Achievement                      | Target Date | Expected Outcome  |
|--|------------------------------|---|-------------|---|
| <b>Housing General</b>   |                              |   |             |   |
| 1) Undertake a survey of all tenants and leaseholders to collect and record details on their diversity profile, covering the “six strands of diversity”  | HO 2                         | Principal Housing Officer<br>(Information/Strategy) | March 2011  | Up to date diversity information on tenants of Council properties   |
| 2) Seek the Government’s new Customer Excellence Award for the whole of the Housing Directorate, to replace the Council’s existing Charter Mark Award  | HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4             | Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)              | Sept 2010   | Receipt of the Customer Excellence Award.   |
| 3) Respond to the CLG’s “offer” to withdraw from the housing subsidy system in return for taking on a proportion of the national housing debt  | HO 1 / 5                     | Director of Housing                                 | Sept 2010   | An assessment on whether or not the CLG’s offer is favourable to the Council.   |
| 4) Produce a Housing Value for Money Strategy, to complement the Council’s corporate Value for Money Strategy  | HO 1                         | Asst. Director of Housing (Property)                | Sept 2010   | A document that clearly and succinctly sets out the Housing Directorate’s approach to achieving value for money for it’s tenants and other customers              |
| 5) Produce a Continuous Housing Improvement Strategy and Action Plan, setting out the approach the Council takes to continuously improving its services for tenants and other housing customers  | HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5         | Director of Housing                                 | Sept 2010   | A document that clearly and succinctly sets out the Housing Directorate’s approach to continuously improving its services for tenants and other housing customers |
| 6) Formulate and implement a Housing Excellence Plan, assessing how well the Housing Service compares with an “excellent housing service”, and identifying required actions to achieve excellence, all be reference to the current and new Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) produced by the Tenant Services Authority and the Audit Commission | HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5         | Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)              | July 2010   | A clear assessment of what actions need to be undertaken to achieve “excellence”, as advocated by the Tenant Services Authority and the Audit Commission          |

|   |              |                           |            |  |
|---|--------------|---------------------------|------------|--|
| 7) Introduce an electronic records and document management system (Information@Work) for housing files  | HO 1 / 2 / 3 |                           | March 2011 | A fully electronic filing system, enabling officers to access housing customers' records more easily and quickly, and to provide a more responsive service. Also to lay the foundations for mobile working.. |
| <b>Housing Management</b>   |              |                           |            |  |
| 8) Continue the Home Ownership Grants Scheme in 2010/11, enabling 612 tenants to purchase their own home and vacate their Council property for occupation by a housing applicant  | HO 1         | Housing Resources Manager | March 2011 | Provision of a further 6-12 home ownership grants in 2010/11.  |
| 9) Investigate the potential for enhancing the Council's HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme (in partnership with the Council's five local authority partners), including:<br><br>(a) Production of a common application form for all HomeOption local authority partners;<br><br>(b) Introduction of a facility for tenants to apply for the housing on-line;<br><br>(c) Advertising vacant properties available for private rent. | HO 2         | Housing Options Manager   | March 2011 | Additional and more convenient way for housing applicants to register for housing and to access the private rented sector  |
| 10) Undertake a 1-year pilot scheme to identify and tackle "social housing fraud, through the creation of a new post of Housing Officer (Fraud), part-funded from funding provided by the CLG   | HO 2         | Director of Housing       | March 2011 | The repossession of a number of properties being occupied by unauthorised people, that can be let to bona fide housing applicants  |
| 11) Transfer the lease of land and properties at Marden Close, Chigwell Row, to one of the Council's Preferred RSL Partners – following a competitive exercise – for the 20 existing bedsits to be converted into 10 one bedroom flats  | HO 1 / 2 / 3 | Director of Housing       | Dec 2010   | Transfer of the lease and a start on site of the conversion scheme.  |
| 12) Undertake a feasibility exercise – in partnership with an appointed development agent - for the development of Council-owned land by the Council, to provide additional affordable housing (subject to the Government changing the housing finance accounting regulations, to avoid the General Fund having to meet loan costs)   | HO 1 / 2 / 3 | Director of Housing       | March 2011 | A conclusion on whether or not the development of a number of Council-owned sites is viable  |

| Tenant Participation  |                  |  |           |  |
|---|------------------|--|-----------|--|
| <p>13) Comply with the various requirements of the Tenant Services Authority's new Housing Regulatory Framework from April 2010, including:</p> <p>(a) Provision of a new Annual Report to all tenants, including performance against tenant-selected indicators in 2009/10</p> <p>(b) Details of how the Council will meet the new National Housing Standards and proposed changes to the Council's existing Housing Service Standards</p> | HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 | Director of Housing                                | Sept 2010 | Production of a document that tenants find easy to read and understand.  |
| <p>14) Provide quarterly performance reports to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation on performance indicators selected by the Federation</p>  | HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 | Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Information) | May 2010  | Provision of information to the Federation that enables them to properly assess the performance of the Council's Housing Service.  |
| <p>15) Introduce and maintain four "Tenant Talkback Panels", providing fora to provide qualitative feedback on the following housing services:</p> <p>(a) Disabilities<br/>(b) Repairs and maintenance<br/>(c) Housing information<br/>(d) Housing allocations</p>  | HO 2 / 3 / 4     | Tenant Participation Officer                       | Sept 2010 | Establishment and operation of all four Tenant Talkback Panels.  |
| <p>16) Produce a Tenant Participation Impact Assessment, documenting how tenants have participated in decision-making in 2009/10, and the impact of their participation, and proposals for tenants to participate in 2010/11</p>  | HO 4             | Tenant Participation Officer                       | June 2010 | Production of the Impact Assessment  |
| <p>17) Train tenants of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and recognised tenants associations to undertake periodic "mystery shopping" exercises on the Council's housing services, and for other social housing providers</p>  | HO 2 / 3 / 4     | Tenant Participation Officer                       | Dec 2010  | A team of trained mystery shoppers, able to properly and objectively assess how well housing officers deal with enquiries from telephone and, possibly, personal enquirers |



### Supporting People and Supported Housing

|  |              |   |            |   |
|--|--------------|---|------------|---|
| 18) Submit a competitive tender for the provision of the Council's Careline Service to neighbouring Harlow DC  | HO 1 / 2     | Asst Director of Housing (Operations)     | Sept 2010  | Increase the use and viability of Careline.   |
| 19) Utilise the 24-hour staffing facility at Careline to actively monitor CCTV cameras around the District   | HO 2         | Housing Manager (Older People's Services) | March 2011 | Improved monitoring of CCTV cameras around the District, to reduce and tackle anti-social behaviour and other crime.        |
| 20) Seek accreditation of the Council's Careline Service from the Association of Social Alarm Providers (ASAP)   | HO 2         | Housing Manager (Older People's Services) | Dec 2010   | Accreditation of ASAP.  |
| 21) Undertake a Strategic Review of the Council's Older People's Accommodation   | HO 1 / 2 / 3 | Asst Director of Housing (Operations)     | Dec 2010   | A clear strategic plan for the future provision of accommodation for older people within the District                       |
| 22) Work in partnership with Essex County Council to assess the outline business case for the provision of a new Extra Care Housing Scheme in the District, on Council-owned land, through the Private Finance Initiative funded by the Department of Health | HO 1 / 2     | Asst Director of Housing (Operations)     | March 2010 | An understanding of whether or not it is viable to development an Extra Care Scheme through the Private Finance Initiative. |

### Housing Repairs and Maintenance

*See Action Plan within the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan at Appendix 1*

#### Key to Corporate Housing Objectives

- |                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| HO 1 - Value for Money         | HO 4 - Tenant Participation |
| HO 2 - Housing Management      | HO 5 - Housing Finance      |
| HO 3 - Repairs and Maintenance |                             |

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# Epping Forest District Council

Director of Housing  
Alan Hall FCIH MCM



## Housing Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## 1. Purpose of the Plan

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The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan has been prepared under the guidelines of the HRA Resource Accounting regime, whose main objective is to promote more efficient use of housing assets. This covers all housing services in detail. Given that repairs and maintenance is the biggest single area of expenditure, and in line with a District Audit recommendation, this separate Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan has been produced to detail the Council's strategic approach to this work. Both Plans have been produced annually since 2000. The Council already has set standards for most of its service provision, which can be found in various documents such as the Tenant's Handbook, Housing Strategy and Contract Conditions etc. However, it was felt that these documents should be brought together into a single Business Plan, which would assist the Council in planning and monitoring the delivery of the repairs and maintenance service. This Plan is therefore comprehensive in its coverage.

This year sees the deadline set by the Government for all social housing to meet the Decent Homes Standard. Previous plans have included a detailed analysis of the Authority's response to the Government's decent homes initiative, which was then updated annually. Our latest position is included in this version, with the Council continuing to be on target to meet the Decent Homes target by December 2010. An updated Housing Services Risk Register, which identifies the strategic and operations risks, including a section which discusses the risks and how these are managed through risk management is also included in this years plan.

This version of the Plan also covers the way in which efficiency gains are being made in line with the Council's Value for Money Strategy, which seeks to achieve value for money savings through better procurement in order to release resources to support the key policy objectives of the Council. Once again, over the last 12 months, significant changes to the Housing Directorate have occurred, particularly in relation to the Repairs Refresh Programme, which followed the merger of the Housing Repairs Section with the Building Maintenance Works Unit. This is covered in more detail later in the plan.

In pursuit of excellence, the Housing Directorate is currently reviewing all of its front line services, including looking the the service we provide from a customer perspective and using the TSA and Audit Commission Key Lines Of Enquiries (KLOEs), which prompts us to differentiate between what is a "fair" service and what is an "excellent" service, to produce a "Housing Excellence Plan". The Housing Excellence Plan will set out a number of actions, which will focus attention and activity on areas where there is room for improvement.

A new section has been added to this plan, which looks specifically at our ability to meet performance targets. Any actions for improvement are recorded in the action plan in section 10 of this Business Plan.

In preparing this Plan, the Council's Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have been consulted in the same way as with the main HRA Business Plan and they have approved both Plans. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation [were particularly pleased with the Council improving its target for the completion of non urgent responsive repairs from 8 weeks to 6 weeks, and that the Council was on target to meet the Decent Homes Target by the end of March 2010. They supported the aims and objectives of the plan and agreed with the financial plan as set out in the 5 and 30 year budget forecasts. The Tenant and Leaseholder Federation also sought to include the notion of seeking to include local contractors on all future tender lists wherever possible, not just during this current economic downturn. This has been included in the action plan in Section 10 of this Business Plan.]

The Plan is updated each year taking into account the latest Government Guidance, revised Council policies, updated financial information, the latest stock condition information and the views of tenants and leaseholders. The Action Plan will be monitored on a bi-monthly basis to ensure appropriate progression of the initiatives included.



## 2. Introduction to the Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan

---

Epping Forest District Council is a major provider of housing. As at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, the Council owned and managed 6514 properties, 2813 garages, 1 homeless hostel and leased 932 properties. A number of these properties were transferred to the Council from the former Greater London Council (GLC) in 1980. There has been a general rate of decline in the number of properties owned by the Council over the years due to tenants purchasing their homes under the Right to Buy scheme. Since 1977, 6147 properties have been sold. The rate at which properties have been sold has varied over the years. However, over the last five years, an average of 36 properties per annum have been sold, which equates to approximately 0.55% of the stock.

### 2.1 The Housing Directorate within the context of other strategic Plans

Housing has a major impact on the quality of the people's lives, influencing health, educational achievement, employment opportunities and social cohesion. The main responsibility for managing and maintaining the Council's housing stock is undertaken by the Council's Housing Directorate.

The Housing Directorate strives to provide the highest quality advice, assistance and equality of opportunity to its customers in housing matters. It aims to be a responsible landlord, managing and maintaining the housing stock effectively, whilst continuing to charge reasonable rents. The Housing Directorate also works within a number of specific strategies. The main strategies influencing the direction of the Repairs and Maintenance Service include:

**Tenant Participation Agreement** – An agreement with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation on consultation, provision of information and support for tenant organisations. The agreement has led to improved tenant consultation on repairs and maintenance programmes.

**Leaseholders Participation Agreement** – An agreement (compact) between the Council and the Epping Forest Leaseholders Association, which was formed through a Council initiative in March 2001.

**Housing Charter** - Sets out the principles by which housing services will be delivered from the clients' point of view and what clients can expect.

**Home Energy Conservation Act and Fuel Poverty Strategies** – Strategies designed to conserve energy use particularly for those on low incomes. This has for some time been targeting energy saving measures to those on low incomes through the Warm Front Scheme (previously known as the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES)).

**Crime & Disorder Strategy** – The Council has a local Crime Reduction Partnership comprising representatives from Police, Social Services Probation Service, which has produced a Crime Reduction Strategy which have influenced programmes for the installation of CCTV and door entry security systems. The Partnership has a number of sub groups, which have influenced programmes for the installation of secure double-glazing, CCTV, door entry systems and has recently introduced a sanctuary scheme for those fleeing domestic violence. This strategy complies with Home Office guidelines.

**HRA Business Plan** - the HRA Business Plan is a broad document, which covers the whole of the Housing Directorate. Given that repairs and maintenance is the biggest single area of expenditure, this Business Plan has been developed to provide more detail on the strategic approach to the repairs and maintenance.

**Housing Directorate Risk Strategy** – A Risk Register, which identifies the strategic and operations risks affecting the Housing Directorate.

**Housing Strategy 2009-2012** - The Housing Strategy assesses the overall housing needs of the District, and sets out the Council's objectives and plans for meeting those needs. It also provides details of how the Council is meeting the Decent Homes Standard and the Decent Homes Targets.

**Continuous Improvement Strategy** – This is a new strategy, currently being developed, which takes a look at the service we provide to our customers, and using the TSA and Audit Commission Key Lines Of Enquiries (KLOEs), prompts us to differentiate between what is a "fair" service and what is an "excellent" service. A Continuous Improvement Action Plan lists the areas of improvement, and who will be responsible

for implementing that improvement.

## **2.2 Housing Directorate**

The Housing Directorate as a whole, since the Senior Management Restructure, is divided into three main headings; Private Sector Housing, Property and Operations, each with its own Assistant Director. The Housing Directorate is responsible for all housing matters. Since the Building Maintenance Works Unit joined the Housing Directorate in May 2008, this additional service falls under the responsibility of the Assistant Director (Property) The current responsibilities of each Assistant Director are listed out below.

### **(a) Private Sector and Resources**

The Private Sector Division is responsible for issues relating to housing in the private sector, including decent homes, empty properties, house condition surveys, HMO's, Disabled Facilities Grants, Home Improvement Grants, Home Improvement Agency as well as the Resources functions with Housing, including Budget Monitoring, Rent Accounting, Leasehold Services, House Sales, Information and Administration

### **(b) Property**

The Property Division of the Housing Directorate is responsible for void maintenance, responsive repairs And planned maintenance functions to council housing.

### **(c) Operations**

The Operations Division of Housing Services is responsible for issues such as Housing Needs, Special Needs, Supporting People and Housing Management.

### **3. Repairs & Maintenance**

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There is a significant amount of maintenance work needed to keep the average home in good condition. Some occurs at short notice, some can be planned in advance, some is the responsibility of the Council and other work is the responsibility of the tenant. In order to clarify who is responsible for various maintenance items, the Council has produced within its 'Tenants Handbook' a leaflet entitled "Repairs And Improvements To Your Home".

The Tenants Handbook also includes information on programmed maintenance, day to day repairs, emergency repairs and gas leaks, adaptations for the disabled, making improvements to the home, asbestos in the home, the right to repair, home improvements compensation scheme and mutual exchange repairs.

In previous years, this Business Plan has set out in detail the work of the Housing Assets Team and the Housing Repairs Service, including how the work is identified, recorded, managed and monitored. Much of this detail remains the same each year, or only requires reviewing on a three-yearly basis similar to other Service Strategies. Therefore, this Business Plan has been streamlined to include a look back at what was achieved during the previous year, including the performance levels that were reached, and a look forward to our plans and targets for the next 1, 5 and 30 years in line with the HRA Business Planning regime. In order to retain the important aspects of work of the Housing Repairs Service and the Housing Assets Section, it is planned that a separate Repairs and Maintenance Service Strategy will be prepared in 20010/11.

#### **3.1 Repairs Refresh Programme**

Following a Senior Management Restructure, which saw the Building Maintenance Division join the Housing Directorate in May 2008, the decision taken by the Cabinet was to combine the Housing Repairs Section and the Building maintenance Division operating from the same site, reduce the number of craft workers but retaining a core to undertake a proportion of the day to day ad hoc repairs to the Council's Housing Stock, and/or those to void properties, with the balance of the work being externalised.

In addition, the Cabinet agreed to the appointment of an External Repairs Management Contractor to oversee the day to day management functions of the newly combined Housing Repairs Service. The "Repairs Refresh Programme" was subsequently launched, starting with the formation of a Repairs Advisory Group and is set out in more detail below.

The main objectives of the Repairs Refresh Programme are:

- To improve the all-round performance of the Repairs Service for our tenants and leaseholders.
- To combine the Housing Repairs Team and the Building Maintenance Works Unit
- To reduce the number of craft workers, but retaining a core to undertake a proportion of the day to day ad hoc repairs to the Council's Housing Stock, and/or those to void properties
- The balance of the work not undertaken directly by the Council being externalised via new or existing framework agreements.
- To appoint an Interim External Management Contractor to supervise the combined Building Maintenance Works Unit and Repairs Service, thus bringing in the added benefit of private sector knowledge and experience.

To meet these objectives, the following initiatives have been identified for the merged Housing Repairs and Building Maintenance Works Unit:

- To relocate the Repairs Section to the Epping Depot site
- To improve overall performance in response times
- To avoid duplication in working practices
- To streamline administrative functions
- To improve tenant liaison
- To reduce risk
- To move towards a more area based Repairs Service in line with other housing management functions

- To increase supervision of repairs
- To introduce Generic Working by combining the duties of the Repairs and Voids Officers
- To achieve savings if possible, which will be reinvested in the Repairs Service

### **3.1.1 Repairs Advisory Group**

A repairs Advisory Group has been established, consisting of Housing Portfolio Holder (Chairman), Finance & Performance Management Portfolio Holder, Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Housing Scrutiny Panel, Director of Housing, Asst. Director of Housing (Property) and 2 representatives of the Tenants & Leaseholders Federation. The role of the Advisory Group is to:

- Provide advice and feedback to officers and the Housing Portfolio Holder on the proposed specification for the Repairs Management Contract;
- Interview short-listed companies and recommend to the Housing Portfolio Holder which company should be appointed; and
- Meet periodically (probably quarterly) to monitor the performance of the repairs management contractor and the repairs service generally.

### **3.1.2 Restructure of Housing Repairs Service**

In order to create a new structure for the combined Repairs and Building Maintenance Works Unit (to be called the Housing Repairs Section), it has been necessary to understand the weaknesses that currently exist. Officers and the Advisory Group have identified the weaknesses, some of which have been observed in recent Audits of the Works Unit. Many of the weaknesses can easily be attributed to the fact that there are currently only 2 Supervisors posts compared to 46 craft worker positions. However, other issues such as Customer Care, performance monitoring, management of the stores, ordering and invoicing of goods and services and Council image each need to be addressed.

Following a detailed staff consultation process, a new structure was been agreed by the Repairs Advisory Group, and Members. The fundamental change is to separate the works and administration functions, thus;

- a. Creating one team that concentrates on receiving and registering the requests for repairs, manages the stores, procurement, invoicing and generally supports the works functions. This team would also monitor performance, monitor the budgets and act as tenant liaison, including dealing with complaints.
- b. Splitting both the technical and trade roles into two distinct geographical areas in the same way other housing management roles are managed. There are a number of advantages to this, not least of which it creates greater control over the supervision of the works and makes it easier to respond to repairs requests. Each area would have a Manager and an Assistant Manager, along with Technical Officers and a number of Craft workers from all trades.

The cost of resourcing the existing structure, taking into account filled and vacant posts, but excluding Craft Worker posts is £571,898. The cost of resourcing the new proposed structure, is £511,281. This is an overall saving of £60,617, which is 10.6% of the existing budget.

### **3.1.3 External Repairs Management Contractor**

The Cabinet agreed to appoint an for a period up to 3-years for the service of a manager or management team combined Repairs and Building Maintenance Section.

The appointment on an Interim External Management Contractor to manage the Council's own Housing Repairs Service will be subject to EU procurement competition, and as such, a detailed strategy and specification has been prepared, along with placing an advertisement in the EU Journal. Short listing applicants is subject to a Pre-qualification Questionnaire. Once a tender list is

prepared, the Council will be seeking tenders, evaluating the tenders and reporting the outcome. The tender would be based on a range of issues such as experience, performance, quality, continuity of service, management support as well as terms and conditions and cost.

In order to assist the Council through the four stages of the procurement process, from developing the procurement strategy through to the appointment of the External Management Team, Cameron Consulting who are specialists with extensive and relevant experience in innovative procurement practices, particularly in Partnering and In-Sourcing services within the public sector construction industry have been appointed.

The four stages of their appointment are:

Stage 1 – To develop the Procurement Strategy. This includes a review of current systems, processes, performance and evidence based data, holding Member, Resident and Staff workshops to understand and define the future service.

Stage 2 - Pre-Qualification Stage. This includes placing the EU advertisement, preparing the evaluation criteria and evaluating the expressions of interest and recommending to the Council the short list of tenderers.

Stage 3 – Tender Activity. This will include further workshops to agree the tender criteria, prepare specifications, Service Level Agreements, Management Fee Structures and Performance Targets. This stage also includes issuing tenders, evaluating the returns, facilitating interviews and recommending an appointment.

Stage 4 – Appointment of Construction Management Team. This includes facilitating the pre-contract meeting and the preparation and execution of contract documents.

A Procurement Strategy has been prepared by Cameron Consulting for the appointment of the External Repairs Contractor, which was presented to and agreed by the Repairs Advisory Group. The strategy sets out the summary of the issues identified from a series of 1-2-1 meetings with various staff across the Council, and includes sections on “Where do we want to be?” and “How do we get there?”. Below is the timetable we are working to, including the key milestones.

| Activity   | Date                |
|--|---------------------|
| Post OJEU Contract Notice Inviting Expressions of Interest | 08/01/10            |
| Return of Expressions of Interest                          | 17/02/10            |
| Shortlist Bidders for Tender (Portfolio Holder Approval)   | 07/04/10            |
| Issue Invitation to Tender (ITT)                           | 13/04/10            |
| Return of Tenders  | 25/05/10            |
| Interviews   | 09/06/10 - 15/06/10 |
| Recommendations/Cabinet Approvals                          | 05/08/10            |
| Expiry of Alcatel Period                                   | 19/08/10            |
| Appointment of RMC   | 19/08/10            |
| Prepare and Execute Contracts                              | 26/08/10            |
| Lead in and mobilisation                                   | 20/08/10 - 02/09/10 |
| Commence Contract  | 06/09/10            |

Since tenders will be sought not only on price but on economic, financial and technical capacity, it is a requirement of EU public procurement rules that the Council advises all prospective bidders the basis of which their submissions will be evaluated. Therefore an evaluation methodology has been agreed by the Repairs Advisory Group that will be used for this purpose. This document sets out guidance on how the evaluation will be undertaken in a fair and auditable fashion.

The information gathered during Stage 1 – Developing the Procurement Strategy is to be captured in the tender documentation as a number of ‘Key Deliverable’ that the Repairs Management Contractor will be expected to contribute towards achieving in collaboration with the Council. Based on the initial work carried out, the following key areas will need to be developed into ‘Key Deliverables’ forming part of the Services Specification:-

- a. Supply Chain Development** – Developing better supply chain arrangements with suppliers and sub-contractors to ensure that value for money is being achieved. This includes a complete overview of how the stores is operated and managed;
- b. Development of Pricing Models** – Developing better financial models to be used in how the HRS is reimbursed for works undertaken, including how supply chain partners are also reimbursed for works carried out. This should also include better ways of financial reporting to the Council;
- c. Building the Team** – Implement excellent HR practices that build a high performance team that is motivated, skilled and customer focused;
- d. Develop Effective IT systems** – Introduce or integrate better IT systems for delivering an effective R&M service from the point of order through to completion and post completion actions;
- e. Deliver a Quality Service** – Work with EFDC in implementing quality processes that accord with the requirements of ISO9001, Charter Mark, Investors in People (IIP) and the Tenant Services Authority Regulatory Framework including designing new processes and procedures that are efficient and deliver value for money;
- f. Sustained Business Growth** – Develop sufficient competencies and resources to take on new work streams in the future and become commercially able to market services outside the District Council;
- g. Customer Focussed Service** – Implementation of a full appointment system, extended opening hours and the provision of a discretionary service to undertake tenant responsible repairs.

### 3.2 Housing Assets

Whilst the Council continues to provide housing, its stock has to be managed and maintained. The purpose of the Housing Assets Section is to continue to keep the Council's Housing Stock in good condition by planning its maintenance based on condition, need, efficiency and value.

There are significant value for money opportunities that have both direct financial and management implications that ultimately lead to a more efficient use of resources. The framework of strategies laid out in this document, defines the way in which Housing Services will plan the future repairs and maintenance of the stock.

#### 3.2.1 Legislative requirements and working practices

Although the provision of housing is not a statutory service, the Council has a statutory duty to maintain the stock it provides.

##### a. Legislation

The work of the Housing Assets Section is guided by a complex set of legislation. To this end, housing assets working practices have to be both flexible, to accommodate multiple legislative requirements and any on-going changes to these requirements, and precise in following specific codes of practice, legal and contractual requirements. This includes procurement rules, including EU Regulations, consultation with Leaseholders and Contract Standing Orders.

##### b. Housing Policies

In addition to legislative and contractual requirements, the Council has developed a number of housing policies that are set out in the Housing Policy Manual maintained by Housing Services.

##### c. Working Practices

As a local authority, the Council is required to undertake its duties and conduct itself in a manner that is both fair and proper. Accountability in working practices is therefore important. In order to

ensure this, Officers must also work in accordance with Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and CIPFA Guidelines.

To manage this complex set of legislation, working practices and housing policies, the Housing Directorate has developed in-depth procedures. The procedures and works instructions cover all aspects of the work of the Housing Directorate including Housing Options, Housing Management, Housing Repairs and Assets as well as customer care issues. The procedures are stored on the Council's Intranet, and are accessible to all Housing staff.

In addition, a Contractor's Code of Conduct has been developed to allow proper conduct and safe working by all contractors working for the Council.

Since 2002, Housing Services has been accredited the ISO 9001/2000 Quality Award for all services. Housing Assets was one of the first two sections to be awarded ISO 9001/2000 status in May 2002. An intensive re-assessment was carried out by an external auditor in June 2008, which resulted in the ISO 9001/2000 status being renewed for a further 3 years. A further re-assessment is due to take place in 2011.

### 3.2.2 Improvements to Council Stock – 2008/9

During the financial year 2008/09, the Council has undertaken the following planned improvements to the Council's housing stock. The vast majority of this work was undertaken either through a Partnering Contract or via Framework Agreements.

|  | 2009/10 Actuals |              | 2010/11 Target |              |
|--|-----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
|  | No Properties   | Cost (£,000) | No Properties  | Cost (£,000) |
| Springfields Improvement Scheme                            | 96              | 1,670        | 96             | 1,548        |
| Kitchen replacements                                       | 158             | 851          | 390            | 2,110        |
| New heating installations, new boilers or heating upgrades | 338             | 808          | 315            | 760          |
| Welfare heating installations                              | 75              | 65           | 50             | 50           |
| Electrical testing, electrical upgrades                    | 600             | 435          | 650            | 300          |
| Rewires  | 71              | 280          | 50             | 195          |
| Re-roofing   | 78              | 435          | 90             | 522          |
| Structural repairs   | 202             | 266          | 200            | 250          |
| Disabled adaptations (Major)                               | 114             | 362          | 166            | 534          |
| Disabled adaptations (Minor)                               | 231             | 49           | 150            | 32           |
| New front entrance doors, new uPVC double-glazing          | 337             | 214          | 260            | 150          |
| External repairs and redecorations                         | 691             | 620          | 700            | 620          |
| Door entry Installations                                   | 0               | 0            | 0              | 0            |
| Asbestos removal   | 44              | 110          | 25             | 52           |
| Digital TV upgrades  | 528             | 70           | 250            | 35           |
| Communal and individual cold water storage tanks           | 73              | 25           | 350            | 120          |
| Internal re-decorations for the elderly                    | 53              | 25           | 85             | 40           |
| Energy Performance Certificates produced                   | 181             | 9            | 500            | 25           |
| Energy efficiency measures                                 | 690             | 184          | 600            | 160          |
| Stock condition surveys                                    | 696             | 0            | 650            | 0            |

## 4. Quality Repairs and Maintenance Service

### 4.1 Tenant Satisfaction – NHF Status Survey

In November 2008, an independent tenant satisfaction survey was undertaken by the National Housing Federation (NHF). The standard questionnaire and survey process called “Status” was used, which is endorsed by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the former Housing Corporation (now the Tenants Services Authority, or TSA). Around 1,563 tenants (22% of all Council Tenants) were randomly selected by the NHF to be surveyed. An exceptionally high response of 829 surveys were returned (53%)

In conclusion, the tenants were very pleased with the service they received across the whole of the housing directorate, but in particular, they were exceptionally pleased with the Council’s repairs and maintenance services, and with the contact they have with the Council’s staff. It was recorded that 86% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service (compared with the national average of 73%), which is up 2% compared to 2006. The Council ranked a strong first in its peer group for all aspects of the repairs and maintenance service measured.

### 4.2 Tenant Satisfaction – Tenant Response to Repairs and Maintenance

| Service                      | Indicator  | Performance 2008/09  | Target 2009/10 | Perf -Q3 2009/10     |
|------------------------------|--|----------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| Housing Repairs Service      | Quality of repair - good or satisfactory                                 | 99%                  | 96%            | 98%                  |
| Housing Repairs Service      | Polite/cooperative workmen - good or satisfactory                        | 99%                  | 96%            | 100%                 |
| Housing Repairs Service      | Home left clean & tidy - good or satisfactory                            | 99%                  | 96%            | 99%                  |
| Housing Repairs Service      | Works completed on time  | 98%                  | 96%            | 99%                  |
| Housing Repairs Service      | General standard of service - good or satisfactory                       | 98%                  | 98%            | 99%                  |
| Housing Repairs Service      | Total number where tenants express “poor” satisfaction                   | 45                   | no target      | 12 (3122 jobs)       |
| Housing Repairs Service      | Complaints upheld (exc. Minor)   |                      |                | 2 upheld (0.38%)     |
| Gas Breakdowns               | South of the District  | 100% good<br>0% poor | 96%            | 94% good<br>1% poor  |
| Gas Breakdowns               | North of the District  | 100% good<br>0% poor | 96%            | 100% good<br>0% poor |
| Internal redecoration        | Average time from application to acceptance (including checking process) | 5                    | 7 cal days     | 7.9 avg              |
| Internal redecoration        | Average time from application to completion                              | 6.5                  | 6 weeks        | 5.4 avg              |
| Internal redecoration        | No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time       | 0                    | none           | 0                    |
| Internal redecoration        | Overall satisfaction   | 95% good<br>0% poor  | 96%            | 93% good<br>7% poor  |
| Kitchen & Bathroom Programme | Overall satisfaction   | 93% good<br>2%poor   | 96%            | 93% good<br>1%poor   |
| Digital tv upgrade           | Overall satisfaction   | new for 09/10        | none           | 0% poor              |
| Structural repairs           | Overall satisfaction   | new for 09/10        | none           | 94% good<br>6%poor   |



### **4.3 Customer Perspective Programme**

In pursuit of customer excellence, in spring 2007, Housing Services initiated a "Customer Perspective Programme", which looks at how housing services are provided to customers from a customer perspective. This includes the repairs and maintenance service. A group of Officers from each section of the Housing Directorate, along with tenant representatives will analyse all aspects of the "interface" that Housing Services have with customers with a view to finding out how services can be improved further.

A Customer Perspective Action Plan has been compiled as part of the review, with actions relating to repairs and maintenance included in the action plan found later in this Plan.

### **4.4 Housing Excellence Plan**

As a result of the 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) was created, which increases the TSA's powers over the regulation of social housing. The TSA is developing a set of standards for the future regulation of the sector, which are due to be published after consultation with key stakeholders.

In April 2010, the TSA will commission inspections from the Audit Commission to assess the quality of housing services delivered by registered providers, which includes Local Authority's that have retained their housing stock. Until these standards are launched, the repairs and maintenance service (along with all other aspects of the Housing Directorate) will continue to draw up its Housing Excellence Plan, based on the Audit Commission key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) relating to the provision of housing services, which represent a set of questions and statements around our approach to assessing and measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of our housing services.

### **4.5 Avoidable Contact – National Indicator 14 (NI14)**

The national indicator 14, which is one of the 198 indicators against which local government is assessed within the new performance management framework, aims to reduce 'avoidable contact' between residents and local authorities. Examples of 'avoidable contact' include calls from residents to chase progress on repairs requests. Since the national indicator for avoidable contact has been introduced, a review has taken place to identify ways in which the Repairs and Maintenance teams can provide clearer advice on the service it provides so that residents do not have the need to make such frequent contact. That review identified the following areas for improvement:

- The need to improve the type and quality of information provided to residents
- Since the repairs counter is no longer available at the civic offices, provide computer facilities in reception areas so that visitors can use the "Repairs On-line" service to report their repairs.
- To introduce a better appointments system for responsive repairs
- To add all planned maintenance programmed work onto OHMS against the individual property database, giving contact details, estimated installation dates etc so that the Repairs call-center staff are able to give more efficient advice at the first point of contact.
- For less reliance on the use of telephone answering machines in the planned maintenance office so that queries can be answered straight away.
- For gas servicing contractors to provide a sticker in each property, in an obvious location so that tenants know who to call for gas servicing queries, giving contact details of who to call.
- To provide a short, but glossy leaflet for each of the planned maintenance works categories, such as disabled adaptations, kitchen renewal, front entrance doors, uPVC windows and French doors, heating installations, rewiring and energy efficiency works. The leaflet will set out the targets, contact details, tenants choice, details of what the Council will do and also what the tenants is expected to

do for themselves.

#### **4.6 Repairs & Maintenance Focus Group**

A Repairs Focus Group has been established, consisting of a large group of tenant volunteers, who have previously indicated that they would be interested in influencing how the Council's Repairs and Maintenance Service is provided. The Housing Directorate is keen to involve tenants and leaseholders in shaping the future of the Housing Service and this is out tenants opportunity to have a real say in how we move forward. The first meeting is scheduled for March 2010.

## 5. Performance

The Council monitors its performance to deliver a whole range of services to its customers. These are captured and monitored as either national indicators, local indicators, management indicators or tenants indicators. The full set of indicators showing the overall performance achieved in 2008/9, the target for 2009/10 and the performance recorded at the end of quarter 3 of 2009/10.

| Service               | Indicator  | Performance 08/09 | Target 2009/10 | Perf -Q3 09/10 |
|-----------------------|--|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Adaptations (Minor)   | Acknowledgement time   | 1.3 days          | 7 days         | 1.3 avg        |
| Adaptations (General) | Acknowledgement time   | 1.9 days          | 7 days         | 1.9 avg        |
| Adaptations (Minor)   | Time from decision to completion of work   | 22.3 days         | 28 days        | 21.8 avg       |
| Adaptations (General) | Time from decision to completion of work   | 227 days          | 90 days        | 264 avg        |
| Adaptations (General) | Time from works order to completion  | 48                | n/a            | 47 avg         |
| Adaptations (Minor)   | No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time                                 | 8                 | none           |                |
| Adaptations (General) | No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time                                 | 66                | none           | 39             |
| Gas servicing         | Graceland and Kinetics - No. of CP12 lapsed (over 12 months)                                       | 46 Graceland      | none           | Graceland 4    |
|                       |  | 111 TA Horn       | none           | TA Horn 14     |
| Gas servicing         | Graceland and Kinetics - % of properties where servicing not complete within 12 months: non-access | 1.27 Graceland    | 0.50           | Graceland 0.13 |
|                       |  | 3.08 Kinetics     | 0.50           | Kinetics 0.5   |
| Gas servicing         | Percentage of Gas Safety Certificates outstanding at the end of period                             | new 09/10         | none           | 0.30%          |
| Gas Breakdowns        | Breakdowns attended within Fast Track (1 hour) - Gracelands  | 100%              | 100%           | 100%           |
| Gas Breakdowns        | Breakdowns attended within Fast Track (1 hour) - Kinetics  |                   | 100%           | 95.65%         |
| Gas Breakdowns        | Breakdowns - Emergency attended (within 1 hour) and left correct - Gracelands                      | 93.90%            | none           | 100%           |
| Gas Breakdowns        | Breakdowns - Emergency attended (within 1 hour) and left correct - Kinetics                        | 94.80%            | none           | 95.65%         |
| Gas Breakdowns        | Breakdowns - Completed within 24 hours and left correct - Gracelands                               | 75.40%            | 85%            | 83.57%         |
| Gas Breakdowns        | Breakdowns - Completed within 24 hours and left correct - Kinetics                                 | 77.02%            | 85%            | 81.02%         |
| Gas Breakdowns        | Breakdowns - Completed within 5 days - Gracelands  | 100%              | 95%            | 100%           |
| Gas Breakdowns        | Breakdowns - Completed within 5 days - Gracelands  | 98.40%            | 95%            | 99.9           |
| Internal redecoration | Average time from application to acceptance (including checking process)                           | 5                 | 7 cal days     | 7.9 avg        |

|                       |  |               |             |                  |
|-----------------------|--|---------------|-------------|------------------|
| Internal redecoration | Average time from application to completion  | 6.5           | 6 weeks     | 5.4 avg          |
| Internal redecoration | No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time                   | 0             | none        | 0                |
| Decent Homes          | Proportion of homes which are non decent   | new fpr 09/10 | 0%          | 0.65% (43)       |
| Repairs               | % of appointments kept   | 95%           | 95%         | 97%              |
| Repairs               | Average time to complete urgent repairs  | 6             | 5 wrkg days | 4                |
| Repairs               | Average time to complete non-urgent repairs  | 30 days       | 42 days     | 17.7 days        |
| Repairs               | % of emergency repairs completed within target time (24 hours)                       | 99%           | 99%         | 98%              |
| Repairs               | % of repairs undertaken within target time: Priority within 3 days (priority code 3) | 100%          | 95%         | 98%              |
| Repairs               | % of urgent repairs completed within target time of 5 working days                   | 86%           | 95%         | 94%              |
| Repairs               | % of routine repairs completed within target time of 6 weeks                         | 86%           | 90%         | 97.00%           |
|                       |  |               |             | E / U / R        |
| Repairs               | % of all repairs received emergency / urgent / routine                               | new           | 10/20/70 %  | 34.4/12.81/29.82 |
| Voids                 | Time between keys from needs & keys to DSO (working days)                            | 3.09          | 1.5 days    | 2.53             |
| Voids                 | Time for Works Unit to complete repairs  | 18.65         | 20 days     | 9.29             |
| Voids                 | % rent loss through voids  | 0.85          | 2%          | 0.77             |
| Voids                 | Average time taken to re-let (overall void period)                                   | 50            | no target   | 46               |
| Voids                 | Average overall void period (excluding difficult to let)                             | new 09/10     | 40 days     | 30               |
| Voids                 | Average period with Housing Repairs after initial void works                         | 5.24          | 4 days      | 1.52             |
| Voids                 | No of voids with Works on 1st day of period  | 24            | no target   | 16               |
| Voids                 | Total number of voids  | new 09/10     | no target   | 133              |
| Voids                 | Voids with Works > 6 weeks   | 20            | no target   | 5                |

The recorded performance relating to tenant satisfaction can be found in section 4 above.

It is clear from the performance results above, there are areas that the Council needs to address. These are:

- 1 The time it takes for the Council from the point a decision is made to undertake a major disabled adaptation to the completion of that work. The main reason for this poor performance is due to the demand for adaptations outstripping the budget available. It is very difficult to address this problem based on the current procedures, since Essex County Council Social Care are responsible for assessing the need and making the recommendation to the Council for processing and funding. Closer partnership working with ECC Social Care Occupational Therapists is essential, which is a target in this years Action Plan.
- 2 The ratio between emergency, urgent and routine responsive repairs needs to be addressed, with a much higher percentage of jobs being allocated as emergency and urgent than routine. However, this management indicator is new, and was established as part of the Repairs Refresh Programme. The target to reduce the ratio to 10:20:70 has been incorporated in the action plan for the External Repairs Management Contractor.
- 3 Overall void periods continue to be an area that the Council need to improve on. Much work has been done to improve this during 2008/9. Some of the void period is in relation to difficult to let properties,

and in particular bed-sit and sheltered accommodation. The Council is looking at alternative redevelopment options in conjunction with Partner RSL's to convert the accommodation into larger self contained 1-bed accommodation where possible.

## 6. Expected trends

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This section is a summary of the major issues taken into consideration when framing the investment programme for the Council's housing stock.

### 6.1 Expenditure

Expected expenditure trends over can be summarised as follows:

**Decent Homes** – Whilst the Government's Decent Homes initiative reaches its conclusion in December 2010, preventing properties from becoming non-decent is an on-going challenge. This is now the key factor in planning the investment programme for the Council's stock. Based on the current strategies employed to deal with the prevention of properties becoming non-decent, the Council can maintain all of its stock to the current decent homes standard until 2028/29. A separate section of this Business Plan is devoted to how the Council will meet the challenge.

**Declining levels of stock by approximately 1.4% per annum** – The Council has sold just 7 houses and flats during 2008/9. However, this has been much higher in previous years with an average of 36 properties sold each year over the last 5 years. This has the effect of reducing the need for maintenance expenditure (although for leasehold properties the Council retains responsibility for structural issues) and reducing income into the HRA.

**Increases in building maintenance costs** – Building costs are increasing by approximately 5-6% per annum, which is more than double the GDP inflation rate. However, given the effect of investment through planned maintenance, expenditure has been falling on an annual basis. The current economic down-turn has not resulted in tender price decreases.

**Uncertain levels of demand for responsive repairs and voids expenditure** – Between 2003/4 and 2008/9 responsive repairs and voids expenditure increased by around 21.6%. However, when we break this down, the responsive repairs element has only increased by 2.04% and voids has increased by 80.16%. Generally, adequate investment in planned maintenance should lead to a reduction in responsive repairs and voids expenditure. However, these are always the most difficult areas within the Housing Repairs Fund (HRF) to estimate given they are responsive to demand.

It is clear that the voids service has seen a significant increase in expenditure over the last 5-years from £473,532 in 2004/5 to £890,977 in 2008/9. This increase in expenditure mirrors an increase in the amount of work that has been necessary due to the poor condition that tenants have left the property when they move out. In response, the Council has introduced a pre-vacation inspection procedure, whereby a Generic Repairs Officer will visit the tenant in advance of them moving out and giving the tenant advice on what the Council expects the condition of the property to be in based on the terms of the tenancy agreement, to avoid the Council having to recharge for works at a later date when the tenant has moved out.

**Continued demand for structural repairs** – Expenditure on structural repairs has increased significantly in recent years. A number of Council properties were constructed using non-traditional building methods during the 1960's and now require additional levels of maintenance above traditional properties. Another contributing factor is the underlying soil type and geology, which is predominantly London Clay. Therefore, buildings located within 30m of trees are at risk of subsidence if left unchecked. Since tenants are able to plant trees in their gardens, this is presenting a problem when maintaining the structural integrity of the properties. A number of structural repairs have been completed and there are likely to be other parts of the Council's stock also requiring similar levels of investment. The Council is not insured for subsidence, heave and landslip as estimates showed that premiums were likely to be higher than expenditure.

**Increasing costs for servicing and improvement/replacement of existing central heating** – All Council tenants requesting central heating now have heating installed. Likely resultant trends include: increasing servicing and repair costs; increased costs to replace existing systems when beyond repair; the need to upgrade partial central heating systems; reduction in demand for welfare heating; and the ongoing need to replace warm air heating systems with 'wet' central heating systems.

**Continued demand for planned maintenance expenditure** – An ageing stock will require increased levels of repairs although this can be offset by a planned maintenance programme. Nationally there is a trend for higher standards in social housing (as demonstrated by the decent homes initiative) and the Council must ensure that the requirements of decent homes are balanced against the need for ongoing investment in its stock to protect its value and long-term let-ability.

**Repairs Refresh Programme** – This is an opportunity to re-think the way in which the Council provides a repairs and maintenance service for our tenants. The appointment of an External Contract Repairs Manager is an innovative approach to injecting the benefits of the commercial private sector into our existing in-house repairs service. Due to the innovative approach there is little market intelligence available to predict the cost of this appointment, especially as the cost of changes that we would expect the External Contract Repairs Manager to introduce would need to be identified and then calculated. However, it is anticipated that any efficiency savings are set out as measurable targets, which will help offset any additional costs.

**Need to tackle anti-social behavior through the use of CCTV** – With an increase in anti-social behavior, which results in an increase in the amount of expenditure on repairing damage caused through vandalism, consideration needs to be given to combating this growing problem. Work is on-going between the Council and the Police Service, which has resulted in a CCTV Policy being drawn up by the Head of Environmental Services. A small on-going budget for the installation of CCTV surveillance systems has been included within the investment programme.

**Recruitment of skilled craft workers** – With the Olympics coming to East London in 2012, there is a real possibility that contractors and sub-contractors will be pulling resources to more lucrative development sites in and around London in the years leading up to the London Olympics. This could lead to higher building costs and a shortage of skilled labour.

**Economic downturn** – Much has been reported about the current economic downturn, with the construction industry being hit hard. Whilst this is mainly affecting new build, general maintenance work is less affected. In order to help local businesses through these difficult financial times, all Council tenders will seek to include at least one local business on the list of tenderers.

## **6.2 Investment Needs**

This section provides a summary of the main areas of investment identified by the stock condition survey. A separate section deals with needs arising from the decent homes initiative. These are broken into the same categories used in Appendices A (summary of expenditure over a 5 year period) and B (summary of expenditure over the next 30 years).

### **6.2.1 Future Planned Maintenance**

There are a number of major works that can be identified from the stock condition survey, other major improvement schemes or development opportunities. These have been prioritised taking into account the decent homes criteria and Appendix A details the investment strategy over the next five years. Appendix B shows this same information over the next 30 years.

One aspect of the Repairs Refresh Programme has seen a significant shift in the allocation of work from the responsive repairs service to the planned maintenance programme to be undertaken via larger more specialized framework agreements. This includes replacement kitchens, replacement front entrance doors, rewiring, replacement mains storage tanks and flat or pitched roof repairs, which would have previously been carried out in-house by the Building Maintenance Works Unit. Financially, this work is now falling on the capital programme rather than on the Housing Repairs Fund, which will require a greater revenue contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) in future years. The level of RCCO will need to be gauged on historical data rather than a predictable sum, since these are all relating to responsive repairs.

### **6.2.2 Cyclical Maintenance**

In order to prolong the useful life of components, it is necessary to carry out regular inspections,

instigate repairs and undertake preventative maintenance on sub-components e.g. replacement boiler parts.

It is likely that further inspections will be required to building components not currently covered by cyclical maintenance. This is most likely to affect the inspection of all electrical systems in Council properties on an annual basis. However, until this happens the Council will continue to inspect the electrical systems as part of the void inspections and the stock condition survey.

Included in the Housing Repairs Fund around £2.35 million is spent per year on cyclical maintenance, which includes: the repair and redecoration of every property and garage every 5 years; the maintenance, service and repair of all Council owned gas appliances and the inspection and service of all Council owned hydro-mechanical lifts on an annual basis.

### **6.2.3 Responsive Repairs**

The current ratio of maintenance to repair expenditure is 69:31 (taking account of HRF and Capital expenditure). However, the Audit Commission's recommended balance is 70:30 (based on HRF expenditure only).

This is maintained by monitoring the expenditure for day-to-day repairs by types of work and then developing maintenance programmes which would obtain better value for money. This process is currently being carried out at 6 monthly intervals, in September and March each year.

The Housing Repairs Fund makes allowance for around £7.05 million per year for the next four years, taking into account a 5% increase per annum in Building Cost Indices and a reduction of 0.8% for the rate of decline in stock numbers as a result of the Right to Buy scheme. The Capital programme includes around £1.8 million over the next 5 years for small capital repairs.

### **6.2.4 Voids Refurbishment**

This area of expenditure is also mainly funded from revenue and as such the comments regarding the split between capital and revenue apply. It is expected that the authority will spend approximately £8.27 million over the next five years on void refurbishment.

### **6.2.5 Cost Reflective Improvements**

Until the introduction of the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan "Cost reflective" improvements had not previously been considered a separate category of works, since the Council's rent structure was not based on a points system which takes account of individual attributes. Cost reflective improvements, such as kitchen and bathroom modernisations, have in the past not previously been considered as essential.

Feedback from tenants has established that they feel the Council should make its properties more attractive and desirable by introducing programmes such as kitchen and bathroom replacements. This has since been supported by the decent homes guidance, which requires authorities to have reasonable modern kitchen and bathroom facilities. In order to meet the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard, substantial investment is required in this area. The Council is using this opportunity to offer tenants a choice on the type and layout to suit individuals' tastes and needs.

### **6.2.6 Non-Cost Reflective Improvements**

Under this heading, the Council provides an environmental improvement scheme for improving parking provision on its estates by carrying out a jointly funded initiative between the HRA and the General Fund to provide off street parking.

The table in Appendix A makes allowances for £2.64 million over the next 5 years. This has been allocated towards improvements to estate footpaths, communal refuse facilities, off street parking and new and enhanced external lighting.



### **6.2.7 Disabled Adaptations**

The Council endeavors to carry out adaptations to properties to meet the reasonable needs of disabled tenants. This is based on assessments and recommendations from Social Services Occupational Therapists.

The Council's previous commitment was to spend at least £300,000 per annum over the next 5-years on disabled adaptations. However, this was recently reviewed to take account of the likely needs of the ageing local authority tenancy profiles, which led to a 5% increase in the budget provision year on year. In 2008/9, the Council's Cabinet agreed to an additional £300,000 lump sum towards the backlog of demand for disabled adaptations. Appendix A shows a budget of £582,000 in 2009/10

### **6.2.8 Other Maintenance and Repairs**

Other types of maintenance and repairs include: decoration allowances for new tenants when they move into a home; internal decorations for elderly and disabled tenants; internal decorations to the common areas within the Council's sheltered housing schemes; and compensation payments to tenants who undertake improvements to their homes themselves and subsequently move out leaving behind the improvements they have carried out.

## 7. Decent Homes

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### 7.1 Background

In July 2000, following its spending review the Government announced a significant increase in resources for housing, especially social housing. This was on top of substantial increases announced in 1998. As part of its desire to link increased spending to better outcomes, the Government has established a target to:

“ensure that all social housing meets standards of decency by 2010, by reducing the number of households living in social housing that does not meet these standards by a third between 2001 and 2004 with most of the improvement taking place in the most deprived local authority areas.”

Under the Government’s Decent homes initiative a decent home meets the following criteria:

**a) Any residential premises should have a safe and healthy environment for any potential occupier or visitor** (Formally the statutory minimum standard for housing)

**b) It is in a reasonable state of repair**

Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those where either:

- One or more key building components are old and because of their condition need replacing or major repairs: or
- Two or more of the other building components are old and because of their condition need replacing or major repair.

**c) It has reasonable modern facilities and services**

Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those which lack three or more of the following:

- A reasonably modern kitchen (less than 20 years old)
- A kitchen with adequate space and layout
- A reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less)
- An appropriately located bathroom and WC
- Adequate insulation against external noise (where external noise is a problem)
- Adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats.

**d) It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort**

This criterion requires dwellings to have both effective insulation and efficient heating. To deliver against the targets the Council needs to:

- quantify the level of non decent housing both now and arising by 2010, in its stock;
- develop an investment strategy to tackle this; and
- measure progress towards its elimination.

### 7.2 Quantifying the level of potential non-decent homes

In 2004, the number of non-decent homes had decreased to 590, which represented 8.6% of the housing stock. This meant that between 2001 and 2004, the percentage change in the number of non-decent homes was a reduced by 64%, which was well within the government’s target of a one third reduction within this timeframe at that time. The level of non-decent homes as at 1 April 2009 is 1.48% of the Council’s housing stock, which amounts to 97 homes.

One area, which requires significant investment to prevent homes from becoming non-decent relates to kitchens and bathrooms under the ‘Reasonably Modern Facilities’ category. Since 2002, the Council has already invested £3.75 million to improve the quality and layout of bathrooms and kitchens in properties where facilities are seen as being in the worst condition, and around £5.7 million is planned to be invested

over the next 5-years.

Another significant area for investment arising from the decent homes standard concerns the Reasonable State of Repair category. Properties failing under the Reasonable State of Repair criteria will generally be addressed as part of the existing cyclical maintenance programme which already covers most of the repairs identified, such as re-pointing, repairs to chimneystacks, doors and windows etc. However, there is a significant requirement to invest in replacement heating systems and electrical re-wiring, where around £5.2 million has been spent on replacement heating and boiler replacement, and around £3.4 million on electrical rewiring since 2002.

The Council also acknowledges that the thermal comfort of some properties needs to be addressed, not only to prevent a home from becoming non-decent but also to prevent the tenant from falling into fuel poverty. Generally, the Council has a good track record in improving heating in properties and 5,911 already have gas central heating installed. There are however, some properties (particularly in the rural areas) which do not have access to mains gas and which require heating and insulation improvements. Alternative fuel sources for heating are being trailed, such as modern electric boilers and solar panels. Appendix C of this Business Plan sets out the Council's position regarding the Decent Homes Targets.

### **7.3 Investment Strategy**

The stock condition database can be interrogated in such a way that lists of all the properties that fail or potentially fail the criteria can be produced. Using this information a programme of work has been developed without having to undertake additional survey work.

The key strategy which has been employed to develop programmes of work is to look at where properties are failing and then only undertake work which will ensure that they are not caught by the criteria. For example, where properties fail on three or more categories under the Reasonably Modern Facilities heading just one category of work will be improved so that they no longer become non decent. Under this heading the standard says that properties must fail on three or more of the categories listed to become non-decent. In this way, although additional investment would still be required, the number of homes that are non-decent or could become non-decent can be reduced.

Using this approach, as of 2001 a total of £14 million was required to eliminate non-decent homes by 2010. However, this does not include the resources necessary to prevent properties becoming non-decent, although Appendix C shows the expenditure required taking into account properties likely to fail the standard before 2010. The first column in the table shows all the failures against the standard in 2001. Some properties may fail on several different criteria and as such totals cannot be cross-referenced with the total number of non-decent homes, because properties can only fail the standard once. The final column of Appendix C shows where expenditure will be programmed to meet decent homes target and this expenditure is contained within Appendix B.

Again, using this approach, together with current funding forecasts, it is expected that the decent homes targets can be reached through the capital investment already available. (See the next section for details of the Council's short and longer-term investment plans.) The next section also discusses the funding gap between the full level of maintenance work required under the stock condition survey and the Council's ability to fund improvements.

### **7.4 Measuring progress**

The on-going stock condition surveys are updated on the Council stock attribute database. This data is also amended to include work already undertaken to the Council's stock as and when contracts are completed.

## 8. Resources & Expenditure Proposals

### 8.1 Financial

As highlighted earlier, there are a number of uncertainties over future projections of the financial resources likely to be made available. Repairs and Maintenance expenditure is currently funded through;

- Contributions from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to the Housing Repairs Fund (HRF)
- Transitional Capital Receipts
- Revenue Contributions to Capital Outlay (RCCO).
- Major Repairs Reserve (MRR)

The following issues are worthy of note at this stage:

The contribution from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has been set at approximately £6.00 million for 2008/9 and £5.6 million each year after that next 4-years.

Funding is provided from the MRR at £5.265 million for 2009/10, although this varies for the next 5 years as laid out in the table below.

The following table indicates an assessment of the use of capital resources, which are forecast to become available over the next five years. The Capital programme is updated annually in June.

| FUNDING SOURCE            | 2009/10<br>£000's | 2010/11<br>£000's | 2011/12<br>£000's | 2012/13<br>£000's | 2013/14<br>£000's |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| MRR                       | 5,265             | 3,608             | 3,921             | 4,373             | 4,321             |
| RCCO                      | 1,525             | 1,763             | 1,450             | 700               | 750               |
| Leaseholder Contributions | 50                | 50                | 50                | 50                | 50                |
| Total                     | 6,840             | 5,421             | 5,421             | 5,123             | 5,121             |

At the conclusion of the five-year period that the Council is forecast to have balances of approximately £8.8 million on the Major Repairs Reserve, which are not being allocated at this stage.

#### 8.1.1 Overall Investment Strategy – 5 Year

Based on the income projections shown in the above table, a detailed programme of expenditure has been prepared which can be found at Appendix A demonstrating how the Council currently intends to spend the resources available for repairs and maintenance. This is based on two main priorities:

- a) Achievement of government targets to reduce the number of non decent homes;
- b) To prevent homes from becoming non-decent; and
- c) The need to invest in the stock to improve its condition as determined by the on-going stock condition survey.

Appendix A adds together all anticipated capital expenditure for a 5-year period up to and including 2014/15.

**SUMMARY OF THE HOUSING CAPITAL FIVE YEAR PROGRAMME**

| Detail  | FORECAST SPENDING |                   |                   |                   |                   |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|   | 2009/10<br>£000's | 2010/11<br>£000's | 2011/12<br>£000's | 2012/13<br>£000's | 2013/14<br>£000's |
| Future Planned Maintenance  | 2,473             | 2,410             | 2,410             | 2,410             | 2,410             |
| Structural Schemes  | 405               | 635               | 635               | 635               | 635               |
| Cyclical Maintenance  | 23                | 5                 | 5                 | 5                 | 5                 |
| Small Capital Repairs (inc voids)   | 400               | 350               | 350               | 350               | 350               |
| Cost Reflective Repairs   | 2,067             | 878               | 878               | 878               | 878               |
| Non-cost Reflective Repairs   | 919               | 628               | 628               | 330               | 328               |
| Disabled Adaptations  | 430               | 450               | 450               | 450               | 450               |
| Others, including contingencies   | 123               | 65                | 65                | 65                | 65                |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>  | <b>6,840</b>      | <b>5,421</b>      | <b>5,421</b>      | <b>5,123</b>      | <b>5,121</b>      |
| <b>TOTAL FUNDING, including M.R.R and Capital Receipts (excluding carry forwards)</b> | <b>6,840</b>      | <b>5,421</b>      | <b>5,421</b>      | <b>5,123</b>      | <b>5,121</b>      |

The table compares the planned expenditure against the anticipated funding position and does not include the total expenditure or investment which is required for the stock, it simply shows how much can be funded. The achievement of decent homes targets, the priorities established by the stock condition survey and existing expenditure already approved and contained within housing budgets would require capital funding of approximately £40 million in total over the next five years. Current estimates show that around £29.5 million is likely to become available over the same time period through capital funding.

Revenue expenditure covering repairs, voids, cyclical maintenance and disabled adaptations is estimated at £5.8 million per annum. HRA contributions to the HRF will be able to support this expenditure.

### 8.1.2 Overall Investment Strategy – 30 years

Appendix B provides an analysis of capital, or investment expenditure, over a 30-year period. There are a considerable number of doubts over the validity of some of the projected figures over this period of time but nonetheless this table provides the best estimate given the information currently available. Using this information the available funding will not meet all requirements identified in the stock condition survey by approximately £28.2 million over the 30-year period. Five years ago, the Business Plan identified a funding gap of approximately £60m. This has reduced as a result of anticipated increased investment through capital receipts and the MRA. Again the funding gap is discussed more in the HRA Business Plan, which refers to the Stock Options Appraisal exercise.

The current revenue expenditure on repairs and maintenance can be maintained for a further 22 years before the HRA falls into deficit. This is covered within the HRA Business Plan.

### 8.1.3 Maximising Value

It is essential that the Council adopts a value for money approach so that resources can be used to maximum efficiency. To this end a strategy has been adopted which seeks the replacement of building components just before they break down. This is known as a 'just in time' strategy and is based on industry standard assessments for the lifetime of components. At the same time the lifespan of building components such as heating appliances are extended by the replacement of sub components where possible. The investment requirements outlined in this section are based in part on these strategies.

Another issue is the use of option appraisals for all redevelopment and refurbishment schemes. This approach has already been used for the redevelopment of a sheltered scheme, major refurbishment at Springfields, Waltham Abbey and has been applied to assess the best option for the future of the Council's homeless hostel. This approach is clearly not appropriate for every maintenance project but where significant expenditure is required for a contained number of properties it can be a useful guide to the most cost effective route.

#### **8.1.4 Efficiency Savings**

Following Sir Peter Gershon's review of public sector efficiency, which identified the need to achieve value for money savings through better procurement in order to release resources to support the key policy objectives of the Government, an annual efficiency statement is completed by the Council as a whole. As a result all areas of the service are being examined to identify ways in which the way in which repairs and maintenance can become more efficient.

Significant savings have been identified as a result of the use of framework agreements or partnering contracts, undertaking work in-house through training that was previously undertaken by specialist contractors, generating income by using a sole utility provider as part of the void process, negotiating with contractors over price increases below DTI indices wherever possible and investing in alternative technology to reduce long-term costs.

### **8.2 Partnering – The Egan Approach**

One difficulty experienced by the Council was finding reliable consultants to support the work of the Housing Assets Section. New methods of appointment were explored and the Council has approved the use of a partnering arrangement following the principles of the Egan Report.

Full project partnering has been applied to embrace contractors and suppliers for a range of planned improvement contracts including the kitchen and bathroom programme, new heating installations, rewiring external repair and redecoration work and Gas Servicing. Framework agreements are also widely used for specialist areas of work where the frequency cannot be predicted with any accuracy. This has resulted in significant efficiency savings, which are included in the Council's annual efficiency statement.

### **8.3 Value for Money**

#### **8.3.1 Essex Hub – Essex wide procurement**

In October 2006, the Council joined the "Essex Procurement Hub", which brings new opportunities to deliver greater value for money for the procurement of goods and services. The Hub works in two ways, one by combining the buying power of many Local Authorities across Essex to get lower costs through the economies of scale, and another by utilizing the expert knowledge and skills of the procurement team who prepare contracts, mainly as framework agreements and tender the works on behalf of the Council. This is a corporate initiative, which is now integrated into the Council's Contact Standing Orders. Housing Services consults the Procurement Hub whenever future contracts are to be let.

#### **8.3.2 Benchmarking**

The last benchmarking exercise that took place was in January 2007, which compared at the schedule of rates used by the Building Maintenance Works Unit against a range of 20 comparison organizations within the Home Counties and to look at organization overheads in comparison to private repairs contractors.

It was clear that of the 20 Local Authorities that were compared, only 2 undertake the majority of their responsive repairs through a Building Maintenance Works Unit, whereas 5 operate their own Building Maintenance Works Unit alongside external contractors. There were 8 Local Authorities that outsourced their whole contracting element of the repairs service

Based on the Schedule of Rates comparison, it was suggested that on average, the Building

Maintenance Works Unit were securing keen material prices. However, on average the Schedule of rates were 1.64% higher than average. It was suggested that this was due to the relatively small scale of the Building Maintenance Works Unit in comparison to the other organisations included in the study.

When comparing wage rates, it was suggested that in general, the salary rates were in line with national averages with the exception of carpenters, which are slightly higher than average.

There were some areas of concern expressed as part of the benchmarking exercise. The existing salary system should be more performance based, taking account of output or targets, quality, completion of jobs on time, fix first time and tenant satisfaction. However, this works against the principles of the recent Job Evaluation exercise implemented in 2005/6.

Further benchmarking exercise of the whole of the Housing Service was undertaken using "Housemark", which is a national housing benchmarking organisation in Autumn 2006, and again in November 2008. These benchmarking exercise enabled us to compare our service based on detailed performance and cost data. In the main, the comparison organisations were housing associations rather than Local Authorities. However the results give a good indication of the level of performance and cost by comparison to others. A further benchmark exercise is due to take place once the External Repairs Management Contractor is appointed. This is to enable a more commercial look at the costs compared to the profit and loss accounts used in the commercial sector.

Benchmarking the Repairs and Maintenance Service is to be explored in more detail as part of the Value for Money Strategy

## **9. Risk Management**

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### **9.1 Introduction**

Risk management can be defined as the consideration of the social, economic, political and other factors involved in risk analysis to determine both the acceptability of damage that could result from an event or exposure and what, if any, action should be taken with regard to the risk of that damage.

### **9.2 Corporate Risk Register**

A Corporate Risk Management & Assurance Group has been established, made up of Officers from each Council Service, to produce and regularly review a Corporate Risk Register, and to collate service based risk assessments. The Asst. Director (Private Sector & Resources) is the representative of the Housing Directorate.

### **9.3 Housing Risk Register**

In early 2005, the former Housing Services produced its own Housing Risk Register, which identified the strategic and operations risks affecting Housing Services. Strategic risks are those that have an effect on the Council as a whole, where individuals, sections or even Housing Services has a whole have no total control over the outcome of risk management. Operational risks are those that affect individuals or sections of Housing Services, or the Housing Service as a whole, and will have little or no impact on the Council. The Risk Register is updated 6-monthly, and an action plan created and monitored for those risks that are above the "critical line". All risks associated with the Housing Repairs Service and Housing Assets are included within the Housing Risk Register.

The Housing Risk Register has been developed by applying a risk analysis, whereby each of the identified risks are assessed in terms of likelihood and impact. "Likelihood" ranges from "very high" to "almost impossible" and "Impact" ranges from "catastrophic" to "negligible".

Risk management is applied to each of the identified risks, through exploring the best options to reduce either likelihood or impact or both. Not all risks can be reduced, but they can be managed.

The action plan for "critical" risks relating to Repairs and Maintenance are included in Section 9 of this Business Plan.

### **9.4 Key Housing Operational Risks – Repairs and Maintenance**

The following have been identified as the Key Housing Repairs and Maintenance Operational Risks within the Housing Risk Register:

- Failure to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010
- The HRA falling into deficit
- Disaster at a sheltered housing scheme or Homeless Persons Hostel
- Disaster at the Civic Offices or The Broadway Area Housing Office
- Major failure of the integrated housing IT system
- Loss or insolvency of, or poor performance by, a major contractor/supplier
- Major incident, involving death or serious injury, due to poor health and safety procedures, or breach of health and safety legislation
- Significant overspend on a major housing maintenance contract
- Fraud, corruption and theft
- Loss of important paper records
- Failure to comply with Government or legislative requirements
- Physical or verbal attacks on staff
- Uninsured losses, especially through subsidence, heave or landslip
- Catastrophic budget overspends



## 10. Strategies

This section of the document lists the main strategies, which flow from firstly, the objectives, strategies and policies previously agreed by the authority and secondly, the issues discussed in this plan. Where these have clear links with corporate objectives or Best Value/Business Plan Guidance this is identified. There may not be current funding available to achieve all targets, but the effect of these strategies will be to focus available resources.

|    | Strategy  | Link with Corporate Objective/Guidance   |
|----|---|--|
| A  | Maintenance and Repair Programmes   |  |
| 1  | <p>To develop ongoing programmes of maintenance and repairs expenditure for a period, of five and 30 years based on:</p> <p>Projections of the amount of funding likely to be available for repairs and maintenance;</p> <p>The findings of the stock condition survey;</p> <p>The number of non decent homes and reasons for them being non decent;</p> <p>The need to eliminate non decent homes by 2010;</p> <p>Patterns of demand for responsive repairs;</p> <p>Key targets (see below);</p> | <p>ODPM Guidance on Business Plans</p> <p>EFDC Council Plan</p> <p>EFDC Performance Plan</p> <p>EFDC HECA Strategy</p> <p>EFDC Fuel Poverty Strategy</p> <p>Decent Homes Guidance</p> <p>Housing Services Risk Strategy</p> <p>Equalities Impact Assessments</p> <p>Housing Strategy</p> |
| 2. | <p>To achieve the following key targets:</p> <p>Replace all existing warm air heating systems by 2010.</p> <p>Identify hard to heat properties and carry out additional insulation measures to improve the energy efficiency of the property.</p> <p>Average SAP rating of 69 by end of 2010</p> <p>Explore alternative fuel sources for properties in the rural communities where properties are harder to insulate and affordably heat.</p>   | <p>EFDC Council Plan</p> <p>EFDC Performance Plan</p> <p>Housing Services Strategy on Energy Efficiency</p> <p>HECA Strategy</p> <p>EFDC Fuel Poverty Strategy</p>   |
| 3. | <p>To ensure maximum value for money from maintenance expenditure by:</p> <p>Extending the life cycle of building components as long a possible so that they are replaced 'just in time.'</p> <p>Using criteria for the replacement of sub components to extend the lifetime of heating systems, door entry systems, window units and other building components.</p>  | <p>ODPM Guidance on Business Plans</p>   |

|           |  |  |
|-----------|--|--|
|           | Employing option appraisals where significant maintenance expenditure is required on a limited number of properties.   |  |
| <b>B.</b> | <b>Responsive Repairs and Voids Work</b>   |  |
| 1.        | To continue to reduce expenditure on voids in line with the recommendations of the Voids and Lettings Study by ensuring as much work takes place as possible through planned maintenance contracts.  | Voids and Lettings Study                                 |
| 2.        | To aim to spend the HRF allocation from the HRA each year whilst acknowledging the fluctuating nature of repairs and maintenance programmes.   | EFDC Housing Strategy<br>Housing Services Risk Strategy  |
| 3.        | <p>To improve the all-round performance of the Repairs Service for our tenants and leaseholders.</p> <p>To combine the Housing Repairs Team and the Building Maintenance Works Unit</p> <p>To reduce the number of craft workers, but retaining a core to undertake a proportion of the day to day ad hoc repairs to the Council's Housing Stock, and/or those to void properties</p> <p>The balance of the work not undertaken directly by the Council being externalised via new or existing framework agreements.</p> <p>To appoint an Interim External Management Contractor to supervise the combined Building Maintenance Works Unit and Repairs Service, thus bringing in the added benefit of private sector knowledge and experience.</p> | Repairs Refresh Programme<br>Continuous Improvement Plan |
| <b>C.</b> | <b>Resources</b>   |  |
| 1.        | <p>To maximise funding on maintenance expenditure by:</p> <p>Making use of available capital receipts where possible.</p> <p>Using RCCO where possible.</p> <p>Transferring approximately £5.6 million from the HRA into the HRF each year for a further 4-years.</p>  | Housing Services Risk Strategy<br>Capital Strategy       |
| 2.        | To review the level of staffing resources annually against the planned level of expenditure.   | Repairs Refresh Programme<br>Value for Money Strategy    |
| 3.        | Monitor repairs and voids expenditure every six months to identify patterns in expenditure, which  |  |

|           |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|
|           | could be incorporated into a planned maintenance programme through the use of new or existing framework agreements.   |   |
| <b>D.</b> | <b>Tenant Consultation and Participation</b>  |   |
| 1.        | To discuss expenditure plans and programmes of work with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation at least annually.   | EFDC Tenant Participation Agreement                                   |
| 2.        | To involve representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in discussions on new policies relating to the Repairs and Maintenance Services.  | EFDC Tenant Participation Agreement<br>Housing Services Risk Strategy |
| 3.        | To consult tenants affected by major improvement schemes over the proposals.  |   |
| 4.        | To consult leaseholders on all planned improvements in line with Leasehold legislation  |   |
| 5.        | To undertake a "Customer Perspective" review of the Repairs Service   | Customer Perspective Programme  |
| 6.        | To consult the Repairs and Maintenance Focus Group on the future of the R&M service.  | Continuous Improvement Plan   |
| <b>E.</b> | <b>Contract Strategy</b>  |   |
| 1.        | To roll out the use of either framework agreements in the form of Partnering contracts to new areas of work.  | Value for Money Strategy<br>Housing Services Risk Strategy            |
| 2.        | To utilize the Essex Hub wherever possible to enter into framework agreements with (sub) contractors or suppliers.  | Value for Money Strategy<br>Contract Standing Orders                  |
| 3.        | To undertake, where appropriate, capital works using Contract Management methods in conjunction with our existing framework agreement sub-contractors so as to save paying overheads and profits to construction companies. | Value for Money Strategy<br>Contract Standing Orders                  |



## 11. Action plan

### 11.1 List of main actions flowing from the plan

This table lists the main areas of action required within the Housing Repairs Service and the Housing Assets Sections to achieve the strategies detailed in the previous sections.

| Action   | Officer responsible       | Target date                              | Progress  |
|--|---------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Implement programme for repairs and maintenance expenditure over 5 and 30 years.  | HAM<br>ADoH(P)            | Ongoing                                  | Included in this plan   |
| 2. Implement upgrade to latest version of Codeman software   | HAM                       | Sept 2011                                | Project to recommence via Northgate as the new IT provider.   |
| 3. To publish clear service standards for planned maintenance, Decent Homes, repairs, Right to Repairs and Leaseholder responsibilities, which are available in printed leaflet form and on the web site (Also relates to NI14 – Avoidable Contact Action Plan).<br><br>To publish the Voids standards on the Web site and to issue a copy to all tenants in advance of them undertaking a viewing or a void offer.<br><br>Undertake a review of the repairs responsibilities to ensure they dovetail with other service strategies ie ASBO, introductory tenancies, demoted tenancies | HAM<br><br>CRM<br><br>CRM | Dec 2010<br><br>Dec 2010<br><br>Dec 2010 | To follow the outcome of the Customer Perspective programme.<br><br>To follow the outcome of the Voids Working Group and the Customer Perspective programme.<br><br>To be undertaken in conjunction with the Repairs Refresh Programme. |
| 4. Timetable at least one meeting each year with the Tenants Federation to discuss the repairs and maintenance expenditure programme.  | ADoH(P)<br>HAM            | Ongoing                                  | Tenants Federation meet in March each year to consider the repairs and maintenance expenditure.   |
| 5. Introduce Asbestos record cards in all properties, and maintain the records for contactors and tenants use.   | CRM                       | Apr 2011                                 | Item previously deferred due to the restructure. To be undertaken in conjunction with the Repairs Refresh Programme.  |
| 6. Closer partnership working with ECC Social Care Occupational Therapists to better forward plan the budget required to meet the ongoing and future demand for disabled adaptations.  | HAM                       | April 2011                               |   |
| 7. Explore options whereby emphasis is put on "fix first time" for responsive repairs.   | CRM                       | Dec 2010                                 | (a) To be undertaken in conjunction with the Repairs Refresh Programme.   |
| Seek, through the Essex Hub, a framework agreement with specialist   | HAM                       | March 2011                               | (b) Identified through Repairs Refresh  |

|     |   |             |   |  |
|-----|---|-------------|---|--|
|     | contractors for asbestos removal, Door entry installations and maintenance, Drainage clearance as well as ad-hoc repairs where necessary  |             |   | Programme. (UPVC window installation and maintenance contract let in 2009)   |
| 8.  | To hold the first meeting of the Repairs Focus Group, consisting of tenants wanting to participate in shaping the way repairs and maintenance is carried out in the future.<br>To continue with the Repairs Focus Group once set up, and create an action plan for inclusion in the Repairs Refresh Programme | ADoH (Prop) | March 2010                              | First meeting arranged.  |
| 9.  | Continue feasibility studies into alternative fuel sources for properties in rural communities where mains gas is not available.  | HAM         | April 2011                              | Replacing old electric storage heating with electric boilers incorporating traditional radiators have received positive tenant feedback. Solar heating panels installed in three property to map the benefits. |
|     | To explore external wall insulation for solid wall constructed properties, and to seek grant funding to support future programmes   | HAM         | April 2011                              | Awaiting HEEP funding notification   |
| 10. | To review all projects with a contract value in excess of £.1m on completion to identify any lessons learnt.  | HAM<br>HRM  | On-going                                | On-going   |
| 11. | Seek to reduce the target response times for routine non-urgent repairs from 6-weeks to 4-weeks   | HWO         | April 2011                              | Identified through Repairs Refresh Programme. Target reduced from 8-weeks to 6-weeks in April 2008.  |
| 12. | To introduce generic repairs and voids officers.  | HRM         | April 2010                              | Restructure agreed. Jobs graded by the Job Evaluation Panel. New structure to be implemented in April 2010.  |
| 13. | Hold site visits at blocks of flats with Tenant Representatives to monitor repairs to, and condition of, communal areas   | HRM         | Apr 2011                                | Agreed in principle. Officer working group set up to agree contract terms.   |
| 14. | To appoint an external Management Contractor to oversee the combined Building Maintenance Works Unit and Repairs team as agreed by the Cabinet in March 2008.   | ADoH(P)     | Aug 2010                                | To be incorporated in Repairs Refresh Programme. EU advert placed, with 15 expressions of interest. Shortlisting taking place with a view to tender the appointment in April 2010.                             |
| 15. | To implement a range of initiatives, as defined in the Repairs Refresh Programme.<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop better supply chain arrangements with suppliers and sub-contractors to ensure value for money. This is to include a</li> </ul>   | ERMC        | Over a 3 year period after appointment. |  |

|     |   |           |            |   |
|-----|---|-----------|------------|---|
|     | <p>review of the current stores systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop better pricing models for works undertaken and where necessary recharged to ensure value for money.</li> <li>Building the team to ensure excellent HR practices are used, which will build a skilled, high performance, customer focused and motivated team.</li> <li>Introduce an IT system for developing an effective R&amp;M service from the point of order to completion and post inspection actions.</li> <li>To deliver a quality R&amp;M service, taking account of the TSA Regulatory Framework.</li> <li>To build the experience, competencies and knowledge to be able to take on new work streams in the future and to be commercially able to market services outside of the Council.</li> <li>To implement a customer focused service by implementing a full appointment system, extended opening hours and to operate a discretionary service to undertake tenants responsibility repairs.</li> <li>To reduce the number of jobs carried out as emergencies and urgent and bring the ratio of jobs to the recommended 10:20:70 for emergency, urgent and routine respectively.</li> </ul> |           |            |   |
| 16  | To develop a Value for Money Strategy   | ADoH (P)  | March 2010 |   |
| 17  | To develop a separate Repairs and Maintenance Service Strategy  | ADoH (P)  | July 2010  |   |
| 18. | To seek to include at least one local business on the list of tenderers for all future contracts.   | HAM / HRM | On-going   | New at the request of the Tenant and Leaseholder Federation Meeting in 2009 |





## Appendix A – 5-Year Capital Programme

### HOUSING (HRA) PORTFOLIO CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2009/10 to 2013/14 5-YEAR FORECAST EXCLUDING CARRY FORWARDS

|   | 2009/10<br>Revised<br>Actual<br>£000 | 2010/11<br>Forecast<br>£000 | 2011/12<br>Forecast<br>£000 | 2012/13<br>Forecast<br>£000 | 2013/14<br>Forecast<br>£000 | 5 Year<br>Total<br>£000 |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Housing Revenue Account</b>                    |                                      |                             |                             |                             |                             |                         |
| <b>Springfields, Sub Total (Works &amp; Fees)</b> | <b>1,548</b>                         | <b>0</b>                    | <b>0</b>                    | <b>0</b>                    | <b>0</b>                    | <b>1,548</b>            |
| Boiler Replacements                               | 310                                  | 300                         | 300                         | 300                         | 300                         | 1,510                   |
| New Heating Upgrades                              | 450                                  | 739                         | 726                         | 722                         | 617                         | 3,254                   |
| MVHR / Ventilation Installations                  | 16                                   | 40                          | 40                          | 40                          | 40                          | 176                     |
| Rewiring - (Kitchens & Bathrooms)                 | 336                                  | 230                         | 317                         | 332                         | 364                         | 1,580                   |
| Rewiring - (Heating)                              | 150                                  | 230                         | 317                         | 332                         | 364                         | 1,394                   |
| <b>Central Heating/Rewiring Sub Total</b>         | <b>1,262</b>                         | <b>1,539</b>                | <b>1,700</b>                | <b>1,727</b>                | <b>1,686</b>                | <b>7,913</b>            |
| PVCu Double Glazing / Door replacement            | 150                                  | 131                         | 203                         | 206                         | 229                         | 919                     |
| Roofing   | 522                                  | 539                         | 528                         | 605                         | 409                         | 2,602                   |
| Balcony Resurfacing                               | 24                                   | 25                          | 25                          | 25                          | 25                          | 124                     |
| Asbestos Removal                                  | 52                                   | 115                         | 115                         | 115                         | 115                         | 512                     |
| Communal water tank renewals                      | 120                                  | 67                          | 80                          | 83                          | 81                          | 431                     |
| <b>Windows/Roof/Rewiring Sub Total</b>            | <b>868</b>                           | <b>876</b>                  | <b>951</b>                  | <b>1,034</b>                | <b>858</b>                  | <b>4,588</b>            |
| Norway House Improvements                         | 50                                   | 50                          | 50                          | 50                          | 50                          | 250                     |
| Communal TV Upgrade/Other                         | 35                                   | 100                         | 0                           | 0                           | 0                           | 135                     |
| Door Entry  | 14                                   | 26                          | 18                          | 35                          | 104                         | 196                     |
| Drainage Works                                    | 20                                   | 100                         | 100                         | 100                         | 100                         | 420                     |
| Energy Efficiency Works                           | 160                                  | 200                         | 200                         | 200                         | 200                         | 960                     |
| <b>Total Other Planned Maintenance</b>            | <b>279</b>                           | <b>476</b>                  | <b>368</b>                  | <b>385</b>                  | <b>454</b>                  | <b>1,961</b>            |
| <b>Total Planned Maintenance</b>                  | <b>3,957</b>                         | <b>2,891</b>                | <b>3,019</b>                | <b>3,145</b>                | <b>2,998</b>                | <b>16,010</b>           |
| Jubilee Court - Conversion of Warden Accom.       | 2                                    | 0                           | 0                           | 0                           | 0                           | 2                       |
| Parsonage Court - Conversion of Warden Accom.     | 139                                  | 0                           | 0                           | 0                           | 0                           | 139                     |
| Miscellaneous Structural Works                    | 250                                  | 400                         | 400                         | 400                         | 400                         | 1,850                   |
| <b>Total Structural Schemes</b>                   | <b>391</b>                           | <b>400</b>                  | <b>400</b>                  | <b>400</b>                  | <b>400</b>                  | <b>1,991</b>            |
| <b>Small Capital Repairs</b>                      | <b>438</b>                           | <b>685</b>                  | <b>632</b>                  | <b>464</b>                  | <b>493</b>                  | <b>2,711</b>            |
| Kitchen & Bathroom Replacements                   | 2,110                                | 1,548                       | 1,672                       | 1,720                       | 1,204                       | 8,254                   |
| <b>Total Cost Reflective Repairs</b>              | <b>2,110</b>                         | <b>1,548</b>                | <b>1,672</b>                | <b>1,720</b>                | <b>1,204</b>                | <b>8,254</b>            |
| Fencing   | 22                                   | 15                          | 15                          | 15                          | 15                          | 82                      |
| Environmental Improvements - Shops                | 280                                  | 165                         | 120                         | 50                          | 50                          | 665                     |
| Off Street Parking                                | 21                                   | 607                         | 541                         | 41                          | 41                          | 1,251                   |
| Estate Environment                                | 112                                  | 102                         | 102                         | 102                         | 100                         | 518                     |
| Structural Watercourse Improvements               | 10                                   | 10                          | 10                          | 10                          | 10                          | 50                      |
| CCTV  | 34                                   | 50                          | 50                          | 50                          | 50                          | 234                     |
| <b>Total Non-Cost Reflective Repairs</b>          | <b>479</b>                           | <b>949</b>                  | <b>838</b>                  | <b>268</b>                  | <b>266</b>                  | <b>2,800</b>            |
| Welfare Heating                                   | 48                                   | 50                          | 50                          | 50                          | 50                          | 248                     |
| Other Disabled                                    | 534                                  | 400                         | 400                         | 400                         | 400                         | 2,134                   |
| <b>Disabled Adaptations</b>                       | <b>582</b>                           | <b>450</b>                  | <b>450</b>                  | <b>450</b>                  | <b>450</b>                  | <b>2,382</b>            |
| External Lighting Schemes                         | 32                                   | 5                           | 5                           | 5                           | 5                           | 52                      |
| Feasibilities                                     | 41                                   | 15                          | 15                          | 15                          | 15                          | 101                     |
| Other (New Roof Covering Loughton Way)            | 8                                    | 0                           | 0                           | 0                           | 0                           | 8                       |
| Careline Equipment Upgrade                        | 50                                   | 0                           | 0                           | 0                           | 0                           | 50                      |
| <b>Other Repairs &amp; Maintenance</b>            | <b>131</b>                           | <b>32</b>                   | <b>20</b>                   | <b>20</b>                   | <b>20</b>                   | <b>211</b>              |
| <b>Contingency</b>                                |                                      |                             |                             |                             |                             | <b>0</b>                |
| <b>TOTAL HRA</b>                                  | <b>8,088</b>                         | <b>6,955</b>                | <b>7,031</b>                | <b>6,467</b>                | <b>5,830</b>                | <b>34,359</b>           |
| Housing DLO vehicles                              | 55                                   | 50                          | 50                          | 50                          | 50                          | 255                     |
| <b>TOTAL DLO</b>                                  | <b>55</b>                            | <b>50</b>                   | <b>50</b>                   | <b>50</b>                   | <b>50</b>                   | <b>255</b>              |

## Appendix B – 30 Year Capital Programme

| HOUSING (HRA) PORTFOLIO<br>30 YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME (EXCLUDING CARRY FORWARDS) |                                      |                      |                       |                        |                        |                        |                        |
|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|   |                                      | Years<br>1-5<br>£000 | Years<br>6-10<br>£000 | Years<br>11-15<br>£000 | Years<br>16-20<br>£000 | Years<br>21-25<br>£000 | Years<br>26-30<br>£000 |
| <b>1</b>  | <b>Total Planned Maintenance</b>     | <b>12,210</b>        | <b>12,288</b>         | <b>11,523</b>          | <b>10,536</b>          | <b>10,733</b>          | <b>10,313</b>          |
|   | Roofing                              | 2,922                | 4,151                 | 3,778                  | 2,544                  | 1,012                  | 1,778                  |
|   | Rewiring                             | 1,686                | 1,498                 | 768                    | 996                    | 1,482                  | 1,888                  |
|   | Window & door replacement            | 750                  | 900                   | 748                    | 2,293                  | 3,779                  | 2,274                  |
|   | Heating and boiler replacement       | 3,560                | 2,141                 | 2,729                  | 1,228                  | 985                    | 1,398                  |
|   | Asbestos removal                     | 582                  | 575                   | 575                    | 575                    | 575                    | 575                    |
|   | Drainage                             | 500                  | 500                   | 500                    | 500                    | 500                    | 500                    |
|   | Energy efficiency                    | 960                  | 1,500                 | 1,500                  | 1,500                  | 1,500                  | 1,000                  |
|   | Norway House improvements            | 250                  | 250                   | 250                    | 250                    | 250                    | 250                    |
|   | Door Entry Security                  | 404                  | 148                   | 125                    | 100                    | 100                    | 100                    |
|   | Ventilation                          | 176                  | 250                   | 250                    | 250                    | 250                    | 250                    |
|   | Communal water tank replacement      | 420                  | 375                   | 300                    | 300                    | 300                    | 300                    |
| <b>2</b>  | <b>Structural Schemes</b>            | <b>2,963</b>         | <b>711</b>            | <b>928</b>             | <b>1,168</b>           | <b>1,369</b>           | <b>1,639</b>           |
| <b>3</b>  | <b>Cyclical Maintenance</b>          | <b>52</b>            | <b>75</b>             | <b>75</b>              | <b>75</b>              | <b>75</b>              | <b>75</b>              |
| <b>4</b>  | <b>Small Capital Works</b>           | <b>1,838</b>         | <b>1,750</b>          | <b>1,750</b>           | <b>1,750</b>           | <b>1,750</b>           | <b>1,750</b>           |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>Cost reflective improvements</b>  | <b>5,622</b>         | <b>1,800</b>          | <b>2,250</b>           | <b>3,550</b>           | <b>2,020</b>           | <b>1,650</b>           |
|   | Kitchen & bathroom renewals          | 5,622                | 1,800                 | 2,250                  | 3,550                  | 2,020                  | 1,650                  |
| <b>6</b>  | <b>Non-cost-reflective repairs</b>   | <b>2,641</b>         | <b>1,500</b>          | <b>1,500</b>           | <b>1,250</b>           | <b>1,000</b>           | <b>1,504</b>           |
| <b>7</b>  | <b>Disabled Adaptations</b>          | <b>2,182</b>         | <b>2,321</b>          | <b>2,962</b>           | <b>3,780</b>           | <b>4,825</b>           | <b>6,158</b>           |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>Other repairs and maintenance</b> | <b>58</b>            | <b>500</b>            | <b>500</b>             | <b>500</b>             | <b>500</b>             | <b>500</b>             |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>Feasibilities</b>                 | <b>101</b>           | <b>75</b>             | <b>75</b>              | <b>75</b>              | <b>75</b>              | <b>75</b>              |
| <b>10</b>   | <b>Housing DLO Vehicles</b>          | <b>255</b>           | <b>250</b>            | <b>250</b>             | <b>250</b>             | <b>250</b>             | <b>250</b>             |
| <b>11</b>   | <b>Less income</b>                   |                      |                       |                        |                        |                        |                        |
|   | <b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>             | <b>27,922</b>        | <b>21,270</b>         | <b>21,813</b>          | <b>22,934</b>          | <b>22,597</b>          | <b>23,914</b>          |

## Appendix C – Decent Homes Summary

| Fails Decent Homes                        | Base Year Failures<br>2001 (Business Plan) |                  | *Current Failures<br>2009/10 |                | All Current and Potential<br>2010 |                  |
|---|--|------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
|   | 1627                                       |                  | 97                           |                | 272                               |                  |
| Stock                                     | 7088                                       |                  | 6559                         |                | 6559                              |                  |
| Non-Decent homes as a % of<br>total stock | 22.95%                                     |                  | 1.48%                        |                | 4.15%                             |                  |
| <b>Min. Fitness Standard</b>              | No.<br>8                                   | £<br>8,000       | No.<br>0                     | £<br>-         | No.<br>0                          | £<br>-           |
| <b>Key Building Components</b>            | <b>688</b>                                 | <b>1,140,100</b> | <b>158</b>                   | <b>432,800</b> | <b>462</b>                        | <b>1,266,300</b> |
| Walls                                     | 6  | 1,500            | 24                           | 60,000         | 36                                | 90,000           |
| Roof Cover                                | 28   | 56,000           | 15                           | 30,000         | 48                                | 96,000           |
| Chimneys                                  | 1  | 400              | 2                            | 800            | 6                                 | 2,400            |
| Heating                                   | 210  | 462,000          | 30                           | 81,000         | 127                               | 342,900          |
| Electrics                                 | 443  | 620,200          | 87                           | 261,000        | 245                               | 735,000          |
| <b>Modern Facilities</b>                  | <b>1180</b>                                | <b>1,657,100</b> | <b>62</b>                    | <b>168,000</b> | <b>163</b>                        | <b>372,000</b>   |
| Kitchens                                  | 513  | 923,400          | 22                           | 88,000         | 23                                | 92,000           |
| Bathrooms                                 | 667  | 733,700          | 40                           | 80,000         | 140                               | 280,000          |
| <b>Thermal Comfort</b>                    | <b>459</b>                                 | <b>573,750</b>   | <b>10</b>                    | <b>10,000</b>  | <b>10</b>                         | <b>10,000</b>    |
| <b>TOTALS</b>                             | <b>2,327</b>                               | <b>3,378,950</b> | <b>230</b>                   | <b>610,800</b> | <b>635</b>                        | <b>1,648,300</b> |







|  |  |
|--|--|
| Affordable housing                       | Subsidised housing for rent or shared ownership, for people who cannot afford to purchase a property on the open market.   |
| Arms length management organisations     | Companies (or other legal bodies) set up and owned by the Council - but operating separately from it and governed by its own board or committee - to manage services on behalf of the Council.   |
| Asset Management Plan                    | A plan the Council produces every year, explaining how it manages its non residential land and buildings.  |
| Benchmarking                             | The process of comparing an organisation's costs and performance with other similar organisations.   |
| Best Value                               | The process of ensuring the continuous improvement of public services, through service reviews, <i>benchmarking</i> , consultation and inspection.   |
| 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.  |
| Cabinet                                  | An important Council committee, comprising ten senior councillors, each responsible for a <i>portfolio</i> , that makes corporate Council decisions.   |
| Capital expenditure                      | Money spent to buy or improve assets (e.g. land or buildings)  |
| Capital receipt                          | Money received for the sale of a capital asset (eg land or buildings)  |
| Catch-up repairs                         | Repairs that should have been undertaken earlier, and now need to be undertaken within the next 5 years.   |
| Choice-based lettings                    | A scheme whereby people in need of <i>affordable housing</i> 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. |
| CIPFA                                    | The Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants. The body that sets the guidelines for Council financial accounts.   |
| Comprehensive Spending Review            | A review by the Government on how much money should be spent on all the different types of public services (e.g. housing) over a set period (usually three years).   |
| Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership | Representatives of local statutory and voluntary organisations with an interest in, or responsibility for, reducing crime within the District, including the Council, Essex Police, Probation Service, Epping Forest CVS, Social Services.   |
| Direct Service Organisation (DSO)        | A Council department that provides the same service as a private contractor, and operates in the same way as a private contractor.   |
| 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> .   |
| 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.  |
| Housing association                                   | See <i>Registered Social Landlord</i> .  |
| Homes and Communities Agency                          | The Government agency that funds <i>registered social landlords (RSLs)</i> .   |
| Housing Revenue Account (HRA)                         | The Council's financial account, within the <i>General Fund</i> that deals with income and expenditure relating to the management and maintenance of the Council's housing stock.  |
| Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan           | An annual plan produced by the Council that analyses issues relating to the Council's own housing stock and sets out the objectives, targets, plans, income and expenditure for the management and maintenance of its housing stock over the next 5-30 years.  |
| HRA subsidy   | An annual revenue subsidy provided to local authorities by the Government to assist with the management and maintenance of their housing stock.  |
| ISO 9001:2000   | An internationally recognised system of ensuring the provision of quality services, that is checked by external assessors.   |
| 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.   |
| Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) | The Government department that replaced the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and has responsibility for formulating and implementing the Government's housing policy at a national level and allocates resources for different national housing programmes.  |
| Out of charge properties                              | Properties for which the Council cannot use for a long time, and for which no rent is being received.  |
| 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, with the number reviewed each year.  |
| Private Finance Initiative (PFI)                      | A way of enabling private companies to provide large amounts of money to construct or purchase public buildings, and then manage them over a long period, in return for a management fee paid by the public organisation responsible for providing the service.  |
| Prudential borrowing                                  | A new system being proposed by the Government, that would not restrict how much councils could borrow to fund capital expenditure. However, councils would only be able borrow money that they know they could pay back over the years of the loan, from their day-to-day income.  |
| 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. |



|   |   |
|---|---|
| Resource accounting                             | A way of accounting for income and expenditure, that takes into account the value of the assets (e.g. properties) and their depreciation.   |
| Revenue contributions to capital outlay (RCCO)  | Rental or other income used to pay for capital expenditure.   |
| Right to Buy                                    | A Government scheme that allows Council tenants, who have held tenancies for more than two years, to buy their own home from the Council. Discounts are currently given of up to £34,000, depending on how many years they have held tenancies.   |
| Sheltered housing                               | Independent accommodation provided to elderly people, with support from a Scheme Manager 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 – Existing Use Value             | A way of valuing Council or housing association properties, taking into account the fact that the rents charged are much lower than for private properties.   |
| Social Housing Grant (SHG)                      | Capital funding provided to <i>RSLs</i> by the <i>Housing Corporation</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.   |
| Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP)             | A measure of how energy efficient a property is, between a score of 0 –120 (previously 0 –100). A score of 120 is the most energy efficient.  |
| Stock condition survey                          | A survey of the inside and the outside of some of a council's properties, that gives an indication of the condition of all the properties   |
| Stock Options Appraisal                         | A process to determine the most appropriate future ownership and management of the Council's housing stock.   |
| Supported housing                               | Housing where the tenants need help – e.g. sheltered housing for the elderly or housing for people with physically disabled people.   |
| Supporting People                               | A Government initiative introduced in April 2003, which brings together 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 Supporting People Strategies explaining how the funding will be distributed. |
| Supporting People Commissioning Team            | The team of County Council officers responsible for managing and administering <i>Supporting People</i> at the county level.  |
| Target rent                                     | The individual rents for properties that councils and housing associations should aim to charge by 2012, based on a Government formula.   |
| Tenant Services Authority                       | The Government Agency that regulates council and housing association landlords  |
| Tenants participation compact / agreement (TPA) | Written agreements between <i>social landlords</i> and groups of tenants, at both district and estate level, setting out the agreed approach to tenant participation.   |



# Contact List

# Appendix 3

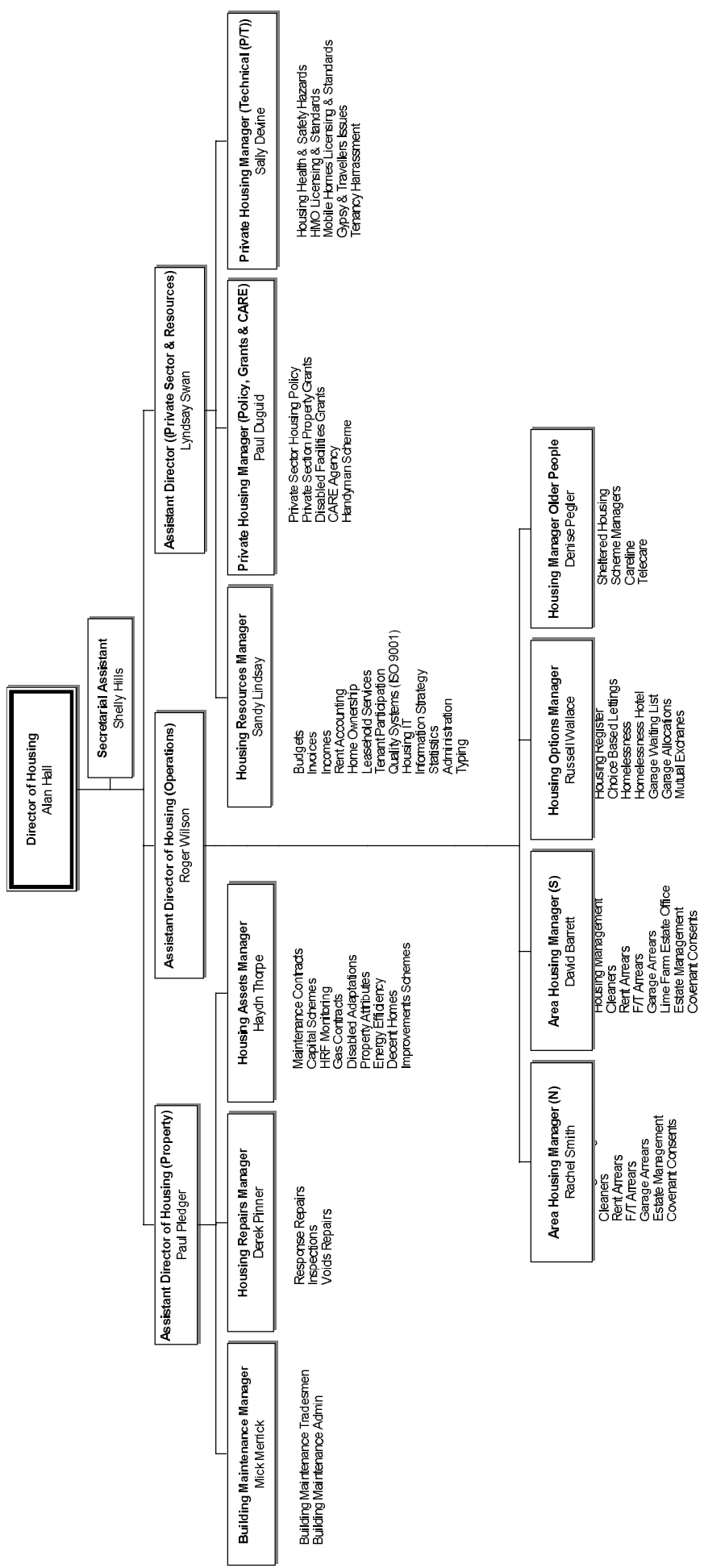
| EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CONTACTS<br>Civic Offices, Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ |                    |  |               |                                |
|--|--------------------|--|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Subject  | Name               | Designation                                | Telephone     | e-mail                         |
| Area Housing Office (North)  | Rachel Smith       | Area Housing Manager                       | 01992 564005  | rsmith@eppingforestdc.gov.uk   |
| Area Housing Office (South)  | David Barrett      | Area Housing Manager                       | 01992 565183  | dbarrett@eppingforestdc.gov.uk |
| Careline Service   | Denise Pegler      | Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)   | 020 8508 8596 | dpegler@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| Chief Executive  | Peter Haywood      | Chief Executive                            | 01992 564080  | phaywood@eppingforestdc.gov.uk |
| Council Plan   | Steve Tautz        | Senior Performance Management Officer      | 01992 564180  | stautz@eppingforestdc.gov.uk   |
| Director of Housing  | Alan Hall          | Director of Housing                        | 01992 564004  | ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk    |
| Energy Efficiency (Council Properties)   | Haydn Thorpe       | Housing Assets Manager                     | 01992 564162  | hthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| HRA Business Plan  | Alan Hall          | Director of Housing                        | 01992 564004  | ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk    |
| Homelessness   | Russell Wallace    | Housing Options Manager                    | 01992 564490  | rwallace@eppingforestdc.gov.uk |
| Housing Finance  | Brian Molden       | Principal Accountant                       | 01992 564455  | bmolden@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| Housing Maintenance  | Haydn Thorpe       | Housing Assets Manager                     | 01992 564162  | hthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| Housing Management   | Roger Wilson       | Asst Director of Housing (Operations)      | 01992 564419  | rwilson@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| Housing Portfolio Holder   | Cllr David Stallan | Housing Portfolio Holder                   | 01992 564004  | ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk    |
| Housing Repairs  | Derek Pinner       | Housing Repairs Manager                    | 01992 564161  | dpinner@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| House Sales  | Marie Thorpe       | Principal Housing Officer (Home Ownership) | 01992 564015  | mthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| Housing Strategy   | Alan Hall          | Director of Housing                        | 01992 564004  | ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk    |
| Leasehold Services   | Marie Thorpe       | Principal Housing Officer (Home Ownership) | 01992 564015  | mthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| Rents Administration & Strategy  | Sandy Lindsay      | Housing Resources Manager                  | 01992 564035  | slindsay@eppingforestdc.gov.uk |
| Sheltered Housing  | Denise Pegler      | Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)   | 020 8508 8596 | dpegler@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| Supporting People  | Roger Wilson       | Asst Director of Housing (Operations)      | 01992 564419  | rwilson@eppingforestdc.gov.uk  |
| Tenant Participation   | Richard Jones      | Tenant Participation Officer               | 01992 565184  | rjones@eppingforestdc.gov.uk   |

**OTHER PARTNERS CONTACTS**

| <b>Organisation</b>                               | <b>Contact</b> | <b>Tel. No</b> | <b>e-mail</b>  |
|---|----------------|----------------|--|
| Citizens Advice Bureau                            | Rachel Poulter | 01992 574989   | <a href="mailto:bureau@eppingcab.cabnet.org.uk">bureau@eppingcab.cabnet.org.uk</a>     |
| Voluntary Action Epping Forest                    | Jaqui Foile    | 01992 564178   | <a href="mailto:jfoile@vaef.org.uk">jfoile@vaef.org.uk</a>                             |
| Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation | Molly Carter   | 01992 564292   | <a href="mailto:csobey@eppingforestdc.gov.uk">csobey@eppingforestdc.gov.uk</a>         |
| Essex County Council Supporting People Team       | Simon Harniess | 01245 240020   | <a href="mailto:simon.harniess@essexcc.gov.uk">simon.harniess@essexcc.gov.uk</a>       |
| GO-East   | Dennis Roberts | 01223 372500   | <a href="mailto:dennis.roberts@goeast.gsi.gov.uk">dennis.roberts@goeast.gsi.gov.uk</a> |

Appendix 4

Senior Management





## Appendix 5

### National and Local Performance Indicators for HRA Landlord Services

#### Performance (2009/10 - Quarter 3) and Targets (2010/11)

| <b>National Indicators</b> |   |                             |                                  |                             |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>PI. No</b>              | <b>Definition</b>   | <b>Target<br/>(2009/10)</b> | <b>Actual<br/>(2009/10 – Q3)</b> | <b>Target<br/>(2010/11)</b> |
| NI 156                     | Number of households living in temporary accommodation                            | 100                         | 51                               | 60                          |
| NI 158                     | Percentage of non-decent Council homes  | 0 %                         | 0 %                              | 0 %                         |
| NI 160                     | Local Authority tenant satisfaction with landlord services                        | 83 %                        | 83 %                             | 85 %                        |
| <b>Local Indicators</b>    |   |                             |                                  |                             |
| LPI 04                     | Rent collected as a proportion of rents owed on housing revenue account dwellings | 98.8 %                      | 97.2 %                           | 97.0 %                      |
| LPI 05                     | Average number of days to re-let Council dwellings                                | 40 days                     | 30 days                          | 30 days                     |
| LPI 07                     | Emergency repairs undertaken within target time (24 hours)                        | 99 %                        | 98 %                             | 99 %                        |
| LPI 08                     | Urgent repairs undertaken within target time (within 5 working days)              | 95 %                        | 94 %                             | 95 %                        |
| LPI 09                     | Routine repairs undertaken within target time (6 weeks)                           | 90 %                        | 96 %                             | 95 %                        |
| LPI 10                     | Satisfaction with repairs undertaken  | 98 %                        | 98 %                             | 98 %                        |





# HRA 30 Year Business Plan

# Appendix 6

| Year    | Income        |              |           |              | Expenditure        |                    |                  |                               |                           |                   |              | Appropriations       |                               |                 |                                 | ANNUAL CASHFLOW | Opening Balance | Closing Balance |                      |           |
|---------|---------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------|
|         | Rental Income | Other Income | Subsidy   | Total Income | General Management | Special Management | Other Management | Responsive & Cyclical Repairs | Total Revenue Expenditure | Interest Received | Depreciation | Net Operating Income | FRS 17 /Other HRA Reserve Adj | AMRA Adjustment | Revenue Contribution to Capital |                 |                 |                 | Total Appropriations |           |
| 2009.10 | 1             | 25,188,166   | 4,636,000 | -9,750,104   | 20,074,061         | -4,369,000         | -3,728,000       | -468,000                      | -5,600,000                | -14,165,000       | 502,131      | -7,776,079           | -1,364,886                    | -133,000        | 2,998,000                       | -1,525,000      | 1,340,000       | -24,886         | 6,081,000            | 6,056,114 |
| 2010.11 | 2             | 25,791,016   | 4,848,000 | -10,051,527  | 20,587,489         | -4,434,000         | -3,804,000       | -486,000                      | -5,600,000                | -14,324,000       | 493,942      | -8,009,608           | -1,252,176                    | -159,000        | 3,166,000                       | -1,763,000      | 1,244,000       | -8,176          | 6,056,114            | 6,047,938 |
| 2011.12 | 3             | 26,805,813   | 4,927,000 | -11,570,078  | 20,162,735         | -4,419,000         | -3,880,000       | -495,000                      | -5,200,000                | -13,994,000       | 652,000      | -8,166,229           | -1,345,493                    | -159,000        | 3,231,000                       | -2,800,000      | 272,000         | -1,073,493      | 6,047,938            | 4,974,444 |
| 2012.13 | 4             | 27,855,941   | 5,007,800 | -12,533,638  | 20,330,104         | -4,507,380         | -3,957,600       | -503,800                      | -5,200,000                | -14,168,780       | 1,298,087    | -8,514,826           | -1,055,416                    | -159,000        | 3,486,249                       | -2,800,000      | 527,249         | -528,167        | 4,974,444            | 4,446,277 |
| 2013.14 | 5             | 28,929,340   | 5,090,040 | -13,279,188  | 20,740,192         | -4,620,065         | -4,036,752       | -512,776                      | -5,200,000                | -14,369,593       | 1,297,000    | -8,883,007           | -1,215,407                    | -159,000        | 3,761,663                       | -2,800,000      | 802,663         | -412,745        | 4,446,277            | 4,033,533 |
| 2014.15 | 6             | 30,014,093   | 5,173,748 | -14,052,734  | 21,135,107         | -4,735,566         | -4,117,487       | -521,932                      | -5,200,000                | -14,574,985       | 1,295,995    | -9,312,638           | -1,456,520                    | -159,000        | 4,096,827                       | -2,800,000      | 1,137,827       | -318,693        | 4,033,533            | 3,714,840 |
| 2015.16 | 7             | 31,132,550   | 5,258,951 | -14,844,364  | 21,547,137         | -4,853,955         | -4,199,837       | -533,321                      | -5,844,305                | -15,431,418       | 1,317,517    | -9,769,801           | -2,336,566                    | -159,000        | 4,461,854                       | -2,000,000      | 2,302,854       | -33,712         | 3,714,840            | 3,681,128 |
| 2016.17 | 8             | 32,298,203   | 5,345,677 | -15,653,036  | 21,990,844         | -4,975,304         | -4,283,834       | -544,984                      | -6,653,376                | -16,457,497       | 1,325,263    | -10,256,947          | -3,398,337                    | -159,000        | 4,859,405                       | -1,200,000      | 3,500,405       | 102,068         | 3,681,128            | 3,783,196 |
| 2017.18 | 9             | 33,028,283   | 5,433,955 | -16,112,590  | 22,349,649         | -5,099,687         | -4,369,510       | -556,038                      | -6,836,344                | -16,861,579       | 1,323,371    | -10,785,199          | -3,973,758                    | -159,000        | 5,292,378                       | -1,100,000      | 4,033,378       | 59,620          | 3,783,196            | 3,842,816 |
| 2018.19 | 10            | 33,774,683   | 5,523,814 | -16,553,305  | 22,745,192         | -5,227,179         | -4,456,900       | -567,316                      | -7,024,343                | -17,275,739       | 1,317,961    | -11,353,681          | -4,566,267                    | -159,000        | 5,763,929                       | -1,000,000      | 4,604,929       | 38,662          | 3,842,816            | 3,881,478 |
| 2019.20 | 11            | 34,551,270   | 5,615,283 | -17,000,880  | 23,165,674         | -5,357,858         | -4,546,038       | -578,848                      | -7,028,935                | -17,511,680       | 1,304,618    | -11,942,226          | -4,983,615                    | -159,000        | 6,253,863                       | -1,000,000      | 5,094,863       | 111,249         | 3,881,478            | 3,992,727 |
| 2020.21 | 12            | 35,359,427   | 5,708,394 | -17,460,076  | 23,607,745         | -5,491,805         | -4,636,959       | -590,640                      | -7,168,470                | -17,887,874       | 1,283,884    | -12,574,124          | -5,570,369                    | -159,000        | 6,785,442                       | -1,000,000      | 5,626,442       | 56,072          | 3,992,727            | 4,048,799 |
| 2021.22 | 13            | 36,186,398   | 5,803,177 | -17,944,531  | 24,045,044         | -5,629,100         | -4,729,698       | -602,673                      | -7,310,768                | -18,272,239       | 1,260,752    | -13,257,516          | -6,223,960                    | -159,000        | 7,362,204                       | -1,000,000      | 6,203,204       | -20,756         | 4,048,799            | 4,028,043 |
| 2022.23 | 14            | 37,032,619   | 5,899,663 | -18,442,160  | 24,490,123         | -5,769,827         | -4,824,292       | -614,951                      | -7,455,884                | -18,664,954       | 1,235,152    | -13,991,883          | -6,931,562                    | -159,000        | 7,987,991                       | -1,000,000      | 6,828,991       | -102,570        | 4,028,043            | 3,925,472 |
| 2023.24 | 15            | 37,898,536   | 5,997,885 | -18,953,132  | 24,943,289         | -5,914,073         | -4,920,778       | -627,480                      | -7,603,872                | -19,066,203       | 1,206,758    | -14,781,426          | -7,697,583                    | -159,000        | 8,666,971                       | -1,000,000      | 7,507,971       | -189,612        | 3,925,472            | 3,735,860 |
| 2024.25 | 16            | 38,790,719   | 6,097,876 | -19,477,791  | 25,410,804         | -6,061,925         | -5,019,194       | -640,276                      | -7,756,002                | -19,477,396       | 1,175,472    | -15,630,704          | -8,521,824                    | -159,000        | 9,403,663                       | -1,000,000      | 8,244,663       | -277,161        | 3,735,860            | 3,458,699 |
| 2025.26 | 17            | 39,710,093   | 6,199,669 | -20,016,485  | 25,893,276         | -6,213,473         | -5,119,578       | -653,345                      | -7,912,409                | -19,898,804       | 1,141,241    | -16,544,658          | -9,408,945                    | -159,000        | 10,202,975                      | -1,000,000      | 9,043,975       | -364,970        | 3,458,699            | 3,093,729 |
| 2026.27 | 18            | 40,651,192   | 6,303,297 | -20,575,778  | 26,378,711         | -6,368,810         | -5,221,969       | -666,681                      | -8,071,968                | -20,329,428       | 1,103,900    | -17,530,668          | -10,377,485                   | -159,000        | 11,070,227                      | -1,000,000      | 9,911,227       | -466,258        | 3,093,729            | 2,627,471 |
| 2027.28 | 19            | 41,614,529   | 6,408,796 | -21,150,208  | 26,873,117         | -6,528,030         | -5,326,409       | -680,290                      | -8,234,744                | -20,769,474       | 1,063,234    | -18,592,607          | -11,425,730                   | -159,000        | 12,011,197                      | -1,000,000      | 10,852,197      | -573,533        | 2,627,471            | 2,053,938 |
| 2028.29 | 20            | 42,600,627   | 6,516,202 | -21,740,168  | 27,376,661         | -6,691,231         | -5,432,937       | -694,178                      | -8,400,802                | -21,219,149       | 1,019,088    | -19,736,784          | -12,560,184                   | -159,000        | 13,032,148                      | -844,289        | 12,028,860      | -531,324        | 2,053,938            | 1,522,614 |
| 2029.30 | 21            | 43,623,857   | 6,625,550 | -22,346,059  | 27,903,348         | -6,858,512         | -5,541,595       | -708,376                      | -8,572,901                | -21,681,385       | 989,414      | -20,970,038          | -13,758,662                   | -159,000        | 14,139,881                      | -751,145        | 13,229,736      | -528,926        | 1,522,614            | 993,688   |
| 2030.31 | 22            | 44,685,806   | 6,736,876 | -22,968,295  | 28,454,387         | -7,029,975         | -5,652,427       | -722,891                      | -8,751,282                | -22,156,575       | 981,966      | -22,299,789          | -15,020,011                   | -159,000        | 15,341,771                      | -156,632        | 15,026,139      | 6,128           | 993,688              | 999,816   |
| 2031.32 | 23            | 45,773,589   | 6,850,219 | -23,621,692  | 29,002,117         | -7,205,724         | -5,765,476       | -737,705                      | -8,933,384                | -22,642,289       | 980,404      | -23,738,541          | -16,398,309                   | -159,000        | 16,645,822                      | -88,584         | 16,398,238      | -71             | 999,816              | 999,745   |
| 2032.33 | 24            | 46,887,834   | 6,965,617 | -24,293,152  | 29,560,299         | -7,385,867         | -5,880,785       | -752,824                      | -9,119,285                | -23,138,761       | 978,734      | -25,290,742          | -17,890,470                   | -159,000        | 18,060,716                      | -11,245         | 17,890,471      | 1               | 999,745              | 999,746   |
| 2033.34 | 25            | 48,029,184   | 7,083,109 | -24,983,157  | 30,129,136         | -7,570,514         | -5,998,401       | -768,254                      | -9,309,064                | -23,646,233       | 976,241      | -26,965,865          | -19,506,721                   | -159,000        | 19,595,877                      | 0               | 19,436,877      | -69,844         | 999,746              | 929,902   |
| 2034.35 | 26            | 49,206,124   | 7,202,734 | -25,692,201  | 30,716,658         | -7,759,776         | -6,118,369       | -784,017                      | -9,504,300                | -24,166,462       | 972,032      | -28,774,182          | -21,251,955                   | -159,000        | 21,261,527                      | 0               | 21,102,527      | -149,428        | 929,902              | 780,474   |
| 2035.36 | 27            | 50,419,918   | 7,324,533 | -26,420,789  | 31,323,661         | -7,953,771         | -6,240,737       | -800,118                      | -9,705,172                | -24,699,798       | 966,017      | -30,726,839          | -23,136,959                   | -159,000        | 23,068,757                      | 0               | 22,909,757      | -227,203        | 780,474              | 553,271   |
| 2036.37 | 28            | 51,663,648   | 7,448,547 | -27,177,780  | 31,934,415         | -8,152,615         | -6,365,551       | -816,553                      | -9,910,303                | -25,245,022       | 958,044      | -32,838,384          | -25,190,948                   | -159,000        | 25,029,601                      | 0               | 24,870,601      | -320,347        | 553,271              | 232,924   |
| 2037.38 | 29            | 52,938,055   | 7,574,818 | -27,955,865  | 32,557,008         | -8,356,431         | -6,492,862       | -833,326                      | -10,119,784               | -25,802,403       | 947,352      | -35,119,565          | -27,417,608                   | -159,000        | 27,157,117                      | 0               | 26,998,117      | -419,491        | 232,924              | -186,567  |
| 2038.39 | 30            | 54,243,893   | 7,703,390 | -28,755,611  | 33,191,671         | -8,565,341         | -6,622,720       | -850,446                      | -10,333,707               | -26,372,214       | 945,421      | -37,584,608          | -29,819,729                   | -159,000        | 29,465,472                      | 0               | 29,306,472      | -513,257        | -186,567             | -699,824  |







## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 25 March 2010**

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

**Subject: HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme – Progress Report**

**Officer contact for further information:  
Roger Wilson, Assistant Director of Housing (01992 56 4419)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Housing Scrutiny Panel reviews progress made on the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme, and considers the Housing Register Activity Report, both for the period January 2009 to January 2010.**

### **Report:**

1. At its meeting on 21 January 2010, the Panel considered the updated Housing Service Strategy on Allocations. The Panel asked for a progress report on the HomeOption choice based lettings scheme, including all of the provisions being made to support vulnerable applicants, hence the need for this report.
2. The Choice Based Lettings Scheme was introduced in November 2007, which was necessary to meet the requirements of Government that such a scheme be in place by 2010 at the latest. The scheme is administered by the external Choice Based Lettings agency Locata Housing Services (LHS). Under the scheme, all vacant social rented properties are advertised to applicants in a two-weekly publication, website, and other media giving details of location, type, rent, service charge, council tax band and landlord of the available accommodation. Applicants apply for a property by “expressing an interest” in up to a maximum of three properties for which they have an assessed need, either in person, by post, telephone, text, email or Internet.
3. At the end of the two weekly cycle, the Council analyses the “expressions of interests” received and allocates each property following a prioritisation and selection process in accordance with its own Allocations Scheme. In general terms, the property is offered to the applicant in the highest band, who has been registered the longest, who had “expressed an interest” for the specific vacancy. The results of the “expressions of interest” on each property advertised is then published in the next periodic publication, setting out the number received on each property, as well as the Band and registration date of the successful applicant. This helps applicants to see how long the successful applicant has been waiting and gives greater transparency in the allocation of accommodation, as each applicant would be able to clearly understand how the scheme works.

4. The Council is a member of the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium (HEHOC) which jointly operates the Choice Based Lettings Scheme and consists of following six authorities:

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

### **HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Information Bulletin**

5. The HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Information Bulletin for the period 16 January 2009 to 22 January 2010 is attached as an appendix to the report.

6. As can be seen, 477 properties (including RSL lets) have been allocated during the period. Some properties have been advertised on more than one occasion as they are difficult to let (particularly those designated for older persons' use) which has resulted in 607 advertisements being placed in the Free-sheets. With 42,374 expressions of interest being made, this is an average of around 70 expressions of interest each time a property is advertised. Most properties, apart from the difficult to let older person's properties referred to, attract in excess of 200 expressions of interest. Almost 90% of applicants expressing an interest in properties did so over the Internet.

7. Around 65% of applicants have participated in the scheme during the period. LHS confirm that, nationally, this is a high participation rate. Some applicants may not participate for a variety of reasons including:

- Joining the register to accumulate time on the list, should they want Council accommodation in the future.
- Homeless applicants who are under a deferment period.
- Applicants who wish to move to smaller accommodation and may be biding their time until a property becomes available that meets all of their aspirations.

### **Housing Register Activity Report**

8. The Housing Register Activity Report for the same period, which is also attached, shows the number of expressions of interest made by all applicants, the number of lets and refusals (excluding RSL properties) and number of applicants in each of the six priority Bands. At the time of writing there are 4,853 applicants on the Housing Register 714 (15%) of which are existing Council and RSL tenants who are seeking to transfer.

### **Surveys of Applicants in 2008**

9. In 2008, two surveys of all housing applicants were undertaken. The first survey was of those who were not participating in the Scheme. One of the main reasons for undertaking a separate survey of those not participating was to explore if there were any vulnerable people who may be having difficulty using the Scheme. All those applicants who have stated their housing reference number on the survey form (68 applicants) were contacted and given every assistance in participating in the Scheme. Furthermore, a letter was sent to all those who had not participated to date, offering assistance and explaining again about the Scheme. Two events were arranged for external agencies that support vulnerable people.

10. A second survey of those who have participated in the scheme was also undertaken, with 97.9% stating that the Scheme User Guide was easy to follow, and 96.1% saying that they had enough information about the HomeOption Scheme. Generally, the survey results showed at that time that those participating in the HomeOption scheme found it easy to use and understood how it works.

11. A further survey will be undertaken later this year.

### **Support Currently Provided to Vulnerable Applicants**

12. The Allocations Team within the Housing Options Section offers a great deal of support to vulnerable applicants including:

- Post-survey actions in 2008, as set out in Paragraph 9 of the report.
- A list of all vulnerable applicants is maintained. The list is compiled by referrals made by Scheme Managers, other Housing Directorate staff and external agencies.
- All Scheme Managers are given lists of older tenants they visit who are on the Housing Register. When visiting these residents, they are ensuring the residents fully understand how to participate in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
- When any new applicant joins the Housing Register, they are given an Information Pack which gives detail of the scheme and how assistance can be obtained.
- Articles are included in the tenants' magazine, "Housing News" on how the scheme operates, explaining that applicants can seek assistance from staff.
- Statistics show that 65 applicants (2.05%) received assistance from staff in the 2009 calendar year.
- A letter is sent to all those who are not participating in the scheme for more than 6 months asking them if they wish to remain on the Housing Register, but more importantly, asking if they require any assistance in participating in the Scheme.
- Applicants are given the opportunity to receive the HomeOption Free-sheet through the post by subscription.
- In the past year, computer access to the Scheme has been provided in receptions at the Area Housing Office (South) at the Broadway, Loughton and at the Limes Farm Office in Chigwell. Arrangements are being made to provide the service at the Civic Offices, Epping.
- Staff are able to refer applicants to Supporting People's support provider "In Touch Support" for assistance with a range of housing-related support matters, including participating in the HomeOption scheme.
- All Housing Options staff are trained in providing support to vulnerable applicants.

13. In addition to the above, HEHOC is considering the option of authorities printing off its own Free-sheets locally which could result in a substantial reduction in costs. A proportion of the savings could be used to send free-sheets through the post to all those applicants who have been identified as being vulnerable.

### **Future Development of the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme**

14. Following the successful implementation, HEHOC has been discussing the way forward on developing the scheme. A number of improvements have been identified which are currently being considered, including:

- Adding a consultation module to the HomeOption Website in order to seek the views of users on the Scheme
- Producing a single housing application form for all HEHOC member authorities in order to streamline the application process
- Offering the service to Private Sector Landlords which would bring additional income and increase the number of housing options available to applicants
- Providing an on-line housing application registration
- Updating the Consortium's Equality Impact Assessment in accordance with the new "toolkit"
- Adding the HomeSwapper national mutual exchange scheme with which the Council participates to the HomeOption website
- Charging partner Registered Social Landlords for including their properties on the Scheme

15. It is hoped that the above developments will be put in place in the near future depending on the amount of officer time available and the commitment of all the HEHOC members.

16. The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to review progress made on the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme since its implementation on 19 November 2007.

**Reason for decision:**

To submit a report on progress with the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings in accordance with the request of the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to submit a report on progress with the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will consider the report at its meeting in April 2010.

**Resource implications:**

Budget provision: N/A

Personnel: N/A

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1996

Background papers: None

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

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A



## APPENDIX ONE

### HomeOption – Information Bulletin

( 16 January 2009 – 22 January 2010 HomeOption Free-sheet Editions 40 – 52)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Number of properties let (including RSL)                     | 477  |
| Number of advertisements                                     | 607  |
| Advertisements by property type                              | Flat 394<br>House 115<br>Maisonette 50<br>Bungalow 48                            |
| Number of expressions of interest during the period          | 42,374   |
| Number of applicants on the Housing Register (February 2010) | 4,853  |
| Number of applicants not participating in the scheme         | 1,691 (35%)  |
| Method of expressing an interest                             | Internet 89.83%<br>Coupon 2.05%<br>Phone 5.52%<br>Text 0.55%<br>Staff Help 2.05% |

| <b>Housing Register Activity – January 2009 – January 2010</b> |                                |                                  |                                      |   |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Band</b>  | <b>Expressions of Interest</b> | <b>Number of Lets (Excl RSL)</b> | <b>Number of Refusals (Excl RSL)</b> | <b>Number of Applicants At January 2010</b> |
| One  | 964                            | 102                              | 29                                   | 118   |
| Two  | 8                              | 1                                | Nil                                  | 1   |
| Three  | 13,465                         | 155                              | 65                                   | 591   |
| Four   | 13,203                         | 38                               | 37                                   | 1,633                                       |
| Five   | 8,327                          | 38                               | 39                                   | 1,128                                       |
| Six  | 6,407                          | 22                               | 14                                   | 1,382                                       |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>42,374</b>                  | <b>356</b>                       | <b>184</b>                           | <b>4,853</b>                                |

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 25 March 2010**

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

**Subject: Options for Cross-boundary Allocations**

**Officer contact for further information:  
Roger Wilson, Assistant Director of Housing  
(01992 56 4419)**



**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the options for cross-boundary allocations within the areas of the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium in accordance with the expectations of the Communities & Local Government (CLG).**

### **Report:**

1. The Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium (HEHOC) was set up in 2005, to develop a joint Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL). The six local authority partners within the Consortium are listed below and comprise all of the local authorities in the eastern part of the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region (i.e. on the Herts and Essex border), with the exception of Harlow District Council, which independently operates its own CBL Scheme:

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

2. One of the objectives of the Regional Housing Strategy for the East of England is to provide mixed communities and widen choice. The Sub-Regional Housing Strategy has an objective of achieving social inclusion, and to ensure access and choice to housing and the inclusion of collaborative working on CBL within the Sub-Regional Strategy's Action Plan.

3. Since all authorities have implemented CBL, it is an expectation of the Communities and Local Government (CLG), through their Special Advisor in this area, to move towards cross-boundary allocations. One of the key objectives of HEHOC, which was included in the Consortium's successful bid for Government grant, is to work collaboratively amongst local authority and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners to increase opportunities for cross-border mobility and nomination arrangements and to explore the opportunities to extend the scheme to private sector landlords.

4. Although customers from any of the partner local authority areas are able in law to register with any other partner local authority, and express an interest for vacancies in that area, there is currently no formal provision for any cross-boundary working.

5. The Government's recently published statutory guidance "Fair and Flexible" on social housing allocations for local authorities in England also refers to cross-boundary working in its document. Some examples of references to this are as follows:

*Greater Mobility – "could develop arrangements with other authorities or RSLs to make a proportion of their lettings available for cross-boundary nominations" (Page 14 paragraph 29).*

*Local Lettings Policies – "Attracting essential workers into the district by giving them priority for a small number of properties" (Page 29 paragraph 86).*

*Local Lettings Policies – "Where a number of local authorities have agreed a common allocations policy or common prioritisation criteria as part of a sub-regional CBL scheme, local lettings policies can be useful as a means of incorporating local priorities" (Page 29 paragraph 88).*

6. The agency Locata Housing Services (LHS) is the largest Choice Based Lettings agency in the UK, which administers the HEHOC HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme. LHS advises that a number of the Consortia they administer operate some form of cross-boundary working. The allocations policies used are based around one of the following four Models:

#### **Model One – Retention of Own Allocations Scheme**

7. This is the Model currently used by HEHOC, with each authority retaining their own Allocations Schemes with no cross-boundary working. Under Choice Based Lettings, all applicants are able to view all available properties across all six local authority areas either in the free-sheet or on the Website. As housing applicants can join any housing register throughout the country, they are able to express an interest in any property they are eligible for that is advertised in the free-sheet, as long as they are registered with the authority that has the vacancy. However, as applicants only have priority in terms of local connection in their own area, they obviously have much lower priority for properties advertised by their neighbouring authorities, which limits mobility.

#### **Model Two – Retention of Own Allocations Scheme with an Over-arching Sub-regional Policy**

8. Under this Model, although each authority would retain its own Allocations Scheme locally, prior to any expressions of interest being registered, around 5 - 10% of vacant properties selected randomly, would be extracted by LHS from each HEHOC member authority for cross-boundary "bidding". These vacancies, during each two-weekly cycle, would be allocated under a separate, over-arching, sub regional allocations policy. Priorities under the over-arching policy would need to be agreed, but should not include applicants being placed in the lowest bands for not having local connection. Banding priority would be predominantly based upon need, with those applicants who do not have local connection having less priority within each band. If all Consortium members' policies were similar, with for example all members having a banding scheme, this would result in a reduced free-sheet as less information on individual schemes would need to be published, which would reduce costs. As explained in paragraph 2, within the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy there is an objective of achieving social inclusion, and to ensure access and choice to housing and the inclusion of collaborative working on CBL within the Sub-Regional Strategy's Action Plan. This Model would meet with this objective.

### **Model Three – retention of Own Allocations Scheme allowing Cross-border allocations for Mobility reasons**

9. This model is a variation of Model Two, but without the need for an over-arching policy. A random 5-10% of all vacancies would be made available to applicants in other local authority areas within the Consortium's area, based on mobility need. The "mobility need" criteria would need to be agreed but could include, needing to move to be closer to older or younger relatives, work, or other socio-economic reasons. This would meet the Government's proposals under its statutory guidance set out in Paragraph 5. Properties would then be allocated to the applicant who had an assessed need to move to the local authority area, who had been registered on their own Housing Register the longest, irrespective of banding (or, indeed relative housing need).

### **Model Four – Voluntary Sub-regional Policy for Difficult to Let Properties**

10. With this Model, all HEHOC members would pool all difficult to let properties and advertise them as being available to all applicants across the partner authorities, possibly subject to applicants being registered with the authority where the vacancy exists. Although it could be argued that this would demonstrate partnership working, in reality it would not increase the chances of an applicant outside of an authority's area as they would be already placed in a lower band (or have less points) due not having local connection. It would therefore be recommended that, if this Model was agreed, priority should be based upon an over-arching banding policy across the Consortium for difficult to let properties, based upon the applicant's need (and time on the list) only, with local connection disregarded.

### **Model Five – Common Assessment Policy**

11. Under a common assessment policy, all HEHOC members would allocate accommodation across all areas under one Allocations Scheme. In order to make this work, all partners would need to work to either a banding or points based system (EFDC works on a banding system, some other local authorities in the Consortium work on a points system). If a banding system was agreed, then local connection could give greater priority within each band rather than applicants being placed in the lowest band for this reason, which currently happens. As explained in Paragraph 2, the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy has an objective of achieving social inclusion, and to ensure access and choice to housing and the inclusion of collaborative working on CBL within the Sub-Regional Strategy's Action Plan. This Model would meet with this objective.

12. One of the clauses in the Consortium's Memorandum of Understanding is that it is the intention of HEHOC that individual housing allocations schemes shall remain the sole responsibility of the individual authorities in which they operate and that responsibility for amendments remain the responsibility of the individual member authorities. Therefore, although there is an expectation of Government to have some form of cross-boundary working, no commitment has been made between the HEHOC partner authorities.

13. Officers in each local authority of HEHOC are reporting on this matter to their Members, to gauge interest and preference across the sub-region. Therefore, the Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider this Council's response to HEHOC on the options for cross-boundary working on the allocation of accommodation. The views of other HEHOC members who have already considered the issue will be reported verbally.

**Reason for decision:**

To consider the Council's response to HEHOC Choice Based Lettings Consortium on the options for operating cross-boundary working on the allocation of accommodation.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to consider the options on cross-boundary working on the allocation of accommodation, or to consider other options.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will be informed of the matter at their meeting in April 2010.

**Resource implications:**

Budget provision: N/A

Personnel: N/A

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1996

Background papers: HEHOC Bid for Government Grant & Government's Statutory Guidance "Fair and Flexible" on Framing Allocations Schemes

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

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of Meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

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

**Subject: Consultation on the Review of the Scope of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel**

**Officer contact for further information:**

**Alan Hall – Director of Housing (01992 56 4004)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers the attached report and recommendations to the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel, and considers whether or not it wishes to pass on any comments on the report to the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel.**

### **Report:**

1. At its last meeting, on the invitation of the Chairman of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered whether or not it wished to be consulted on the report and recommendations of the Director of Housing to the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel, reviewing the scope of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel. The Housing Scrutiny Panel agreed that it would like to be consulted.

2. Accordingly, a copy of the Director of Housing's report is attached, and the Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider whether or not it wishes to pass any comments on the report to the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel. Any comments will be reported orally to the Scrutiny Panel, which is due to meet during the week following the Housing Scrutiny Panel meeting.

3. Members will note that all the members and substitute members of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel, and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, have been consulted on an earlier draft of the report. Their views are set out in the report, and the final version of the report has been amended in a number of ways to take account of the comments received.

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# **Report to the Constitution and Members Services Scrutiny Panel**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference:**

**Date of meeting: 29th March 2010**

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

**Subject: Review of the Scope of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel**

**Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall, Director of Housing (01992 564004)**

**Committee Secretary:**

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## **Recommendations:**

**That the following recommendations be made to the Council, after consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;**

- (1) That, with effect from the 2010/11 Municipal Year, the Terms of Reference for the Housing Appeals and Review Panel be amended to only allow appeals and reviews in relation to the following issues:**
  - (a) All homelessness reviews, with the exception of the following types of reviews that are already only undertaken by officers;**
    - (i) Whether or not single applicants are “homeless” or have a “priority need”;**
    - (ii) Whether or not an allocation of either temporary or permanent accommodation is suitable for the applicant and his/her family; and**
    - (iii) Whether or not a homeless applicant should be referred to another local authority, due to their local connection with that local authority;**
  - (b) Housing succession cases, where the successor is under-occupying Council accommodation, and has been required to transfer to smaller accommodation;**
  - (c) Exclusion of housing applicants from the Housing Register;**
  - (d) Non-provision of discretionary home improvement grants;**
  - (e) Refusal of requests for disabled adaptations to Council properties requested by the tenant;**
  - (f) Refusal to sell Council owned-land under 50 square metres to occupiers for garden use;**
  - (g) Refusal of requests from housing applicants for “priority moves” (i.e. those very urgent and rare cases, dealt with outside of the usual Allocations Scheme); and**
  - (h) Disagreements with tenants and former tenants on the level or liability for current or former rent arrears;**

- (2) That all other appeals and reviews are determined by the relevant Assistant Director of Housing (or, in the case of some homelessness reviews listed at (1)(a)(i)-(iii), the Housing Options Manager), provided that the reviewing officer has had no material previous involvement with the case;
- (3) That appeals and reviews eligible for determination by the Housing Appeals and Review Panel continue to be generally considered first by the relevant Assistant Director of Housing except (in accordance with current policy) all homelessness reviews that do not involve the types of homelessness reviews listed at (1)(a)(i)-(iii), with such cases be considered only by the Housing Appeals and Review Panel; and
- (4) That revised Terms of Reference for the Housing Appeals and Review Panel, incorporating the changes in (1) above, be submitted to the Council for approval and that appropriate changes be made to the Council's Constitution and Scheme of Officer Delegation accordingly.

## Introduction

1. Following the formal business of a meeting of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel (HARP) on 20 August 2009, members of the Panel had an informal discussion with the Director of Housing and the Assistant Director (Democratic Services) about whether the scope of the housing appeals and reviews undertaken by the Panel, in accordance with its Terms of Reference, were too wide. Concern was expressed about the cost and the member and officer time involved with housing appeals (both before and at meetings) about some relatively minor matters.
2. The point was made that no other Directorate has any appeals of officer decisions held in the same way as officers of the Housing Directorate. It was therefore agreed that the Director of Housing would produce a report on this issue.
3. The members and substitute members of the HARP, and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, were consulted on a draft version of this report; their views are set out later in the report and at Appendix 5, and a number of changes have been made to the final version of this report and recommendations as a result.

## History of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel (HARP)

4. The HARP was established in 1991, following the demise of the former Housing Management Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee was a member-level meeting that dealt with routine issues relating to housing management, including reviews of certain housing cases.
5. When a decision was made to disband the Sub-Committee, both officers and members were anxious to replace it with a body that not only allowed reviews being made of key decisions affecting housing clients, but also allowed clients to attend the meeting, explain their case to members, question officers and answer questions. This resulted in a quasi-judicial Housing Appeals Panel being established. At the time, such an approach was considered innovative, which continues to be the case. No similar arrangements by other councils are known to officers.
6. Following one of the Council's homelessness cases being heard in the County Court on a point of law, and adverse comments being made by the Judge that the Council should **review** homelessness cases and not hear **appeals**, the name of the Panel was changed to the Housing Appeals and Review Panel during the mid-2000s.
7. Between 1991 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009:
  - The HARP considered 249 cases, an average of around 13 each year;

- The lowest and highest number of cases were in 1994/5/6 (4 cases) and 2004/5 (27 cases) respectively; and
  - Around 30% of all appeals/reviews were allowed; around 70% of all appeals/reviews were dismissed.
8. The HARP's Terms of Reference are set out at Appendix 1.
9. Appendix 2 provides a breakdown of:
- The number of appeals/reviews received each year; and
  - The number of appeals/reviews allowed and dismissed by category.

### **Policy on Housing Appeals and Reviews**

10. Generally, the policy since 1991 has been that **any** client of the Housing Directorate (and previously Housing Services) can appeal against (or request a review of) **any** decision made by an officer from the Housing Directorate on **any** housing matter.

11. Moreover, with the exception of those cases listed below, such clients first have the right of appeal to, or review by, an Assistant Director of Housing. If the decision of the Assistant Director is adverse, clients then have a further right of appeal/review to the HARP.

12. The only exceptions are as follows:

- (a) To ensure that statutory timescales for homelessness reviews are met, except for those cases listed at (b) below, reviews of homelessness decisions are **not** first considered by an Assistant Director;
- (b) Because of the potential number of cases, and the need to undertake some reviews very quickly, the following statutory homelessness reviews are only undertaken by an Assistant Director, and not by the HARP:
  - Whether or not single applicants are “homeless” or have a “priority need”
  - Whether or not an allocation of either temporary or permanent accommodation is suitable for the applicant and his/her family
  - Whether or not a homeless applicant should be referred to another local authority, due to their local connection with that local authority

13. Homeless applicants also have a further right of appeal to the County Court on a point of law.

14. If the applicant/appellant feels that the Council has mal-administered, they also have the right to refer their case to the Local Government Ombudsman.

15. It should be noted that the appeals and review process is different from the complaints process. In simple terms, the difference is that:

- (a) Appeals/reviews relate to a person being unhappy about a housing decision that has been made, that can be changed. If they appeal, the HARP reconsiders the decision, to see whether it should be changed;
- (b) Complaints generally relate to a person being unhappy about the way that the Council has provided a service, or if the Council has failed to take action which it has been asked to do when it is has responsibility.

## Types of Cases Heard by the HARP

16. Appendix 2 sets out the general categories of appeal/review, and the outcome by category. Appendix 3 lists more details about the appeals/reviews considered by the HARP over the past 2 years.

## The Case for Restricting the Types of Appeal Considered by the HARP

17. Senior housing officers continue to be passionate and supportive about the merits of the HARP and the ability of clients to have their case heard in person by a panel of councillors and to ask questions of the case officer. They strongly support the principle that, other than for those types of homelessness cases listed in Recommendation (1)(a)(i)-(iii) above, all homelessness reviews should be considered by the HARP and not senior officers (the latter of which is the case in most local authorities), since it provides greater independence and transparency to the review process.

18. Officers also feel that all housing clients should have the right of appeal to an Assistant Director, to reconsider decisions made by their managers or their staff.

19. However, it is also felt that there have been a number of cases over the years that have either been too minor to warrant lengthy consideration by a panel of five members, or where the Panel has had little discretion, since the policy is quite clear. An example of the former would be the case of a tenant who felt that she should not pay £83.72 rent arrears. An example of the latter would be an applicant who is unhappy about their housing banding under the Housing Allocations Scheme, which is quite clear and does not allow any discretion on the banding.

20. It should be noted that each meeting of the HARP involves the following time and resources:

- The Director of Housing acknowledges and logs each HARP application, and undertakes the initial processing and referral to the Assistant Director (Democratic Services).
- The Assistant Director (Democratic Services) liaises with the applicant, and sometimes members, to arrange the meeting
- The case officer researches and writes a carefully-considered report, and identifies required appendices – This can take between a half and one full day.
- Members of the Panel, and the Director of Housing, have to thoroughly read and understand the reports and appendices, which can take up to 2 hours.
- Sometimes, members undertake site visits
- Panel meetings are attended by the following, and last an average of 1.5 hours for each appeal (usually 3 hours for each session in total):
  - Up to 5 councillors
  - At least 3 officers, more if there are additional witnesses
- The Assistant Director (Democratic Services) has to draft the detailed minutes of the HARP meeting, and the HARP's decision letter
- The Chairman of the HARP and the Director of Housing have to check the draft minutes and provide any comments or amendments.

21. Therefore, **each** appeal can involve around 40 “man-hours”, at a time when one of the Council's key drivers is efficiency and value for money.

22. It should also be noted that only officers of the Housing Directorate have their decisions reviewed in such detail by a panel of members (with the exception of Complaints and Staff Appeals Panels, both of which are relatively rare, and only amount to around one, possibly two, meetings each year). It could be argued that the concept of the HARP should be extended to decisions made by staff in **all** directorates, and heard by a Council Appeals Panel. However, the staff and member resources required would make such a proposition unviable.

### **Suggested Approach for the Future**

23. In view of the above, it is suggested that, in future, the HARP should only consider housing appeals and homelessness reviews for specific types of cases, that it is felt merit the officer and member resources involved (based on the experience of past cases), and where the outcome of a decision has a significant effect on the applicant/appellant.

24. It is therefore suggested that only cases related to those types listed in the Recommendations of this report should be considered by the HARP from the 2010/11 Municipal Year.

25. It should be noted that the first draft of this report did not include those cases listed at Recommendations 1(g) and 1(h) of this final version. However, following consultation with HARP members and substitute members on the draft report, these types of cases have now been added to the recommended list.

26. It should also be noted that, since the list within the Recommendations is a definitive list of cases, the following types of cases (that have occurred over the recent years) would no longer be heard by the HARP (Note – this is not a definitive list):

- The banding of housing applicants in accordance with the Housing Allocations Scheme
- Allocation of Council garages
- Applications for vehicular crossovers.
- Housing repairs and maintenance issues
- Write-off of former rent arrears
- General housing management issues
- Covenants and leases of former Council or leasehold properties

27. Based on the 231 cases heard by the HARP since its inception, and the 29 cases heard by the HARP in the past 2 years, the approach suggested above should reduce the workload of officers and members by an estimated 45%, resulting in the average number of cases heard by the HARP each year being reduced from around 13 cases to around 7 cases, with an associated estimated reduction of 240 “man hours”.

28. It is also suggested, however, that **all** other appeals and reviews are considered by the relevant Assistant Director of Housing, provided that the officer has had no material previous involvement with the case. A minor exception to this proposal is to continue with the current policy of allowing the Housing Options Manager to consider some of the homelessness reviews listed at Recommendation (1) (a) (i) - (iii). This is simply to share the workload of these reviews, which can be time consuming. It should be noted that allowing housing clients to appeal to an Assistant Director of Housing on any housing issue, will continue to provide housing clients with an important right, that is not provided by any other directorate within the Council, or known to be provided by any other Council.

### **Views of the Housing Appeals and Review Panel**

29. Since the suggestion for this report originated from the members of the HARP, both the main and substitute members of the HARP were consulted on a draft version of this report. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix 4. Ten members were consulted in total, and 5 responses (50%) were received. Of the 5 members that responded:

- 2 members (40%) **fully supported** the proposals within the draft report
- 3 members (60%) **generally supported** the proposals **except for** reasons given on their response form
- No members **did not support** the proposals

30. All members' individual comments are set out in the table at Appendix 5. The table also provides the comments of the Director of Housing in response. As can be seen, nearly all of the comments have been accepted and have resulted in changes to this final version of the report and recommendations. It is felt that, having made these changes, it is reasonable to assume that all members of the HARP that responded to the consultation would be supportive of the revised proposals.

### **Views of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation**

31. Since the constitution and approach of the HARP has an effect on tenants and leaseholders, the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation was also consulted on the draft report at its meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2010. The Federation represents all of the recognised tenants associations within the Epping Forest District, as well as the Leaseholders Association, the Sheltered Housing Forum and the Rural Tenants Forum.

32. The Federation supported the proposals within this report, with one exception. The first draft of this report recommended that, to avoid duplication by officers and members, appeals that continue to be eligible for consideration by the Housing Appeals and Review Panel should no longer be considered in the first instance by the Assistant Director of Housing. However, the Federation felt that the continuation of the current approach, whereby all appeals are considered in the first instance by the relevant Director of Housing (except homelessness reviews), would have the benefit of filtering, and therefore reducing, the number of cases considered by the HARP, which is one of the objectives of this exercise. On reflection, officers agree with this point of view, and the final version of this report and recommendations have been amended accordingly.

### **Views of the Housing Scrutiny Panel**

33. The Chairman of the HARP suggested that the members of the Housing Scrutiny Panel may also welcome the opportunity to be consulted on the proposals. At its meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2010, the Housing Scrutiny Panel agreed that it would like to be consulted.

34. Therefore, arrangements have been made for this final version of the report to be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Panel at its meeting to be held on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010. The views of the Housing Scrutiny Panel will be reported orally at the meeting of the Constitution and Members Services Scrutiny Panel.

### **Adoption of the Proposals**

35. If the Constitution and Members Services Scrutiny Panel is minded to agree the proposals within this report, or any revised proposals, it would be appropriate for the Scrutiny Panel to report up to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2010. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee can then make its recommendations to the Council Meeting on the 20 April 2010, based on the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can report to the Council orally any changes to the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations that are made by his Committee.

**HOUSING APPEALS AND REVIEW PANEL – TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- (1) The terms of reference of the Housing Appeals Panel shall be to hear appeals against and reviews of the decisions of the Head of Housing Services ("the Head of Service") acting under delegated authority, on housing matters.
- (2) The Panel shall comprise five Councillors, including a Chairman and Vice-Chairman, appointed at the Annual Council meeting. Each political group represented on the Panel shall be required to nominate the equivalent number of substitutes to cover for any member of the Panel who is unavailable.
- (3) A minimum of three members shall constitute a quorum for meetings of the Panel. Only members of the Panel present throughout the proceedings shall participate in the decision making process. Members arriving after the commencement of a Panel meeting will be required to leave immediately without taking part in the proceedings.
- (4) In the absence of both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman at any meeting of the Panel, a Chairman shall be appointed from the members of the Panel present (but not any substitute members) for that meeting only.
- (5) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 3 it shall be competent for the Panel to hear and adjudicate on applications if less than three members are present, provided that both the applicant and the Officer or representative agree.
- (6) In relation to appeals or reviews at which the applicant's case is presented in person or by a representative, the hearing shall be conducted in the following order:
  - (a) Chairman's introductory remarks;
  - (b) Presentation of the case for the applicant;
  - (c) Questioning by Officer (or representative);
  - (d) Questioning by members of the Panel;
  - (e) Presentation of the Officer's case;
  - (f) Questioning by the applicant (or representative);
  - (g) Questioning by members of the Panel;
  - (h) Summing up by Officer;
  - (i) Summing up by the applicant;
  - (j) Panel considers its findings in the absence of the applicant and the Officer;
  - (k) The decision of the Panel will be conveyed to the applicant and Officer in writing.
  - (l) The Panel shall have discretion to reverse the order in which the cases of the applicant and the Council are presented, provided that both parties agree.
- (7) Meetings of the Panel shall be open only to those members appointed save that a Councillor or nominated person shall be permitted to attend in order to assist with the presentation of the applicant's case.
- (8) The Panel shall make recommendations to the Housing Portfolio Holder/Cabinet on any matters of policy arising from specific cases.

**HOUSING APPEALS PANEL  
RECORD OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS  
05-Mar-10**

| <b>Breakdown of Appeals by Type and Outcome</b>            |                |                  |                   |
|--|----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Type of Appeal</b>                                      | <b>Allowed</b> | <b>Dismissed</b> | <b>To be Held</b> |
| Vehicular Crossovers                                       | 10             | 28               | 0                 |
| Successions  | 9              | 7                | 0                 |
| Admissions to Waiting Lists                                | 1              | 8                | 0                 |
| Allocations of Council Garages                             | 0              | 1                | 0                 |
| Improvement Grants   | 1              | 5                | 0                 |
| Disabled Adaptations / Welfare Heating                     | 2              | 6                | 0                 |
| Allocation of Accommodation / Transfers / Priority Housing | 5              | 21               | 0                 |
| Maintenance Issues   | 4              | 8                | 0                 |
| Permission for Hardstandings                               | 1              | 0                | 0                 |
| Sales of Amenity Areas                                     | 2              | 3                | 0                 |
| Penalties for Refusing Reasonable Tenancy Offers           | 1              | 6                | 0                 |
| Write-off of Former Rent Arrears                           | 1              | 1                | 0                 |
| Homelessness   | 24             | 61               | 0                 |
| Housing Management - General                               | 2              | 4                | 0                 |
| Covenants & Leases - Former Council & Leasehold Properties | 2              | 3                | 0                 |
| Other  | 2              | 2                | 0                 |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>67</b>      | <b>164</b>       | <b>0</b>          |
| Withdrawn  |                | 18               |                   |

| <b>Outstanding Appeals:</b> | <b>No. of Appeals Heard/Scheduled</b> |            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|
|                             | <b>Year</b>                           | <b>No</b>  |
|                             | 1991/2                                | 6          |
|                             | 1992/3                                | 5          |
|                             | 1993/4                                | 11         |
|                             | 1994/5                                | 4          |
|                             | 1995/6                                | 4          |
|                             | 1996/7                                | 10         |
|                             | 1997/8                                | 13         |
|                             | 1998/9                                | 19         |
|                             | 1999/00                               | 15         |
|                             | 2000/1                                | 15         |
|                             | 2001/2                                | 16         |
|                             | 2002/3                                | 25         |
|                             | 2003/4                                | 17         |
|                             | 2004/5                                | 27         |
|                             | 2005/6                                | 18         |
|                             | 2006/7                                | 9          |
|                             | 2007/8                                | 16         |
|                             | 2008/9                                | 11         |
|                             | 2009/10                               | 8          |
|                             |                                       |            |
|                             | <b>Total</b>                          | <b>249</b> |



**Appeals and Reviews Considered by the Housing Appeals and Review Panel  
Over the Last Two-Year Period**

| Type of Decision Appealed  | No. of Appeals<br>in Last 2 Years | Appeal Considered<br>Under New Proposals? |                 |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------|
|  |                                   | Yes                                       | No              |
| The applicant was intentionally homeless.  | 6                                 | Yes                                       |                 |
| The Council's homelessness duty has been discharged, following intentional homelessness from temporary accommodation provided by the Council | 4                                 | Yes                                       |                 |
| Refusal of a request for a disabled adaptation   | 2                                 | Yes                                       |                 |
| Refusal of a request to purchase a small amount of Council land  | 1                                 | Yes                                       |                 |
| A successor tenant must move to smaller accommodation, following the death of the previous tenant, due to under-occupation                   | 1                                 | Yes                                       |                 |
| The applicant was not homeless (since he still held a housing association tenancy)   | 1                                 | Yes                                       |                 |
| Tenant was responsible for rent arrears of £83.72.   | 1                                 | Yes                                       |                 |
| Permission should not be given for a vehicular crossover,  | 5                                 |   | No              |
| The applicant should not be promoted to a higher Allocations Band.   | 3                                 |   | No              |
| Removal of a disabled adaptation following a reletting.  | 1                                 |   | No              |
| Refusal of permission for an extension to a leasehold flat.  | 1                                 |   | No              |
| Refusal of a tenant's request to transfer to her late father's home following his death (the tenant was not a successor tenant)              | 1                                 |   | No              |
| A charge was made for a repair that was the tenant's responsibility.   | 1                                 |   | No              |
| Refusal of a request for the Council to install sound proofing in a Council property   | 1                                 |   | No              |
| <b>Totals</b>  | <b>29</b>                         | <b>16 (55%)</b>                           | <b>13 (45%)</b> |

**Consultation of Members and Substitute Members of the Housing Appeals  
and Review Panel on Proposed Changes to the Coverage of  
Housing Appeals in the Future**

Name:

Cllr

**Having read the draft report of the Director of Housing :**

*(Please delete/complete ONE of the following – Continue on another sheet if necessary):*

**1) I Fully support the proposals.**

**2) I generally support the proposals, EXCEPT the following:**

**3) I do NOT support the following, because :**

**Any other comments:**

Signed:

Return to:

Alan Hall  
Director of Housing  
[ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

Date

**BY FRIDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2010**

Responses from Housing Appeals and Review Panel (HARP) Members and Substitute Members on the DRAFT Report on the Future Scope of Appeals

| <b>Fully Support the Proposals</b>                  |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Name  | Councillor's Comment  | Comments of the Director of Housing   |
| Cllr Mrs Janet Whitehouse                           |   | None  |
| Cllr John Wyatt                                     |   |   |
| <b>Generally Support the Proposals – Except....</b> |   |   |
| Cllr Mrs Caroline Pond<br>(Chairman)                | <p><b>Except...</b></p> <p>(1) All succession cases should be eligible to come to the HARP</p> <p>(2) All priority banding cases should also come to the HARP</p> | <p>(1) Both the draft report and the final report have always recommended that housing succession cases (where the successor is under-occupying Council accommodation and has been required to transfer to smaller accommodation) should be considered by the HARP.</p> <p>(2) The draft report did not propose that appeals involving allocation bandings should be considered by the HARP. However, as a result of this comment received on consultation with HARP members, the final report now recommends that appeals on priority moves (i.e. those very urgent and rare cases, dealt with outside of the usual Allocations Scheme, where some judgement has to be exercised by officers) should be considered by the HARP.</p> <p>However, it is not recommended that any other appeals on allocation bandings are considered by the HARP, since eligibility for each of the bands (which is set by members) is very clearly set out within the Allocations Scheme and are matters of fact.</p> |

|                                |  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
|                                |  | <p>The only other area where a judgement is made, is by the Council's Medical Advisor – to determine the level of priority that should be given for medical reasons. It is felt that HARP members will not be in a position to judge such information since, unlike the Medical Adviser, they will not be able to compare the relative merits with all other cases.</p>  |
| <p>Cllr Mrs Jill Sutcliffe</p> | <p><b>Except...</b></p> <p>Where the tenant contests liability for rent arrears and there is the slightest doubt – e.g. if the Council did not alert them early enough, if the liability reaches £50 say, or if a Council employee may have given poor or wrong advice/information.</p> <p>As a rule of thumb, it should be possible for arrears to be paid off in 1 year comfortably, and the age of the appellant should be taken into account. If not, possibly the Panel needs to assess the case.</p> | <p>The draft report did not propose that appeals involving disagreement on the level or liability for current or former rent arrears should be considered by the HARP. However, as a result of this comment received on consultation with HARP members, the final report now recommends that such disputes on the level or liability for current or former rent arrears should be considered by the HARP.</p>  |
| <p>Cllr Mrs Ricki Gadsby</p>   | <p><b>Except...</b></p> <p>Write off of former tenant arrears.</p>   | <p>The Council has a clear policy on how former tenant rent arrears can be written off. The Director of Housing has delegated authority to write-off former tenant arrears up to £2,500. Former tenant arrears above this amount can only be written-off by the Housing Portfolio Holder. A similar policy applies to the Director of Finance and ICT for the write-off of former Council Tax arrears. In most cases there is no dispute over whether or not the former tenant arrears are payable.</p> <p>However, as explained above in relation to Cllr Mrs Sutcliffe's comments, it is now proposed that appeals involving disagreement on the level or liability for either current <u>or former</u> rent arrears should be considered by the HARP.</p> |

## Other Comments

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| <p>Cllr Mrs Caroline Pond<br/>(Chairman)</p> | <p>When the Panel made comments about the scope of the HARP, it had in mind the arrears case when ten people were tied up for an afternoon discussing an amount owed of £83. The officers should have applied de minimis to a case such as this.</p>   | <p>Under the current HARP arrangements, officers have no discretion on which cases the HARP should and should not consider – all appeals must be considered by the HARP (with the small exception of specific types of cases explained in the main report). One of the reasons for bringing forward this report on the scope of the HARP, is to avoid the HARP having to consider relatively minor matters.</p> <p>It should be noted that this comment appears to conflict with the comments of two members above in relation to disagreement over the level or liability for rent arrears.</p>  |
| <p>Cllr Mrs Jill Sutcliffe</p>               | <p>Should there be a caveat that if the officer who deals with appeals without the Panel has any doubts at all about a case, he/she should refer it to the Panel, regardless of what category it falls under ?</p> <p>This would provide a safeguard against genuine mistakes or maladministration, and give an opportunity to change the way something is done.</p> | <p>In a front line service such as Housing, officers deal with many individual and often difficult cases and have to exercise judgments on a daily basis, having regard to the Council's policies. Decisions are made at various levels, with the most difficult or contentious being taken by Asst Directors and the Director. If officers are unsure of a particular course of action in an individual case, or if they do not have delegated authority, the matter is referred to the Housing Portfolio Holder for a formal decision.</p> <p>If mistakes are made, or there has potentially been maladministration, such cases are not dealt with through the appeals procedure, but through the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.</p> |
| <p>Cllr John Wyatt</p>                       | <p>I'm still not happy about appellants failing to arrive at hearings. They should sign a statement that they will be attending at the specified time and that if they don't it will be heard in their absence. Genuine emergencies are very rare.</p>   | <p>Following concerns previously raised by members of the HARP, the standard letter sent by the Assistant Director (Democratic Services) to appellants now states:</p> <p><i>" Please advise me by return if it is your intention to attend the meeting...Please note that if you are not in attendance at these offices at (the prescribed time and date) it is possible that the matter will be decided in your absence."</i></p> <p>It is felt that the Council's intention is therefore made very clear to appellants. If, in the event, the appellant does not attend, the HARP</p>  |

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|  |  | <p>members consider whether or not the appeal should take place in the person's absence. The HARP usually takes into account whether or not the appellant has given apologies and a reason for their non-attendance, and whether he/she has previously failed to attend a hearing.</p> <p>It is not felt that any further changes to the procedure are required.</p> |
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## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

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

**Subject: Housing Strategy 2009-2012: 6-Month  
Progress Report on Key Action Plan**

**Officer contact for further information:**

**Alan Hall – Director of Housing (01992 564004)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the 6-Month Progress Report on the Key Action Plan 2009/10, contained within the Housing Strategy 2009-2012 – attached as an Appendix – be considered, with any comments passed to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing accordingly.**

### **Report:**

1. At its meeting in September 2009, the Council's Cabinet adopted the Housing Strategy 2009-2012. This followed the Housing Scrutiny Panel considering in detail and approving for consultation an earlier "Consultation Draft" Housing Strategy, and a major Consultation Exercise being undertaken with the Council's partners, key stakeholders and the public over a three-month period. The Consultation Exercise included a one-day Housing Strategy Conference, to which all the consultees were invited.
2. The Housing Strategy assesses the District's current and future housing needs - having particular regard to the 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.
3. The Strategy also includes a Key Action Plan, which sets out the proposed actions that will be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives over the 3 years of the Housing Strategy.
4. The Cabinet agreed that progress with the Key Action Plan should be monitored on a 6-monthly basis by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, in accordance with its Terms of Reference.
5. A 6-Month Progress Report is therefore attached as an Appendix, which the Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider, and to provide any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing.
6. When adopting the Housing Strategy, the Cabinet also agreed that Key Action Plans be produced and updated on an annual basis for approval by the Cabinet. An updated Key Action Plan will therefore be submitted to the Cabinet in September 2010 for approval.

**Reason for decision:**

The Housing Strategy includes a Key Action Plan, on which the Cabinet has asked the Housing Scrutiny Panel to monitor progress on a 6-monthly basis.

**Options considered and rejected:**

None.

**Consultation undertaken:**

None

**Resource implications:**

Budget provision: Nil

Personnel: Nil

Land: Nil

Community Plan/BVPP reference: Meeting Housing Need

Relevant statutory powers: N/A

Background papers: None

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: None

Key Decision reference: N/A



## Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2009-2010

### Six-Month Progress Report

| No | Category           | Action  | Responsibility                                     | Timescale  | Current Position  |
|----|--------------------|---|--|------------|---|
| 1  | Housing Market     | Disseminate the findings of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment undertaken with the 5 partner LAs through the Council's website and local media   | Principal Housing Officer (Information / Strategy) | Dec 2009   | <b>Delayed</b> – The SHMA is being produced by a research company on behalf of the 6 local authority partners. It has taken longer to complete than anticipated. However, it has now been finalised, and arrangements are in progress to publicise the results.   |
| 2  | 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  | June 2010  | <b>In Progress</b> – A consultancy, Levels, has been jointly-appointed by the local authorities in the SHMA Area to undertake the Viability Assessment. It is currently in production, and should be completed by the Target Date.  |
| 3  | Housing Market     | In collaboration with the other 13 local authorities in the London Commuter Belt Housing Sub Region, formulate a revised Sub Regional Housing Strategy and Action Plan  | Director of Housing                                | April 2010 | <b>In Progress</b> – The revised Sub-Regional Housing Strategy is being produced by the LCB's Housing Co-ordinator.   |
| 4  | Affordable Housing | Work with RSLs and developers to provide 396 affordable homes for rent and shared ownership at the following sites with detailed or outline planning permission:  | Director of Housing                                | Dec 2011   | <b>On Target</b> – 212 affordable homes have either been built in the current financial year, or are on site and due to be completed by March 2011. A further 254 affordable homes have detailed planning permission, with most expected to start on site in 2010/11. Overall, 466 homes are expected to be completed by December 2011. |

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|---|--------------------|--|---------------------------|------------|--|
|   |                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Epping Forest College (Phase 2), Loughton</li> <li>(b) St Margarets Hospital, Epping</li> <li>(c) White Lodge/The Limes, Waltham Abbey</li> <li>(d) Ongar Station, Ongar</li> <li>(e) Merlin Way, North Weald</li> <li>(f) Jennikings Nursery, Chigwell</li> <li>(g) St Johns School, Epping</li> <li>(h) Church Hill, Loughton</li> <li>(i) Acres Avenue, Ongar</li> <li>(j) Theatre Resource, Ongar</li> <li>(k) Off site provision from Warren Hill development, Loughton</li> </ul> |                           |            |  |
| 5 | 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 2010 | <b>In Progress</b> – A good response was received to the marketing campaign for the Home Ownership Grants (HOGs), and 5 have been allocated, with the tenants in the process of purchasing their first homes. The Cabinet has made budget provision for a further 6-12 HOGs in 2010/11.  |
| 6 | Affordable Housing | Investigate the feasibility and viability of the Council building social housing for rent itself, including the possible development of the following 6 Council-owned sites:   | Director of Housing       | April 2010 | <b>In Progress</b> – Detailed investigation by the Housing Scrutiny Panel's Affordable Housing Group identified that, for complex accounting reasons, it is not currently viable. However, the Cabinet has agreed the concept in principle, and agreed that the Leader should write to the Minister for Housing and Planning asking him to amend the accounting regulations to make it viable for the Council. |

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|---|--------------------|---|---|------------|--|
|   |                    | <p>(a) Chequers Rd, Loughton<br/> (b) Millfield, High Ongar<br/> (c) Thatchers Close, Loughton<br/> (d) Kirby Close, Loughton<br/> (e) Langley Meadow, Loughton<br/> (f) Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey</p>  |   |            | <p>John Healey MP has responded and advises that changes will be made.</p> <p>The required change is awaited.</p>  |
| 7 | 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 2010 | <b>Achieved</b> – The Brief has been finalised. Senior Housing, Estates and Planning Officers are now considering the most appropriate way forward to develop the Council's landholdings within the Development Brief area.  |
| 8 | Affordable Housing | In partnership with one of the Council's Preferred RSL Partners, convert the Council-owned Leader Lodge and develop the associated grounds to provide 6 affordable flats  | Director of Housing                               | Dec 2010   | <p><b>Delayed</b> – Following the withdrawal of the tenders submitted by the preferred and reserve housing associations, due to the worsening market conditions, a further tendering exercise was undertaken by the Director of Housing. A preferred housing association was selected.</p> <p>However, this housing association has recently advised that they must withdraw their offer, due to uncertainties around the implications for recently-introduced regulations on rural areas, which includes North Weald.</p> <p>The Director of Housing will be discussing the best way forward on this project.</p> |

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| 9  | Affordable Housing | 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 2010   | <p><b>In Progress</b> – Agreement has finally been reached with the charity that owns the freehold (the Council owns the leasehold), regarding the terms of the surrender of the existing lease by the Council and the provision of a new lease to the Council's selected housing association. The charity and the Council's Legal Services are currently drafting the new lease.</p> <p>The Director of Housing will then undertake a tendering exercise amongst the Council's Preferred RSL Partners to undertake the conversion scheme.</p>     |
| 10 | Homelessness       | Operate a scheme providing Rental Loans to potentially homeless people, to enable them to stay in their private rented accommodation   | Housing Options Manager | April 2010 | <p><b>Achieved</b> – The Rental Loan Scheme is operating successfully, with additional funding from the CLG and the Council.</p>   |
| 11 | Homelessness       | Continue to actively engage with the Government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme   | Housing Options Manager | April 2010 | <p><b>Ongoing</b> – To date, three mortgage rescues in the District have been facilitated by the Council – more than most other councils in Essex.</p>   |
| 12 | Homelessness       | Investigate the feasibility and viability of the Council establishing a Local Housing Company to purchase properties on the open market and let to homeless and other Housing Register applicants at market rents, in many cases funded by housing benefit | Director of Housing     | April 2010 | <p><b>Achieved</b> – The Feasibility Study has been completed. It established that, although the approach was legal, and the Council could potentially receive additional income from loans and services provided to the Local Housing Company (LHC) than from its usual investment deposits, the LHC itself would not be viable, with the anticipated income from rents being insufficient to meet its costs.</p> <p>A report is due to be submitted to the Cabinet in April 2010, recommending that the proposal is not pursued any further.</p> |

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| 13 | Black & Minority Ethnic Groups | Record the ethnicity of all Council tenants, using data obtained from the latest Tenants Census.   | Principal Housing Officer (Information / Strategy) | Dec 2009   | <b>Achieved</b> – All the data has been loaded onto the Housing Directorate's OHMS integrated housing IT system.  |
| 14 | Black & Minority Ethnic Groups | Compare the ethnicity of applicants provided with Council accommodation with the ethnicity of Housing Register applicants  | Housing Options Manager                            | July 2010  | <b>On Target</b> – The annual report comparing the ethnicity of applicants provided with Council accommodation with the ethnicity of Housing Register applicants will be submitted to the Housing Scrutiny Panel, as usual, in July 2010.   |
| 15 | 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 2010 | <b>In Progress</b> – Although some diversity information is collected, the Housing Directorate is awaiting the introduction of corporate guidance on monitoring equality and diversity.   |
| 16 | Gypsies & Travellers           | Continue to challenge the Government's proposals to require Epping Forest to provide an additional 34 authorised pitches for gypsy and travellers  | Asst. Director of Planning & Economic Development  | April 2010 | <b>In Progress</b> – Further planning permissions have been granted for gypsy and traveller sites, through the normal planning process. The Leader has written to the Department of Communities and Local Government seeking a meeting with the appropriate minister to discuss the Council's concerns. |
| 17 | Gypsies & Travellers           | Following consultation on the draft proposals, produce and submit for examination a Gypsies and Travellers Development Plan Document addressing the provision of new sites for gypsies and travellers in the District. | Asst. Director of Planning & Economic Development  | April 2010 | <b>Delayed</b> – The way forward on the production of the Development Plan Document is dependent on the outcome of the Leader's meeting with the Minister.  |

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| 18 | Gypsies & Travellers                                 | Identify the most suitable locations for the additional authorised pitches for gypsy and travellers required by the East of England Plan                  | Asst. Director of Planning & Economic Development      | April 2010 | <b>Delayed</b> – The locations will be set out in the Draft Development Plan Document, which is dependent on the outcome of the Leader’s meeting with the Minister  |
| 19 | Gypsies & Travellers                                 | Produce a Gypsies and Travellers Delivery Strategy, explaining how the required number of pitches for gypsies and travellers will be provided in practice | Asst. Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources) | April 2010 | <b>Drafted</b> – The Housing Directorate has produced a Draft Delivery Strategy. However, further work is required, but is not yet possible until the proposed site locations have been agreed.   |
| 20 | Gypsies & Travellers                                 | Work in partnership with registered social landlords to provide and manage affordable gypsies and travellers sites in the District                        | Asst. Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources) | April 2011 | <b>In Progress</b> – Discussions continued to be held with RSLs. Four of the Council’s five Preferred RSL Partners have advised that they currently have no plans to develop and manage gypsy sites. The remaining Preferred RSL Partner is in the process of developing a gypsy site in Norfolk, and does not want to commit to any further sites until the success of its Norfolk site can be evaluated.<br><br>Discussions will be held with any other interested RSLs. However, very few appear interested.   |
| 21 | 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 2010 | <b>Achieved</b> – Discussions with Essex Adult Care Service (EACS) have established that Jessopp Court would <b>not</b> be suitable for designation as an Extra-Care Scheme. However, discussions with EACS have led to EFDC being a partner of Essex CC in its bid to the Department of Health (DoH) for PFI funding for the development of a new Extra Care Scheme in the District, on EFDC land.<br><br>The outcome of the bid is expected in April 2010. It is understood that the totality of the bids to the DoH is less than the available budget. |

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|    |  |   |                                |            | This has led to the Housing Directorate undertaking a Strategic Review of its Older Peoples Accommodation, to assess how fit for purpose its sheltered housing schemes are, and to determine a strategy for the future. It is envisaged that this may result in a site being identified as suitable for a new Extra-Care Scheme. |
| 22 | Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables | Obtain TSA accreditation for the Council’s Careline Service   | Housing Manager (Older People) | April 2010 | <b>In Progress, but delayed</b> – Good progress has been made. However, it will not be possible to obtain accreditation until the extension of the Careline Control Centre has been completed and the service returns to its enlarged accommodation, from its current temporary location.  |
| 23 | 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 2010 | <b>No Progress</b> – In order for the extension to proceed, the landowner (a large developer) has to be prepared to sell adjacent land at a reasonable price, and the developer continue to be reluctant to discuss reasonable terms.  |
| 24 | 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            | Dec 2010   | <b>In Progress</b> – The building is under construction, and the Project Team has been meeting to discuss operational aspects of the scheme.<br><br>The current completion date is scheduled for December 2010   |

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| 25 | Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables | In partnership with East Thames Housing Group, commence a development of 9 affordable homes for people with learning disabilities, with associated drama therapy from the Theatre Resource Project, at Gt Stony, Ongar | Director of Housing                                | April 2010 | <b>In Progress</b> – The building is under construction, and due for completion in 2010/11.  |
| 26 | 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   | <b>No Progress</b> – Progress with undertaking the LDF Core Strategy has been delayed, mainly due to staff resources having to be diverted to the Gypsies and Travellers Consultation Exercise.  |
| 27 | 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   | <b>In Progress</b> – The Housing Directorate, along with other HIAs, continues to engage with the Essex Supporting Team on the proposed new arrangements.<br><br>However, due to delays by Essex CC, it has been agreed that all the HIAs' existing Supporting People Contracts will be extended until April 2011. |
| 28 | Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables | Liaise with the North Essex Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust to assess the housing need in the District for people with mental health problems and the level of funding available from mental health sources         | Principal Housing Officer (Information & Strategy) | April 2010 | <b>No Progress</b> – This is a project that will be actioned during 2010.  |



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| 29 | Supported Housing – Older People & Other Vulnerables | Work with other councils to investigate the feasibility of other councils connecting its emergency alarms into the Council's Careline Control Centre                            | Asst Director of Housing (Operations) | Dec 2009   | <b>In Progress</b> – Discussions are ongoing with one local authority in Essex that it is known will be tendering its Careline Service during 2010/11. The Housing Directorate intends to submit a competitive tender.<br><br>Any other opportunities will be actively pursued.   |
| 30 | 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 2010 | <b>Achieved</b> – Letters have been sent to all owners of long-term empty properties, with advice on ways of enabling the properties to be occupied,  |
| 31 | Empty Homes  | Develop the Council's web-site to provide further information and advice to the owners of empty properties  | Private Housing Manager (Technical)   | Dec 2010   | <b>No Progress</b> – Due to insufficient staff resources within the Private Sector Housing Section and other commitments, it has not been possible to progress this task.<br><br>However, the Cabinet has agreed to the appointment of an additional part-time temporary Technical Officer; one of the post's responsibilities will be to progress the Council's Empty Property Strategy. |
| 33 | Empty Homes  | Bring at least 5 long-term empty properties back into use by Council intervention.  | Private Housing Manager (Technical)   | April 2010 | <b>Not achieved</b> – Although one property has been brought back into use through the Council's PLACE Scheme, it has not been possible to progress this task further. However, the additional part-time temporary Technical Officer referred to above will be responsible for increasing the number of private properties brought back into use.   |
| 34 | Under-occupation                                     | Write to all under-occupying Council tenants, encouraging them to transfer to smaller accommodation   | Housing Options Manager               | Dec 2010   | <b>No Progress</b> – This will be actioned during 2010.   |

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| 35 | Rural Housing                 | Investigate the development potential for rural housing schemes in Moreton and other villages, in partnership with the Parish Councils and Hastoe Housing Association, under the Council's planning exceptions policy | Director of Housing                         | April 2010             | <p><b>In Progress</b> – The Housing Directorate has been working closely with Hastoe HA and parish councils on potential development sites. As a result, one site is due to be developed imminently (see (No. 36) below).</p> <p>Hastoe HA is in contact with other parish councils on other potential sites. However, no site has yet been identified for Moreton</p>                               |
| 36 | Rural Housing                 | Work with Abbess Berners and Beauchamp Roding Parish Council and Hastoe Housing Association to provide a rural housing development in the Parish, under the Council's planning exceptions policy                      | Director of Housing                         | April 2010             | <p><b>In Progress</b> – A site in Abbess Roding has received planning permission as a Planning Exceptions Scheme, has received funding from the Homes and Communities Agency, and is due to start on site by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.</p>   |
| 37 | 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             | <p><b>Achieved</b> – All of the Council's properties will meet the Decent Homes Standard by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.</p>  |
|    | 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 2010 and ongoing | <p><b>Achieved for 2009/10</b>– Due to financial housing assistance provided by the Council to vulnerable older people, a number of private sector properties now meet the Decent Homes Standard.</p> <p>A Private Sector House Condition Survey is planned for 2010/11, which will provide information on the most up-to-date estimate of the number of non-decent homes in the private sector.</p> |

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| 39 | 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 2010 - March 2011 | <b>In Progress</b> – Funding has been provided by the East of England Regional Assembly, and the scheme is currently being undertaken in partnership with other local authorities in the LCB Sub-Region.  |
| 40 | 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.) | Dec 2010                | <b>No Progress</b> - It is considered that an Equity Loan Scheme is unviable in the current housing market.   |
| 41 | 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 2010                | <b>In Progress</b> - Senior members and planning officers have been meeting regularly with Harlow DC, and a number of joint studies have been commissioned.   |
| 42 | 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 | April 2010              | <b>In Progress</b> – Although delayed, due to staffing resources having to be diverted to the Gypsy and Travellers Consultation Exercise, progress is being made by planning officers.  |
| 43 | Energy Efficiency             | Complete energy efficiency surveys for all the Council's properties   | Housing Assets Manager                      | April 2010              | <b>Achieved</b> – Energy efficiency surveys have been undertaken for all the Council's sheltered housing schemes and Norway House. Surveys are also undertaken in all empty Council properties, with an Energy Certificate issued to the incoming tenant. |
| 44 | Energy Efficiency             | Seek funding for a small pilot scheme using renewable energy sources to a group of Council properties   | Housing Assets Manager                      | April 2010              | <b>No Progress</b> – Appropriate funding has not yet been identified.   |

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| 45 | Energy Efficiency               | Set up a Fuel Poverty Referral System in the District.   | Environmental Co-ordinator             | April 2010 | <b>No Progress</b> – Due to the previous Environmental Co-ordinator leaving the Council's employment, and the post being un-filled for some time, this project has been delayed.                    |
| 46 | Energy Efficiency               | Produce a leaflet on domestic energy efficiency.   | Environmental Co-ordinator             | April 2010 | <b>No Progress</b> – Due to the previous Environmental Co-ordinator leaving the Council's employment, and the post being un-filled for some time, this project has been delayed.                    |
| 47 | 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 2010   | <b>In Progress</b> – Due to a number of other commitments of the Principal Housing Officer (Strategy) it has not been possible to progress this task as quickly as it was hoped.                    |
| 48 | 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) | Apr 2010   | <b>Achieved</b> – It has been agreed that the Careline Control Centre will provide a 24-hour monitoring service for all of the Council's CCTV cameras that can be accessed from the Control Centre. |

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 25 March 2010**

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

**Subject: Draft Regulatory Framework Action Plan**

**Officer contact for further information:  
Roger Wilson, Assistant Director of Housing (01992  
56 4419)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers the draft Regulatory Framework Action Plan, and that the Plan be monitored by the Panel on a six-monthly basis and added to the Work Programme.**

### **Report:**

1. The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) came into effect in December 2008 and replaces the regulatory functions for Housing Associations, formerly undertaken by the Housing Corporation. From April 2010, the TSA will also regulate Local Authority Housing and will be seeking to generally raise the standard of services to tenants. This will be achieved by, amongst other requirements, setting social housing providers a range of National Standards with an emphasis being placed on tenant involvement and empowerment.

2. At its meeting on 21 January 2010, the Panel received a detailed presentation on the TSA's proposed Regulatory Framework and Short Notice Inspections. The Panel was advised that the Housing Directorate already has a range of initiatives in place and is currently reasonably prepared for any Inspection. These initiatives include:

- A number of Service Standards, with performance against the Standards being monitored by the Panel and the Tenant and Leaseholder's Association.
- A comprehensive Tenant Participation network
- An Equality and Diversity Strategy which has recently been reviewed by the Panel
- A strong performance management regime
- Charter Mark, ISO 9001, and Investors in People accreditations
- Good staff and a good track record

3. However, it is recognised that a number of actions are required to meet the new Framework and to ensure the Housing Directorate is fully prepared for any Inspection.

4. Therefore, a number of actions have been identified which need to be undertaken over the coming months and are set out on the attached draft Regulatory Framework Action Plan.

5. The Panel is asked to consider the document and pass on comments to the Director of Housing. It is also suggested that the Panel monitor progress on the Plan on a six-monthly basis and that it be added to the Work Programme.

**Reason for decision:**

To set out a list of actions required to ensure compliance with the TSA's new Regulatory Framework.

For the Housing Scrutiny Panel to monitor progress against the Action Plan on a six monthly basis.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to have a Regulatory Framework Action Plan.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have also received a detailed presentation on the TSA's proposed Regulatory Framework and Short Notice Inspections, and will be consulted on this report at their meeting on 23 March 2010 with their comments being reported verbally at the meeting.

**Resource implications:**

Budget provision: N/A

Personnel: N/A

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1985 & 1996

Background papers: TSA's Regulatory Framework

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

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A

## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan

| Ref | Action   | Comments  | Responsible Officer  | Deadline   |
|-----|--|---|--|------------|
| 1   | Arrange attendance at seminars on the Regulatory Framework and Short Notice Inspections for the Directorate's Housing Management Team  | No comments   | Director of Housing  | Achieved   |
| 2   | Arrange presentation by the Deputy Director of Housing at Welwyn & Hatfield for all Managers and other relevant staff on the Regulatory Framework and Short Notice Inspections | To raise the awareness of staff   | Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)                 | Achieved   |
| 3   | Consider the TSA's Single Equalities Scheme and respond to the consultation by 31 March 2010   | No comments   | Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources) | March 2010 |
| 4   | To put procedures in place for actions required should the Council receive a call giving notice of an Inspection   | To ensure the Directorate is prepared for the practical requirements of a Short Notice Inspection | Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)                 | March 2010 |

| <b>Ref</b> | <b>Action</b>  | <b>Comments</b>  | <b>Responsible Officer</b>                 | <b>Deadline</b> |
|------------|--|--|--|-----------------|
| 5          | Consider which further 5 documents (which set out service outcomes rather than processes) will be submitted to the Inspectors following notification of the Inspection | No comments  | Director of Housing                        | March 2010      |
| 6          | Completion of the Continuous Improvement Strategy and Continuous Improvement Action Plan   | The Strategy will set out our commitment to achieve continuous improvement and deliver an excellent service to all our customers         | Director of Housing                        | March 2010      |
| 7          | Centralise all good practices to allow easy access for the Short Notice Inspectors   | All staff to consider all good practices to be centralised   | Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) | March 2010      |
| 8          | Completion of a Value for Money Strategy   | The Strategy will set out our commitment in delivering quality cost effective services in consultation with our tenants and leaseholders | Assistant Director of Housing (Property)   | March 2010      |



| <b>Ref</b> | <b>Action</b>   | <b>Comments</b>   | <b>Responsible Officer</b> | <b>Deadline</b> |
|------------|---|---|----------------------------|-----------------|
| 9          | Completion of a Tenant Participation Impact Assessment to include publishing arrangements for involving and empowering tenants and how support will be provided to achieve this aim   | The Assessment will measure the impact tenants have on policy making and set out both the issues we have consulted on and intend to consult on in the future  | Housing Resources Manager  | March 2010      |
| 10         | Tenants and Leaseholders Federation to be consulted on the performance indicators they wish to monitor in the future and following the Housing Directorate's "offer" the levels of performance they expect against the National Standards | Although the Federation have monitored performance in the past, they will now be consulted on which areas they wish to monitor in the future, and the levels of performance they expect against the new National Standards. | Director of Housing        | March 2010      |
| 11         | Review the way in which complaints are monitored and publish annually, information about the number & nature of complaints, the areas referred to, the outcomes and how services have been changed as a result                            | Ensure that feedback received through the complaints monitoring process are acted upon to improve services  | Housing Resources Manager  | March 2010      |

| <b>Ref</b> | <b>Action</b>  | <b>Comments</b>  | <b>Responsible Officer</b>                                 | <b>Deadline</b>   |
|------------|--|--|--|---|
| 12         | Populate the KLOE Excellence Plan proforma with each of the KLOEs, and provide the latest KLOE descriptors to managers   | This is to ensure that Managers have the latest versions of the KLOEs and have this information pre-populated within the proforma                    | Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)                 | Mid-March 2010  |
| 13         | Centralise all key documents likely to be required for a Short Notice Inspection   | This is for any HMT members to be able to access and submit them to the Audit Commission quickly.  | Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)                 | March 2010 (for documents completed by this date)<br>December 2010 for all others |
| 14         | Set up a Continuous Improvement Group to discuss the Regulatory Framework Action Plan, Continuous Improvement Plan and general service improvements in each Section of the Housing Directorate | To ensure all staff are working towards compliance with the Regulatory Framework and becoming more aware of achieving excellence in service delivery | Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)                 | April 2010  |
| 15         | Undertake an audit of the Code of Practice in Rented Housing to ensure compliance  | Although confident that we are complying with the Code of Practice, due to its importance it is felt an Audit is appropriate                         | Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources) | May 2010  |

| <b>Ref</b> | <b>Action</b>   | <b>Comments</b>  | <b>Responsible Officer</b>                 | <b>Deadline</b> |
|------------|---|--|--|-----------------|
| 16         | Complete Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) excellence plans  | Excellence plans will set out our current position in each service area and list evidence under the KLOE and identify actions required to meet “an organisation delivering an excellent service” in accordance with the descriptor. Plans must include how “cross cutting” KLOEs will be met | All Managers                               | June 2010       |
| 17         | Publish to all tenants, an annual report containing the provider’s view on performance (self assessment), referring to tenant scrutiny, use of external validation, “peer review” and benchmarking. | This is in order to comply with the new Regulatory Framework   | Director of Housing                        | July 2010       |
| 18         | Submit an application for the Customer Service Standard Award   | Receipt of the new Award will demonstrate the Council’s commitment and success in providing excellent customer service   | Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) | August 2010     |
| 19         | Transfer actions listed within KLOE Excellence Plans into the Continuous Improvement Plan.  | This is to ensure that identified actions to achieve excellence are captured in the Continuous Improvement Plan and regularly monitored and updated  | Director of Housing                        | August 2010     |

| <b>Ref</b> | <b>Action</b>  | <b>Comments</b>   | <b>Responsible Officer</b>   | <b>Deadline</b> |
|------------|--|---|--|-----------------|
| 20         | Publish a report to tenants on how we plan to meet each of the National Standards noting any gaps and setting out improvement plans for developing local standards   | This is in order to comply with the new Regulatory Framework. A copy of the report must be submitted to the TSA.                  | Director of Housing  | October 2010    |
| 21         | Undertake a “diversity profile” survey of all tenants and applicants   | To ensure that services are tailored and take into account the profile of our customers   | Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources)                         | December 2010   |
| 22         | Update all Equality Impact Assessments for front line services in accordance with the new toolkit including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Management</li> <li>• Choice Based Lettings</li> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Older People’s Services</li> </ul> | All staff involved in the process must attend the Corporate Training course   | Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources)<br>Appropriate Managers | December 2010   |
| 23         | Consider undertaking external validation by way of a “peer review” to ensure compliance with the national standards  | Such an exercise will demonstrate an honest and robust self assessment of performance in accordance with the Regulatory Framework | Director of Housing  | December 2010   |

| <b>Ref</b> | <b>Action</b>  | <b>Comments</b>   | <b>Responsible Officer</b>               | <b>Deadline</b>                     |
|------------|--|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 24         | Undertake further Mystery Shopping exercises including training tenants to become mystery shoppers   | Undertook a mystery shopping exercise in December 2009/January 2010. This area of work needs to be developed further. | Housing Resources Manager                | December 2010                       |
| 25         | Set out our plans for consulting tenants on the need for, and developing and establishing local standards and explain to tenants our performance against the standards | This is in order to comply with the new Regulatory Framework  | Director of Housing                      | April 2011                          |
| 26         | Publish to all tenants an annual report on Value for Money on how expenditure was prioritised and how Value for Money was secured.                                     | This is in order to comply with the new Regulatory Framework  | Assistant Director of Housing (Property) | July 2011                           |
| 27         | Regularly update the Consultation Plan and Consultation Register   | This is to ensure that the Plan and Register are up-to-date if we have an inspection.                                 | Housing Resources Manager                | March/June/Sept/December each year. |

| <b>Ref</b> | <b>Action</b>   | <b>Comments</b>   | <b>Responsible Officer</b>    | <b>Deadline</b>                        |
|------------|---|---|-------------------------------|--|
| 28         | Monitor anticipated and actual value for money savings  | The VFM savings spreadsheet should be updated on a quarterly basis by Managers, co-ordinated by the Assistant Director (Property).  | Assistant Director (Property) | March/June/Sept/December each year     |
| 29         | Provide quarterly reports on performance to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation on Tenant-selected Performance Indicators                               | The Federation will be invited to select performance indicators that it would like to monitor quarterly, at the March 2010 meeting. Once selected, it is important that the Federation has the opportunity to comment, quarterly, on performance. | Housing Resources Manager     | May/August/November/February each year |
| 30         | Continue with the Annual events Plan, updated quarterly, which will be considered at each quarterly Performance Management Meeting with individual managers | The Annual Events Plan is a reminder of all actions that are required within the Housing Directorate on an annual basis.  | Director of Housing           | On-going                               |
| 31         | Discuss Value for Money initiatives, potential savings, and ways in which savings can be re-invested at Quarterly Performance Management meetings           | No comments   | Director of Housing           | On-going                               |

| <b>Ref</b> | <b>Action</b>   | <b>Comments</b>   | <b>Responsible Officer</b>                 | <b>Deadline</b>          |
|------------|---|---|--|--------------------------|
| 3 2        | Continue to communicate and include staff on service improvements and the requirements of the Regulatory Framework                            | Communicate through Housing Management Team, the Housing Directorate Group, Section Meetings and the staff newsletter "In House"                              | All Managers                               | On-going                 |
| 3 3        | Work with the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium to undertake a number of enhancements to the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme | A list of the proposed enhancements are held separately and will be reported to the Housing Scrutiny Panel in March 2010                                      | Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) | On-going                 |
| 3 4        | Compliance with the Short Notice Inspection Post-Inspection Improvement Plan  | Following the Short Notice Inspection, the Improvement Plan will be monitored by both the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and the Housing Scrutiny Panel. | Director of Housing                        | Following the Inspection |

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## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 25 March 2010**

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

**Subject: Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Harassment**

**Officer contact for further information: R Wilson,  
Assistant Director of Housing (01992 56 4419)**

**Committee Secretary: M Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers and endorses the Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Harassment, attached as an appendix, and provides any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder for incorporation.**

### **Report:**

1. The Housing Directorate's Service Strategies were originally produced around 12 years ago in accordance with an agreed standard framework, and have since been updated. The Strategies give more detail than the Council's main Housing Strategy on the various housing services provided. In total, 17 Housing Service Strategies have been produced to date, covering:

|                                 |                                    |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Equality and Diversity          | 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 the updated Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Harassment attached as an appendix to the report and provide any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder for incorporation.

### **Reason for decision:**

The Housing Scrutiny Panel reviews all Housing Directorate Service Strategies on a three-yearly basis. 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.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to review the Housing Directorate's Strategies.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will be consulted on the Strategy at their meeting on 23 March 2010. In addition, the Hate Crime Panel which forms part of the Crime and Disorder Partnership, and the Citizens Advice Bureau are being consulted. All comments received will be reported verbally at the meeting.

**Resource implications:**

Budget provision: N/A

Personnel: N/A

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: As set out in Section 3 of the Strategy

Background papers: N/A

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

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A

**Epping Forest District Council**  
**HOUSING DIRECTORATE**  
**STRATEGY ON**  
**HARASSMENT**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Strategy sets out the Housing Directorate's approach to dealing with acts or allegations of harassment involving members of the public who are recipients of housing services. It also covers the harassment of tenants of privately rented residential property by their landlords, and, to a limited extent, of landlords by their tenants. It explains how this issue is dealt with within the Housing Directorate and includes links with other policies and services, both internally and externally. One of these is the Housing Directorate's Strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour. Although harassment in the community may often be classed as anti-social behaviour, this Strategy deals more specifically with the issue of harassment and bullying.
- 1.2 The Housing Directorate Strategy on Harassment is consistent with the Council's role as a good employer when dealing with harassment in the workplace. Further details about how the Council handles allegations of workplace harassment may be obtained from Human Resources.
- 1.3 Harassment can take many forms and can be triggered by many things. People may suffer from bullying or harassment because of their appearance, actions and habits or identity. Examples include harassment linked to a person's colour, religion, nationality, gender, sexuality, age, disability, cultural traditions and lifestyle. Harassment is defined by the impact on the recipient not the intention of the perpetrator. Harassment involves the abuse of some form of collective or individual power.
- 1.4 In privately-rented properties, harassment is commonly reported as a result of landlords interfering with the peace and comfort of those living in a property as their tenants. An example of this would be by a landlord persistently withdrawing services that are reasonably required for the occupation of the premises such as the removal of hot water. It might also involve the landlord making constant visits to the property or entering the accommodation without permission. In these circumstances the harassment may be perpetrated in an attempt to get the tenant to vacate the premises.
- 1.5 Dealing effectively with all forms of harassment, in and around residential buildings owned and/or managed by the Council and those subject to private renting, is an important role for the Council. The Council's standard Tenancy Agreement for its own tenants (Section 6.2) makes it clear that harassment of any person(s) could result in prosecution, an injunction and/or repossession of the premises. With regard to the private sector, the Council has signed up to the national Enforcement Concordat which includes details of the approach that will be taking in dealing with enforcement, including cases of harassment and illegal eviction in privately-rented living accommodation. Ultimately this could lead to the prosecution of a landlord, either in a Magistrates Court or in the Crown Court, with penalties upon conviction including a fine and/or imprisonment.
- 1.6 The Housing Directorate is well placed to promote equality and racial harmony (statutory duties for public authorities) in its role as a Housing Authority, working in partnership with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to develop and manage affordable housing in the District, and carrying out its Statutory duty to maintain standards in private sector housing.

- 1.7 Furthermore, the Council has a role in supporting vulnerable tenants within the community and homeless people to whom a duty is owed, who may be more at risk of harassment by other people.
- 1.8 As with related issues, such as responding to racist, homophobic and anti-social behaviour, the Council works in partnership with relevant agencies through various Groups set up under the Crime Reduction and Disorder Partnership.
- 1.9 The Strategy has been developed in accordance with the provisions of the following legislation and, where relevant, the associated codes of practice:
- Housing Act 1985;
  - Housing Act 1988;
  - Housing Act 1996;
  - Housing Act 2004;
  - Protection from Eviction Act 1977;
  - Crime and Disorder Act 1998;
  - Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
  - Human Rights Act 1998;
  - Protection from Harassment Act 1997;
  - Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000;
  - Civil Partnership Act 2004;
  - Disability Discrimination Act 2005; and,
  - Equality Act 2006.
- 1.10 The Harassment Strategy has been developed in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Anti Social Behaviour Violent Crime Tasking Group and the three Citizens Advice Bureaux.
- 1.11 The Harassment Strategy was considered in detail by the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder on xxxxx.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 In addition to approximately 2,500 privately-rented properties throughout the District (Private Sector House Condition Survey 2005), the Council owns and manages a stock of around 6,600 properties. There are Council homes in towns and villages throughout the District, while Chigwell, Loughton, Waltham Abbey, Epping and Ongar have some larger estates. The Council also works closely with several housing associations to develop affordable housing for rent. There are over 1,200 housing association properties in the District. Some people on the Housing Register (waiting list) are offered a housing association property instead of a council home.
- 2.2 Sheltered housing is provided for older people and is staffed by Scheme Managers who visit residents on every duty day. The Council also provides a homeless person's hostel, Norway House, in North Weald with around 40 rooms plus shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. A further 10 "chalets" with shared facilities are located in the grounds. The Hostel is supervised by a Manager and two Deputy Managers.

- 2.3 Careline is a twenty-four hour emergency alarm service provided to people living in sheltered housing as well as other vulnerable residents in the private sector.

### **3. Legal Framework**

- 3.1 The following legislation has particular implications for services delivered by public authorities, including Housing Services, in relation to harassment and promoting good relations between people in the community.

#### **3.2 Human Rights Act 1998**

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

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

#### **3.3 Protection of Harassment Act 1997**

This legislation concerns any conduct classed as harassment, wherever it takes place.

- The Act provides for a civil or criminal remedy in cases of harassment of another person or putting them in fear of violence.
- Deliberate intent does not have to be proved – the test is whether a reasonable person would have known that such conduct would cause someone to feel alarmed or distressed.
- If harassment is found, actions taken could include an award for damages, an injunction, a restraining order, a fine or imprisonment.

#### **3.4 Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000**

The Race Relations Code of Practice in Rented Housing gives specific guidance in relation to race equality in relation to providing Housing Services. Public authorities are required to meet a general duty to:

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

#### **3.5 Disability Discrimination Act 2005**

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

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

### 3.6 Equality Act 2006

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

- Eliminate unlawful gender discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity between women and men; and,
- The duty to eliminate unlawful sex discrimination includes transsexuals.

### 3.7 Housing Act 1996

This Act includes:

- Discretionary powers for any Local Authority to introduce an Introductory Tenancy Scheme for all new secure tenants (Section 124);
- An additional ground for possession for any tenant committing acts of domestic violence (Section 145); and,
- Proceedings in Anti-Social Behaviour cases expedited by the removal of the 4 week Notice period.

### 3.8 Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003

This Act covers issues relating to:

- Closure Notices (Part 1 Section 1);
- Publishing of Policies and Procedures (Part 2 Section 12);
- Injunctions (Part 2 Section 2);
- Security of Tenure (Part 2 Section 12);
- Dispersal of Groups (Part 4 Section 30);
- The Environment/Noise/Graffiti (Part 6 Sections 40/41/42); and
- High Hedges (Part 8 Sections 65/66/67).

### 3.9 Crime & Disorder Act 1998

This Act covers:

- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
- Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

### 3.10 Housing Act 2004

This Act covers:

- Powers to Extend the period of an Introductory Tenancy by a further 6 months;
- Right of a secure tenant to mutual exchange denied if they are the subject of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order; and,
- Right of a secure tenants Right to Buy denied if they are the subject of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order.

### 3.11 Protection from Eviction Act 1977

This Act covers:

- Requirement of landlord to apply to Court before regaining possession; and,
- Any Notices served must give the tenant 28 days notice.

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

4.1 The following Housing Directorate strategies, policies and procedures are relevant to this Harassment Strategy:

- Housing Directorate's Anti-Social Behaviour, Housing Equality and Diversity and Housing Management Strategy;
- Housing Directorate's Equality Impact Assessments and Equality & Diversity Action Plan;
- Housing Charter;
- Housing News;
- Housing Allocations Scheme (see paragraph 5.1c, paragraph 16 and App 1);
- Housing Appeals and Review Panel Application Pack;
- Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy; and,
- Standard Tenancy Agreement (see section 6.2).

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

- Corporate Equality/Diversity Policy;
- Corporate Equality/Diversity Action Plan;
- The Council's Race Equality Scheme;
- The Council's harassment procedures for its employees;
- Staff equality/diversity training;
- CCTV Protocol;



- Equality monitoring statistics and census data; and,
- Corporate Compliments and Complaints procedure.

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

- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA);
- Hate Crime reporting procedures (relating to racist, homophobic and transgender incidents, harassment and victimisation);
- Housing Services Guidelines for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults from Abuse;
- Floating Support Scheme for vulnerable single adults;
- Stay Safe Scheme for women experiencing domestic violence;
- Supporting People (led by Essex County Council);
- Mediation services; and,
- Careline twenty-four hour emergency Alarm systems.

## **5. Aims and Objectives**

5.1 The Housing Directorate condemns all forms of harassment and bullying and recognises that harassment is defined by the impact on the victim of harassment, not by the intentions of the alleged perpetrator.

5.2 The Housing Directorate is committed to:

- Prevention of harassment through positive action and the use of sanctions where necessary;
- Encouraging victims and witnesses of harassment to report it and seek help without fear;
- Taking seriously allegations of harassment;
- Supporting victims of harassment;
- Taking action to prevent further acts of harassment;
- Treating all parties with dignity and respect and taking action based on an objective and unbiased assessment of the situation, taking all the circumstances into account; and,
- Training its employees to recognise and deal effectively with allegations of harassment in a fair and professional manner.

5.3 The target audience for this Strategy is:

- Epping Forest District Councillors;
- Housing Directorate staff;
- Tenants and leaseholders of Council property and other people living in the same communities;
- Tenants and landlords in the private sector;
- Managing Agents; and,
- The Council's partner agencies.

5.4 The objectives of this Strategy are to:

- Raise awareness about the nature and impact of harassment within the community;
- Raise awareness about the options and support for dealing with it;
- Raise awareness about how the Council and its partners will respond;
- Raise awareness about the implications for perpetrators of harassment;
- Ensure that, wherever possible, incidents of harassment are always recorded and reported to the correct body;
- Develop effective support mechanisms in partnership with other agencies;
- Ensure allegations of harassment are properly and promptly investigated by people who understand the issues;
- Take effective action against alleged perpetrators, in partnership with other agencies, using all legal remedies;
- Ensure that Council staff and other people working with the Council are trained to identify incidents of harassment and know how to respond effectively;
- Monitor the numbers and types of incidents and the actions taken by the Council in response; and,
- Ensure the Council meets legislative requirements.

## **6. Consultation, Information and Involvement**

6.1 People likely to be affected by the Strategy and those who will be involved in advising or acting on harassment reports have been consulted on this Harassment Strategy prior to its implementation. This includes the following:

- Epping Forest Tenants' and Leaseholders' Federation;
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Violent Crime Tasking Group;
- The three Citizens' Advice Bureaux,;
- Managers within the Housing Directorate;
- The Council's Cleaner Greener Safer Scrutiny Panel; and,
- The Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel.

6.2 When agreed by the Council, information about the Harassment Strategy will be made available to the general public through the Council's web-site and to Council tenants, leaseholders and the consultees listed above through "Housing News", a regular newsletter to Council tenants. The purpose of the communication will be two-fold. Firstly, to inform residents where to get help and advice and secondly, to help prevent harassment by increasing awareness and understanding of what constitutes harassment, what the impact is and what the outcome for perpetrators could be.

## **7. Definition of Harassment**

7.1 The Housing Directorate's Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy which relates to the Council's approach to anti-social behaviour on its housing estates, defines harassment and anti-social behaviour as any act or omission which interferes

with the peace and comfort of, or which may cause nuisance, annoyance, injury or offence to:

- tenants, members of their household, their visitors or neighbours;
- the Council including the Council's employees and contractors; or,
- any other member of the general public."

7.2 Anti-discrimination legislation defines harassment as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

7.3 Harassment more often occurs as a result of a series of incidents which results in a damaging effect on the recipient. However, in some cases, a serious single incident may be sufficient to create a hostile and intimidating environment.

7.4 Subtle forms of harassment, over time, can be just as damaging as overt harassment or bullying.

7.5 People can experience harassment, even if they were not the intended target or fall within the target group. For example, many people find bullying, racist, homophobic or other abusive behaviour towards others intimidating and offensive and would not wish to live or work in an environment where such behaviour was prevalent, even if it was not directed at them personally.

7.6 Harassment can be perpetrated via a number of means, for example:

- physical acts directed towards one or more persons or their property; e.g. a private landlord cutting off essential services such as water or electrics;
- spoken or written communications, e.g. face to face, in writing, pictures, cartoons, emails, telephone, text messages, etc.;
- by a landlord failing to do things supposed to be done under the tenancy agreement or by not allowing a private sector housing tenant to exercise their right to make complaint to the Council about certain defects at the property;
- non-verbal communication e.g. facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, body position, etc.; and,
- deliberate exclusion or avoidance.

7.7 The following gives some specific examples of harassment in the community, but there are many more:

- Public criticism, humiliation, ridiculing or demeaning someone;
- Fabricated allegations, spreading malicious rumours;
- Graffiti about an individual, a family or particular groups/types of people;
- Making statements or name calling that is racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.;

- Derogatory or demeaning comments about how a person looks or behaves;
- Unwarranted and persistent shouting, swearing and verbal abuse;
- Exerting control e.g. through emotional or physical pressure, threats and intimidation;
- Body language such as offensive or mocking hand gestures, staring at intimate parts of the body, eyeing someone up and down, etc.;
- Unwelcome sexual advances or suggestions, persistent unwanted communication, stalking;
- Deliberate exclusion or overt avoidance which makes people feel isolated and rejected;
- Putting people down, belittling/ignoring their contribution, showing lack or respect, rejecting an individual's rights;
- Damaging or interfering with a person's property, e.g. their home, car, garden, etc.;
- Road rage or parking vehicle(s) to deliberately inconvenience others;
- Aggressive body language e.g. staring, making abusive or threatening signs, pushing, blocking the person's path, standing too close, etc.;
- Jokes, cartoons, pictures, etc. that put people down or promote prejudice because of their nationality, colour, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, etc.;
- Open hostility and intolerance towards different cultures, traditions, dress, food, an impairment, etc.; and,
- Nuisance calls or excessive noise directed at an individual or family.

7.8 Harassment and bullying is always a misuse of power. Power comes from a variety of sources, such as:

- Physical, or perceived physical power – e.g. being stronger or taller, driving a more powerful or larger vehicle, etc.;
- Controlling or possessing more money or other important resources;
- Emotional power – playing on another person's feelings of guilt, vulnerability, duty, honour, low self esteem or lack of confidence, etc.);
- Position power – being in a position to enforce rules and over-rule others – a landlord, group leader, boss, parent, teacher or some other form of authority (not necessarily appointed in an official capacity);
- Status power – been seen as a leader or in some way superior which could be earned or bestowed;
- Intellectual power – articulate, able to win the argument, confuse, belittle;
- Group power – people may not take particular actions on their own, but they may feel empowered if others approve of or are encouraging their actions or they may fear being bullied or isolated themselves if they don't comply; and,

- Society/cultural power – in many societies, there are different expectations on how men and women will behave. (e.g. “boys will be boys”, “a women’s place is in the home”). People who do not fit the traditionally accepted ways of behaving may be harassed or abused by others as a result.

## **8. The Impact of Harassment**

- 8.1 A person who is bullied or harassed may start out as a confident and capable person, attractive and popular with friends and colleagues and with everything to look forward to. However, the effects of constant harassment, over time, can lead to serious implications for their well-being. Victims of harassment frequently lose their confidence and may experience feelings of inadequacy, guilt, embarrassment, shame, powerlessness and worthlessness. These are often encouraged by the bully to keep their victim quiet. These negative emotions often lead to stress related illnesses and symptoms such as anxiety, panic attacks, headaches, nausea, ulcers, skin rashes, irritable bowel syndrome, high blood pressure, tearfulness, depression and ultimately, suicidal thoughts.
- 8.2 Harassment which is linked to something a person has no control over or is part of their culture and identity, such as their sex, race, religion, sexuality, disability, etc., can have a devastating effect on the individual and others who are close to them. For example, racial harassment can cause people to feel like a prisoner in their own homes if they are fearful of going out. It can affect when and where they and their family feel safe, making them constantly anxious and on-edge. In some extreme cases, the lives of women who wish to lead independent lives, people from minority groups or people attracted to people of the same sex have been in serious danger through criminal acts of violence.
- 8.3 The effects of isolation can be particularly felt in areas where there is little support from other people with similar identities or experiences. In such situations, victims of harassment may be less likely to speak out for fear of reprisals or of not being heard and understood. They will also have less access to support from others; they can become powerless.
- 8.4 Harassment can have a profound effect when it is connected with housing. Council tenants who are harassed within their neighbourhoods or private tenants harassed by their landlords may be reluctant to bring this to the attention of others for fear that it might make them seem inadequate or that it might make matters worse. Victims might choose instead to continue to live in intolerable circumstances or, in severe cases, might decide to leave their home.

## **9. Terminology**

- 9.1 For the purposes of terms used in this Strategy, the following explanations are based on definitions used in anti-discrimination legislation and authoritative reports such as the MacPherson inquiry report following the death of Stephen Lawrence.
- 9.2 Racial harassment is defined as “an incident or series of incidents intended or likely to intimidate, offend or harm an individual or group because of their ethnic origin, colour, race, religion or nationality.” (*MacPherson report*)

9.3 People who are more likely to suffer from racial harassment are those from minority ethnic groups such as:

- Black people who are African, Caribbean, Asian or people of mixed heritage.
- White people such as Eastern Europeans, Jews, Sikhs, Gypsies and Irish Travellers.

In the Epping Forest District, 8.7%<sup>1</sup> of the population are from a minority ethnic group, with the largest single group being Indian. The census does not break down the number of white minority ethnic groups residing in the Epping district, but this includes, among others, Italian communities, Gypsies and Irish travellers.

9.4 Religion includes any religious or similar philosophical belief (which is likely to include a form of collective worship, a clear belief system and a profound belief affecting the way of life or view of the world). Religion can define who you are, how you view the world around you and how you interact within it. The largest minority religious groups in the district are Muslim and Jewish (2001 census).

9.5 Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A few examples include: learning disabilities, some long-term medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy), progressive illnesses (e.g. cancer, multiple sclerosis, HIV, Parkinson's disease), physical impairments (e.g. musculoskeletal disorders, Chroner's disease, heart conditions), mental impairments (e.g. schizophrenia, manic depression, phobias which have a substantial effect on a person's life), facial disfigurement, sensory impairments (e.g. blindness, impaired hearing). It can be seen that many disabilities are not generally visible and people may need specially adapted facilities, support or services for reasons that are not always obvious to others. Harassment related to a person's disability is sometimes based on other people's misconceptions due to their lack of understanding or fear.

9.6 Sexual harassment refers to harassment that is related to a person's gender, married status and/or gender reassignment (transsexuals). Men are less often sexually harassed than women as men usually have more power. Sexual harassment may have a sexual content, but it also relates to harassment of a non-sexual nature if it is linked to the victim's gender.

9.7 Sexual orientation is defined as having a sexual attraction to persons of the same sex (lesbians and gay men), persons of the opposite sex (heterosexual) and persons of both sexes (bisexual). Sexual orientation harassment refers to actions relating to a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation.

9.8 Ageism is more often aimed at people at either end of the age spectrum, i.e. the very young or older people, as these are usually the groups with less power. However, some young people commit acts of bullying and harassment of others by drawing on group power plus their physical strength and agility. In housing estates, the people most likely to suffer from age related harassment are older people and vulnerable young adults.

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<sup>1</sup> Source 2001 census - includes people with dual heritage.

9.9 Bullying is a form of harassment. However, someone who bullies another person may do so not because they belong to a particular racial or religious group or because of their sex or sexuality. The victim of bullying may be a family member, work colleague, neighbour or someone else with whom the bully has contact. For the purposes of this Strategy, the term 'harassment' is intended to encompass bullying.

9.10 Anything which marks someone out as different, living contrary to cultural expectations and norms or indicates a potential weakness or vulnerability can result in bullying and harassment. The Housing Directorate is committed to supporting victims of harassment and to taking action to prevent harassment continuing.

## 10. Harassment Procedures

10.1 The options open to victims of harassment include the following:

- Do nothing and tell no one – this option is very common but it is unlikely to resolve the matter. Victims often do not report harassment for reasons which include: fear of reprisals or that matters may get worse; thinking they won't be believed or taken seriously; lack of concrete evidence or proof; lack of trust in the process or powers of the authorities; believing that nothing can be done; depression or feelings of worthlessness or that somehow they have provoked the problem.
- Tell someone – a friend, relative or someone such as a counsellor, doctor or religious leader. Sharing the problem with someone like this may help the individual to cope with the situation, but it is unlikely to prevent it continuing.
- Seek advice via an experienced body such as Epping Forest District Council's Housing Directorate, the Citizens Advice Bureaux, Victim Support, South Essex Switchboard (for homophobic incidents) and Essex Racial Equality Council.
- Speak to the perpetrator and explain that their actions are causing distress or upset. This may be sufficient to stop any further inappropriate actions or behaviours. In this situation, it is most helpful if the person speaking to the perpetrator describes the specific actions that are causing the problem and the impact this is having on the victim without becoming emotional, labelling the perpetrator or assuming any particular motive. It may be helpful to take someone else along as a support and to act as a witness.
- Report the matter to an authority such as the Police, Epping Forest Housing Directorate, Essex County Council's Adult Social Care and Community Wellbeing Service, South Essex Switchboard (for homophobic incidents) and Essex Racial Equality Council or any other agency that offers support to people in the community.

10.2 Protection for victims available from the Housing Directorate includes:

- Protection of the homes of Council tenants or the immediate surrounding area e.g. by fitting fireproof letter boxes, improving window and door locks, etc.;

- Speedy removal of offensive graffiti;
- Temporary location of mobile, overt CCTV; and,
- Temporary or permanent re-housing.

10.3 In respect on the Council's secure tenants, a transfer to alternative accommodation does not necessarily solve a problem of harassment. The Council may grant a priority transfer to a tenant who is experiencing harassment, but only if there is clear evidence from agencies like the Police to confirm that the tenant would be at risk if they remained in their current accommodation.

10.4 Investigation:

- Where the allegation concerns a tenant of the Council, a full investigation will be undertaken by Housing Management in liaison with the appropriate agency, with the victim's agreement, following any reported incidents of harassment. If the victim does not wish the matter to be investigated, the incident will still be recorded and monitored. The victim will be contacted within three months to check if the harassment has continued. If not, the incident will be marked as closed. If the harassment is continuing, the victim will be encouraged to agree to an investigation.
- Positive steps will be taken to identify the alleged perpetrator(s) and, unless there are particular risks to the victim, the perpetrator will be informed of the allegations made and that the matter is under investigation.
- Where the allegation relates to a tenancy within the private sector, once the housing status of the client has been assessed, the landlord will be contacted and given a chance to respond to the allegation. The landlord will be notified in writing of their obligations with regard to harassment and unlawful eviction and asked to provide assurances that they will cease the behaviour that led to the allegation. Should they fail to do so within ten days, enforcement action will be considered and where there is cause for concern, the tenant will be advised to log their complaint with the Police.
- Council Officers will give advice regarding allegations of harassment and illegal eviction to both private sector tenants and landlords, however, Officers cannot advise both the landlord and tenant in an individual case. In these circumstances the other party will be referred to Citizens Advice Bureaux or to further sources of information.
- In all cases the Council will take account of the victim's wishes and the risk to their safety and welfare when considering what actions to take. The victim will be provided with regular updates on any action taken. In serious cases, the Police may be informed and/or the Council may decide to investigate the matter without the victim's agreement. In all cases, the victim will be told what is happening.
- The investigator's role is not to take sides, but to impartially establish the facts of the situation.



- The Council will liaise with other relevant bodies during an investigation. If the investigation has to be suspended e.g. because the Police or another party is taking action, the victim will be informed.
- When the investigation has been completed, all parties will be informed of the outcome.
- The rights of all parties will be fully taken into account when deciding on the best course of action following the investigation. This will include the extent to which the perpetrator was or should have been aware that their actions caused the victim to feel harassed, taking into account all the circumstances of the case.

10.5 Dispute resolution methods may be used where the Council considers that informal means of resolving the issue are likely to be successful. Options could include:

- Advice;
- Mediation between the parties involved;
- Requiring Council tenants to enter into Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs); and,
- Developing action plans with Council tenants.

10.6 Sanctions against perpetrators – if an allegation of harassment has been investigated and found to have taken place, the Council (or other body acting in partnership with the Council such as Essex Police) may take any of the following actions against the perpetrator (see the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for further details):

- Ask the perpetrator to sign agree an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC);
- Application to the courts for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO);
- Where the perpetrator is a Council Tenant, an application may be made to the County Court for a Tenancy Demotion Order which would reduce the secure tenancy to non-secure for a period of twelve months, effectively putting the tenant “on trial”;
- Where the perpetrator is a Council Tenant, possession proceedings may be commenced which will possibly lead to eviction;
- Seek to recover costs incurred e.g. for damage to the victim’s property;
- Seek an Injunction to prevent the perpetrator from having contact with the victim, or to prohibit aspects of the perpetrator’s behaviour; and,
- Work with the Police or other agencies to commence criminal or civil proceedings.

10.7 Monitoring – all reported incidents of harassment will be recorded together with how the case is progressing including details such as: any further incidents, investigation, involvement of other bodies, resolution and any actions taken in relation to the victims and/or perpetrators.

Each case will be reviewed (by checking with the victim) within three months of any final action to check whether the case can be marked as closed or whether any further action is required. The victim will be asked to complete a questionnaire seeking their views on how the matter was dealt with, which will assist in service improvements.

10.8 Complaints – any complaints against actions taken or not taken by the Council will be progressed in accordance with the Council's Compliments and Complaints Procedure.

10.9 Appeals – if a resident is unhappy with a decision taken by the Council under this Strategy, they may Appeal. In the first instance, the decision will be reviewed by the appropriate Assistant Director of Housing. If the resident is unhappy with the outcome of that Appeal, they may proceed to the Housing Appeals and Review Panel.

## **11. Impact on employees**

11.1 Staff protection – Housing Directorate employees are subject to the Council's employment policies and procedures, which include:

- Health and Safety Policy and incident reporting procedures;
- Equal Opportunities Policy; and,
- Lone Worker Policy.

11.2 Staff training includes:

- Equality/diversity;
- Harassment/bullying;
- Managing challenging behaviour
- Handling aggression;
- Investigation skills (for those required to carry these out); and,
- The Ant-Social behaviour Strategy and this Harassment Strategy and associated legislative requirements.

## **12. Strategy Evaluation and Review**

12.1 In order to monitor the effectiveness of this Harassment Strategy, monitoring systems will be put in place to record:

- the numbers and types of harassment allegations reported orally and in writing;
- the numbers and types of harassment reports that are investigated/followed up;
- the outcomes of those investigations including any actions taken against the perpetrators;
- feedback (on the reporting process, the investigation and the effectiveness of any actions to stop the harassment) from those people who reported harassment allegations; and,

- The outcome and effectiveness of actions taken by any other relevant methods, including whether there are any further allegations of harassment by the same perpetrators or against the same victims.

12.2 The results of the monitoring data will be regularly reported and assessed by the Housing Directorate and reported to the Anti-Social Behaviour Network Group (at least half yearly).

### 13. Action Plan

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

| Action   | Lead Officer/s                          | Timescale     | Resource Implications     |
|--|---|---------------|---------------------------|
| To ensure that appropriate staff receive training on the contents of the Strategy  | All Managers                            | On going      | Within existing resources |
| Produce a leaflet to distribute to the public and partner agencies setting out the main objectives of the Strategy                     | Principal Housing Officer (Information) | December 2010 | Within existing resources |
| To include an article in the tenants magazine "Housing News" outlining the main issues covered by the Strategy                         | Principal Housing Officer (Information) | December 2010 | Within existing resources |
| Ensure that proper reporting arrangements are in place and a 6 monthly report is made to the Anti-Social Behaviour Network Group       | Area Housing Managers                   | On going      | Within existing resources |
| Produce a Housing Directorate Enforcement Strategy outlining how the Council will deal with enforcement in the private housing sector. | Private Sector Housing Manager          | July 2010     | Within existing resources |

#### **14. Reviewing the Strategy**

The Strategy for Harassment will be reviewed in consultation with the Housing Scrutiny Panel, the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Anti Social Behaviour Violent Crime Tasking Group and the Citizens Advice Bureaux before March 2013.

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of Meeting: 25 March 2010**

**Subject: Tenant Participation Progress 2009**

**Officer contact for further information: R Jones,  
Tenant Participation Officer (01992 56 4524)**

**Committee Secretary: M Jenkins (01992 56 4607)**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That progress made on the development of tenant participation during the period 1 January 2009 – 31 December 2009 be noted.**

### **Report:**

#### **Background:**

1. At the Tenant Participation Progress (officer) Meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2007 and following discussion with the Director of Housing, it was agreed to provide a yearly tenant participation update to the Housing Scrutiny Panel.
2. The Housing Services Strategy on Tenant Participation, which was updated in 2007, sets out the Council's approach to tenant participation and how the service will be delivered.
3. Consultation of 1,563 general needs tenants through the 2008 Tenant Satisfaction Survey showed that 62% of respondents were satisfied that their views were being taken into account by their landlord (EFDC) and only 7% were dissatisfied.

#### **Existing Groups**

4. There are currently 6 established residents associations and 2 residents panels in the District, namely:
  - Debden Tenants Panel, Loughton;
  - Limes Farm Community Association, Chigwell;
  - Ninefields Residents Panel, Waltham Abbey;
  - Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association, Loughton;
  - Paternoster North Residents Association, Upshire;
  - Romeland Residents Association, Waltham Abbey
  - Roundhills Residents Association, Waltham Abbey;
  - Shelley Residents Association, Ongar.
5. To become established and remain 'recognised', groups must fulfil the Council's criteria for formal recognition.
6. In addition to the existing groups, there are 3 associations representing specific groups of residents:

- Epping Forest Leaseholders Association; which has 91 members and meets quarterly.
- Epping Forest Sheltered Forum; which has 32 members and meets bi-monthly.
- Epping Forest Rural Tenants Forum; which has 13 members and meets quarterly.

There is also an 'Umbrella' group, the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, that includes representatives of all the residents groups and meets with senior officers of the Housing Directorate and the Housing Portfolio Holder bi-monthly.

7. Each of the residents associations has signed a Local Tenant Participation Agreement with the Council, which sets out the approach each group and the Council will adopt in relation to tenant participation. These agreements are renewed on a yearly basis.
8. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, Leaseholders Association, Sheltered Forum and Rural Tenants Forum has each signed its own Tenant Participation Agreement. These agreements are renewed on a three-yearly basis.
9. Each of the residents associations is invited to apply for a support grant of up to £250 per annum and a minor estate enhancement grant of up to £500 per annum.

## Special Events

10. During 2009, a Community Consultation Day was held in Loughton (Debden). It is planned to hold similar events in other parts of the District during 2010.
11. A Mystery Shopping Exercise took place during November/December 2009 and it is planned to set up a Mystery Shopping group from EFDC's tenants and leaseholders in 2010. This is where tenants would "test" the services being provided by the Housing Directorate, by "pretending" to be a customer in need of a service, and reporting on how well the organization deals with the enquiry.

## New Initiatives

12. It is planned to introduce Local Area Agreements, particularly in areas where no current residents group exists. This will offer the opportunity for residents in these areas to become involved in the management of their neighbourhood and could also lead to the setting up of a residents group.
13. The Tenant Participation Officer is working with the East of England Resident Involvement Group, which meets quarterly to share good working practice and to compare methods for involvement.
14. A Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group is being set up to look at ways of improving the current repairs service provided to tenants and leaseholders.

15. A Tenant Reading Group is being set up to 'Tenant Approve' new literature created by the Housing Directorate.
16. A Focus group is being set up to look at the Housing Allocations Scheme.
17. A Tenant Participation Impact Assessment is being written to record and measure the impact of Tenant Participation in the District.
18. Officers are working with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation to agree a number of service standards as required by the Tenant Services Authority's New Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England.

### **Diversity**

19. In its Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) the Government has identified a number of 'Hard to Reach' groups: rural communities, younger people, minority groups, families; that landlords are expected to include in the tenant participation process.
20. The Epping Forest Sheltered Forum represents EFDC tenants living in Sheltered or Group –dwelling schemes and properties covered by a Scheme Manager. The Forum meets bi-monthly and continues to attract new members.
21. The Epping Forest Rural Tenants Forum was set up in November 2006 and continues to expand. Twelve rural areas of the district are represented on the Forum.

### **Administration and Management of Tenant Participation**

22. The Tenant Participation Officer holds monthly progress meetings with the Housing Resources Manager and Principal Housing Officer (Information and Strategy) and quarterly progress meetings with the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations).
23. The Tenant Participation Officer maintains an Action Plan which monitors progress of all aspects of tenant participation. Progress of the Action Plan is discussed at both the monthly and quarterly meetings.

### **Targets**

24. A list of targets for 2010/11 is attached as Appendix 1.

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Tenant Participation  
Targets  
2010/11

Appendix 1

| <b>Task</b>  | <b>Target Date</b> |
|--|--------------------|
| Continue to work with tenants to agree service standards as required by Tenant Services Authority.   | April 2010         |
| Produce Tenant Participation Impact Assessment to evaluate the impact of Tenant Participation in the district  | April 2010         |
| Hold Community Consultation Days at agreed locations in partnership with EFDC Community Development Team<br>Areas agreed at 15/2/10 – Shelley, Ongar (4/3/10) Oakwood Hill, Loughton (12/5/10) | Ongoing            |
| Set up a Mystery Shopping group from existing Tenants & Leaseholders; Arrange training of group; Commence regular Mystery Shopping exercises.  | September<br>2010  |
| Set up further Tenant Talkback Panels to look at specific issues: Reading Panel, Allocations Scheme,   | March 2011         |

Tenant Participation  
Targets  
2010/11

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Introduce Local Area Agreements, initially in areas without a recognised residents group. Areas identified include Hornbeam Road, Buckhurst Hill; Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey, Birch View, Epping; Rowley Mead, Thornwood | March 2011 |
| Increase membership of Rural Tenants Forum by further dialogue with Parish Councils, use of Housing News/Forester, Council's Website, publicity campaign.   | March 2011 |