

## Scrutiny Standing Panel Agenda



### ***Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel Thursday, 28th October, 2010***

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

**Time:** 5.30 pm

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

**Members:**

Councillors S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), R Barrett, D Dodeja, Mrs A Grigg, Ms J Hart, Ms J Hedges, Mrs S Jones, Mrs J Lea, L Leonard, A Lion and Mrs J H Whitehouse

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

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<p><b>PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS TO ATTEND</b></p>
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**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**

The notes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 8 September 2010 will follow.

**5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 5 - 10)**

(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. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION (Pages 11 - 24)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**7. REVIEW OF THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY ACTION PLAN (Pages 25 - 34)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2010/11 SIX MONTH PROGRESS REPORT ON KEY ACTION PLAN (Pages 35 - 48)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**9. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK ACTION PLAN 6 MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT (Pages 49 - 60)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**10. HOUSING DIRECTORATE'S SERVICE STRATEGIES ON ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR & HOUSING (Pages 61 - 92)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**11. 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.

**12. FUTURE MEETINGS**

To consider the forward programme of meeting dates for the Panel. The next scheduled meeting of the Panel is on 27 January 2011 at 5.30p.m. and then on:

28 April 2011 at 5.30p.m.



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## TERMS OF REFERENCE - STANDING PANEL

**Title:** Housing

**Status:** Standing Panel

**Terms of Reference:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Chairman:** Cllr Stephen Murray

## Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel – 2010/2011

Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Scheduled Date	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
(1) Revised Date for meeting scheduled for 28 April 2011	Low	July 2010	<b>Completed</b> - 29 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	<del>29 July 2010</del> <del>8 September</del> (Extra Ordinary Meeting) 28 October 2010 27 January 2011; and 28 April 2011 (Date to be reviewed)
(2) Presentation on Homelessness Prevention	Low	July 2010	<b>Completed</b> - 29 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	
(3) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants	High	July 2010	<b>Completed</b> - 29 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	
(4) Review of Housing Performance Indicators	Low	July 2010	<b>Completed</b> - 29 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	
(5) Continuous Housing Improvement Strategy	High	July 2010	<b>Not yet produced (due to other commitments)</b> – Deferred to January 2011 or March 2011 meeting	
(6) Value for Money Strategy in the Provision of Housing Services	High	July 2010	<b>Not yet produced (due to other commitments)</b> – Deferred to January 2011 or March 2011 meeting	
(7) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	High	July 2010	<b>Completed</b> - 29 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	
(8) Housing Service Strategy on Information (Review and update)	Medium	July 2010	<b>On agenda for 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010</b>	
(9) Housing Service Strategy on the Private Rented Sector (Review and update)	Medium	July 2010	<b>Completed</b> - 29 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	

(10) Housing Service Strategy on Empty Properties (Review and update)	Medium	July 2010	<b>Not yet produced (due to other commitments) – Deferred to January 2011 meeting</b>
(11) Housing Service Strategy on Tenant Participation (Review and update)	Medium	July 2010	<b>Drafted, but not finalised, or consulted upon with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation (due to other commitments) – Deferred to January 2011 meeting</b>
(12) Tenant Participation Impact Assessment	High	July 2010	<b>Completed - 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010</b>
(13) 12 Month Progress Report on Housing Strategy Action Plan 2009/10	Low	July 2010	<b>Completed - 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010</b>
(14) Housing Strategy Action Plan 2010/11	High	July 2010	<b>Completed - 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010</b>
(15) Review of Housing Service Standards	High	July 2010	<b>Completed - 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010</b>
(16) Six-monthly Progress Report on the Housing Regulatory Framework Action Plan	Low	October 2010	<b>On agenda for 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010</b>
(17) Six-monthly Progress Report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan	Low	October 2010	<b>On agenda for 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010</b>
(18) Homelessness Strategy – Action Plan Progress Report	Low	October 2010	<b>On agenda for 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010</b>



(19) Housing Service Strategy on Rent Arrears (Review and update)	Medium	October 2010	<b>Not yet produced (due to other commitments) –</b> Deferred to January 2011 meeting
(20) Housing Service Strategy on Anti-social Behaviour (Review and update)	Medium	October 2010	<b>On agenda for 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010</b>
(21) Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency (Review and update)	Medium	October 2010	<b>On agenda for 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010</b>
(22) Briefing on the proposed Council rent increase for 2010/11	Low	March 2011	<b>Not yet required</b>
(23) 12-monthly Progress report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan	Low	March 2011	<b>Not yet required</b>
(24) Six-monthly Progress report on Housing Strategy Action Plan 2010/11	Low	March 2011	<b>Not yet required</b>
(25) HRA Business Plan 2011/12	High	March 2011	<b>Not yet required</b>
(26) Annual Report on the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme	Low	March 2011	<b>Not yet required</b>

(27) HouseMark Benchmarking Report on Value for Money of Housing Services	Medium	March 2011	<b>Not yet required</b>	
<b>Items added after the original Work Programme was agreed</b>				
(28) Housing Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan and Progress Report	Low	July 2010	<b>Completed - 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010</b>	
(29) Tenant Satisfaction Surveys 2009/10 – Comparisons with other stock-retained councils	Low	July 2010	<b>Completed - 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010</b>	
(30) Review of Proposed Licence Conditions for Park Homes - Referred by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to a Special Meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Panel	High	September 2010	<b>Completed – 8<sup>th</sup> September 2010</b>	
(31) Pre-scrutiny of report to Cabinet on the likely cessation of Government funding for the Homelessness Prevention Service, and the future of the Service	High	October 2010	<b>On agenda for 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010</b>	

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 28 October 2010**

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

**Subject: Homelessness Prevention Service**

**Officer contact for further information:  
Roger Wilson extension 4419**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins extension 4607**

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

**The Housing Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider the attached report on the future funding of the Homelessness Prevention Service and pass on their comments to both the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Cabinet.**

### **Report:**

1. At its meeting on 9 September 2010, when considering performance on a range of Council services and cost indicators including homelessness, Members of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel shared the concern of officers that performance on homelessness may go down if the Homelessness Prevention Service was discontinued. The Panel appreciated that, apart from the “social cost” of either reducing or losing the service, the financial cost to the Council may be greater than the cost of keeping the service. The Panel asked if it could consider (“pre-scrutinise”) the attached report on the future funding of the Homelessness Prevention Service before it was considered by the Cabinet.
2. As due to committee cycles this would not be possible, the Panel asked for the report to be considered instead by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the first instance. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee officer Agenda Planning Group agreed that it would be more appropriate for the Housing Scrutiny Panel to “pre scrutinise” the report as it concerns a service within the Housing Directorate.
3. The Panel is therefore asked to consider the attached report and pass on their comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Cabinet.

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## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference:** C-*nnn*-2010/11  
**Date of meeting:** 6 December 2010



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio:** Housing

**Subject:** Homelessness Prevention Service – Future Funding

**Responsible Officer:** Roger Wilson (01992 564419).

**Democratic Services Officer:** Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

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

- (1) That, in addition to the Council's current expenditure of £30,000 per annum, should the current Government grant funding of £60,000 per annum cease or reduce from 2011/2012 onwards, a CSB growth item for the General Fund be agreed, in order to continue to fund the full cost of the existing Homelessness Prevention Service;**
- (2) That the eventual amount of CSB growth be set, dependent on the actual resultant shortfall, up to a maximum amount of £60,000 per annum;**
- (3) That the existing 3 FTE temporary Homelessness Prevention Officer posts be made permanent; and**
- (4) That the comments of the Housing Scrutiny Panel be considered.**

### **Executive Summary:**

1. The Homelessness Prevention Service was introduced in January 2003, and has proved to be a great success and has brought a huge reduction in the level of homelessness acceptances and has also led to a high number of people being able to remain in their own homes.

2. The service has also brought significant savings to the General Fund as only a very small number of single homeless applicants had to be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Currently, only 5 people are being accommodated in this way with in addition less people being placed in the Council's Homeless Persons' Hostel and only 2 homeless applicants living in the Council's housing stock (for management reasons), which was not the case prior to the Homelessness Prevention Service being introduced.

3. The number of cases being dealt with through homelessness prevention exceeds, by far, the number of resultant cases being dealt with as homeless and requiring accommodation. This ensures that any unnecessary homelessness applications no longer occur.

4. Homelessness Prevention Officers provide a comprehensive service with a range of initiatives at their disposal to assist them with resolving housing difficulties for clients. During the period 2005/2006 to 2009/2010, the Prevention Service dealt with a total of 2,999 cases, of which 2,410 (80%) were prevented.

5. The Council currently employs 1 full time Senior Homelessness Prevention Officer and 2 full time Homelessness Prevention Officers employed on temporary contracts, jointly funded by the General Fund and a Government grant.

6. The Government grant of £60,000 ends on 31 March 2011 and there has been no indication that any further funding will be received after this date. Due to the uncertainty, the Cabinet are being asked to consider the future of the service should the Government not provide any further funding. When taking into account the additional expenditure that will arise through the increase in the numbers being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, due to any reduction in the Homelessness Prevention Service, it is recommended that should the current Government grant funding of £60,000 per annum cease or reduce from 2011/2012 onwards, a CSB growth item for the General Fund be agreed, in order to fund the full cost of the continuation of the existing Homeless Prevention Service. It is considered that as the additional costs of B&B will exceed the level of the proposed CSB growth (and the possibility of accommodating applicants in existing Council properties); this "spend to save" approach is the most appropriate course of action.

#### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

If the service continues at its current staffing levels, the prevention of homelessness will continue. However, if the service was discontinued or reduced, the resultant costs in providing increasing numbers of bed and breakfast and Hostel placements, (and the possibility of accommodating applicants in existing Council properties), would far exceed the cost to the General Fund of continuing with the Homeless Prevention Service at its current staffing levels. When taking into account the additional expenditure that will arise due to any reduction in the Homelessness Prevention Service, it is considered that this "spend to save" approach is the most appropriate course of action.

#### **Other Options for Action:**

1. Discontinue the Homelessness Prevention Service
2. Continue with the Homelessness Prevention Service with reduced staffing.

#### **Report:**

##### **Introduction**

1. The Homelessness Prevention Service was introduced in January 2003, and has proved to be a great success, has brought a huge reduction in the level of homelessness acceptances, led to a high number of people being able to remain in their own homes, and resulted in significant savings to the Council's General Fund.

2. The service has brought savings to the General Fund as only a very small number of single homeless applicants have had to be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Indeed, at the time of writing this report, there are only 5 applicants being accommodated in bed and breakfast, compared to 35 applicants on average in 2002/2003, just prior to the service being introduced. In addition, only 2 homeless applicants are now living in the Council's housing stock (for management reasons), compared to 202 applicants being accommodated in this way prior to the Homelessness Prevention Service being introduced. Furthermore, less people are being placed in the Council's Homeless Persons' Hostel

3. The number of cases being dealt with through homelessness prevention exceeds by far the resultant number of cases being dealt with as homeless and needing accommodation. This has ensured that any “unnecessary” homeless applications no longer occur. However, despite this “gate keeping” approach, the Council’s statutory duties are still met under the Housing Act 1996 PT VII as amended, with homelessness applications being received from any person who require that safety net, investigated and, where required, resulting in the provision of accommodation.

4. Homelessness Prevention Officers now provide a comprehensive service, with a range of initiatives at their disposal to assist them with resolving the housing difficulties for clients they are seeking to serve, including:

- Epping Forest Housing Aid (EFHAS) Rent Deposit (Bond) Scheme
- Rental Loan Scheme
- Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- Mediation
- Sanctuary Scheme
- Preventing Re-possession Fund
- Discretionary housing benefit payments
- Negotiation with landlords, banks, families and friends

#### **Success of the Homelessness Prevention Service**

5. The table below demonstrates the success of homelessness prevention work over the years and shows, for each year the number of cases that presented to the Homelessness Prevention Service and the reason, together with the numbers of cases prevented (set out in the final row):

<b>Reason for initially Presenting as Homeless</b>	<b>Case numbers 2005/06</b>	<b>Case numbers 2006/07</b>	<b>Case numbers 2007/08</b>	<b>Case numbers 2008/09</b>	<b>Case numbers 2009/10</b>
Notice to Quit privately rented accommodation	105	123	149	89	58
Family/friends no longer willing to accommodate	114	175	167	163	93
Domestic violence, harassment	61	59	83	71	57
Relationship breakdown (non violent)	79	37	50	54	74

<b>Reason for initially Presenting as Homeless</b>	<b>Case numbers 2005/06</b>	<b>Case numbers 2006/07</b>	<b>Case numbers 2007/08</b>	<b>Case numbers 2008/09</b>	<b>Case numbers 2009/10</b>
RSL/Council tenancy at risk	55	32	46	30	20
Repossession affordability	143	69	44	92	68
Other	49	71	114	126	179
<b>Total cases</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>549</b>
<b>Total prevented</b>	<b>460 (76%)</b>	<b>516 (91%)</b>	<b>523 (80%)</b>	<b>460 (74%)</b>	<b>451 82%)</b>

6. As can be seen, during the period set out in the above table, the Prevention Service dealt with a total of 2,999 cases, of which 2,410 (80%) have been prevented. This has been a considerable achievement. These results have had a direct impact on not only the homelessness acceptance rate, which has significantly reduced during the same period, but also the quality of life for the applicants involved.

### **Current Funding of the Homelessness Prevention Service**

7. When the Homelessness Prevention Service was first introduced in January 2003, one full-time Homelessness Prevention Officer post was created, fully-funded from a Government grant to assist local authorities in preventing homelessness. In November 2003, the Council received a further Government grant to assist in meeting the Government's target to avoid the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by families. This further grant was invested in an additional full-time Homeless Prevention Officer being employed. In 2004/2005, the Government grant reduced and, as a result, the Cabinet agreed that, due to the success of the service, the shortfall at that time of £8,000 per annum would be funded from the General Fund to enable it to continue.

8. In April 2006, the Government awarded the Council a further grant, making a total of £60,000 per annum. The Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 10 April 2006 (Minute 183 refers) that this further funding would be used to appoint a full time Senior Homelessness Prevention Officer to lead the Team, part funded from the further Government grant, with the General Fund meeting the shortfall at that time of £19,000 per annum.



9. As a result, the Council currently employs 1 full time Senior Homelessness Prevention Officer and 2 full time Homelessness Prevention Officers, employed on temporary contracts. The posts are currently funded as follows:

Government Grant	£60,000 per annum
General Fund	£30,000 per annum
<b>Total</b>	<b>£90,000 per annum</b>

10. In addition to the 3 FTE staff on temporary contracts, as with most other local authorities, it has been possible to shift the emphasis from homelessness investigation case work to prevention. This has resulted in 2 full-time homelessness investigation officers being seconded to the Homelessness Prevention Team, (with the Team now consisting of 5 FTE), leaving the need for only one remaining Investigation Officer.

### **Future Funding**

11. The Government grant of £60,000 per annum ends on 31 March 2011 and there has been no indication that any further funding will be received after this date which will have serious implications for the service. Indeed, the expectation is that the funding will cease from the end of the current financial year. The Cabinet is therefore asked to consider a CSB growth item for the General Fund of up to £60,000 per annum to fund the expected shortfall.

12. In 2009/2010, the Council had an average of 8 single homeless applicants placed in bed and breakfast accommodation as they could not be placed elsewhere for sound management reasons. The cost of bed and breakfast accommodation in 2009/2010 was £87,239 exclusive of management charges, being applicant's travel expenses, accountancy, legal and audit costs. Due to the Council receiving less Housing Benefit subsidy (68%) from the Government (in order to discourage authorities from placing applicants in temporary accommodation) to meet the associated Housing Benefit costs, the net cost to the Council exclusive of management charges was £27,916. However, it is important to note that from 1 April 2010, the amount of subsidy received has reduced to 58%.

13. If funding for the service reduced by £60,000, there is little doubt that the numbers placed in bed and breakfast would increase. The average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation is around 2 months, at a net cost of approximately £1,910 per applicant inclusive of management charges based on 2009/2010 costs and 2010/2011 subsidy levels. Therefore, the Council would only need to accommodate a further 32 applicants each year in bed and breakfast accommodation for it to be more costly to the General Fund than funding the entire grant shortfall. **This is equivalent to around (only) 5 additional homeless applicants in bed and breakfast at any one time.**

14. If the Cabinet did not agree CSB growth of up to £60,000, it would result in the numbers of staff fulfilling the homelessness statutory function reducing by 2 FTE which, including the remaining existing Prevention Officer and the Investigation Officer will create a team of 4 staff. Based on last year's figures, a total of 549 cases would need to be managed by only 4 FTE staff which would have a devastating effect on service provision.

## **Effect on the Service**

15. The Council has a responsibility to meet all of its statutory functions in respect of homelessness. The remaining 4 staff would have to undertake both investigative and a little prevention work. Bearing in the mind the complexity and time-consuming nature of prevention work, for example, time being spent on each mortgage rescue case being measured in days, the majority of cases would almost certainly have to be dealt with as homeless investigations. Without the prevention work being undertaken, and based on the fact that, in 2009/2010, 98 investigations led to 48 applicants being accommodated (around 50%), potentially, around half of the 549 applicants initially presenting as homeless (i.e. 275 applicants) could have required accommodation.

16. In 2009/2010, 264 properties were let to new Introductory Tenants. Bearing in mind the number of cases that would be dealt with as homeless investigations by a reduced number of Homeless staff if the service was discontinued, there is every likelihood that this would result in all, or if not most, of the Council's future lettings being made to homeless households, with most other applicants on the Housing Register being overlooked.

17. When taking into account the case-load last year, already referred to in Paragraph 14 of this report, (and the potential for the numbers of cases increasing), it is considered that if the CSB growth of up to £60,000 is not agreed, it would result in huge numbers of homeless applicants being placed in either B&B accommodation or the Council's housing stock, in order for the Council to be able to meet its statutory responsibilities under the homeless legislation.

18. In addition, any reduction in the service would have a serious impact on the Council's performance on a range of indicators including:

- Number (and length of stay) of single homeless households placed in B&B accommodation
- Number of families placed in B&B accommodation
- Number of households (and length of stay) in Hostel accommodation
- Number of households in other temporary accommodation
- Average time to complete homeless enquiries
- Percentage of total lettings made to homeless households
- Finally, and not least, there would be a significant impact on the quality of life of both homeless and non-homeless households

## Financial and other Effects of reducing the Homelessness Prevention Service

19. The following table sets out the financial implications compared to numbers of staff employed to carry out the Council's statutory homeless function, and demonstrates the negative impact of having any less than 6 FTE staff carrying out the Council's statutory duties under the Homelessness Legislation. It also includes an indication of the potential numbers of homeless applicants who could be accommodated in the Council's housing stock:

<b>Numbers of Homeless staff (Prevention and Investigation)</b>	<b>Casework Capacity</b>	<b>Additional Cost to the General Fund of staffing (£ per annum)</b>	<b>Average No. of additional people in B&amp;B above which it would be more costly to General Fund than staffing costs</b>	<b>Potential additional numbers of homeless applicants accommodated in the Council's housing stock, B&amp;B and Hostel</b>
3	324	Nil	N/A	202
4	432	Nil	N/A	134
5	540	30,000	3	66
6	648	60,000	5	Nil

20. If no additional funding was made available, it would result in 2 FTE being made redundant. Due to one post being covered by an agency worker and one part-time member of staff joining the Council only recently, redundancy costs are expected fairly low at around £6,000.

### Conclusion

21. When taking into account the additional costs of bed and breakfast accommodation, the effect on homeless and other Housing Register applicants and the inevitable negative effect on the Council's performance, it can only be concluded that not meeting the grant shortfall and reducing the Homeless Prevention Service is not a prudent or appropriate option.

22. Therefore, should the current Government grant funding of £60,000 per annum cease or reduce from 2011/2012 onwards, a CSB growth item of up to £60,000 funded from the General Fund is recommended, in order to fund the full cost of the continuation of the existing Homeless Prevention Service. It is further recommended that the 3 FTE temporary Homelessness Prevention Officers be made permanent to ensure that they do not leave due to the uncertainty of their temporary contracts taking with them their experience and skills that they have developed. It is considered that as the additional costs of B&B alone will exceed the level of the proposed CSB growth (and there is a risk that homeless applicants could be placed in much needed Council properties), this "spend to save" approach is considered to be the most appropriate course of action.

23. Consideration has been given to savings being made elsewhere in order to meet the Grant shortfall. However, the only two options within the Housing General Fund would be to reduce the homelessness function which, for the reasons set out in the report would not be appropriate, or to reduce the Private Sector Housing staff establishment by 2 FTE staff, which would be against the Cabinet's recent decision to increase staff in this area.

### ***Value for Money Audit***

24. At the request of the Director of Housing, the Council's Chief Internal Auditor has undertaken a Value for Money audit on the Homeless Prevention Service.

25. Although the report has only been drafted, the provisional view concludes that the Homelessness Prevention Service is providing excellent value for money. It further states that the service has developed a pro-active approach to homelessness prevention, which, together with the good working relationships it has with partner agencies, has resulted in a substantial reduction in homeless acceptances in the District. It confirms that an increase in homeless acceptances will have a major impact on Council property lettings with non homeless Housing Register applicants having to wait significantly longer for a Council property as available properties would be allocated mostly to homeless households.

26. The draft report draws attention to the social costs of homelessness including psychological upset for the household, health problems and the effect on children etc. Homelessness prevention can strengthen an individual's social network which can increase resilience against future homelessness as well as enhancing peoples' well-being and quality of life.

### **Resource Implications:**

If recommendations are agreed:  
General Fund Growth item of up to £60,000 per annum  
Continued General Fund funding of £30,000 per annum

### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

The Council's homelessness duties under the Housing Act 1996 will continue to be met.

### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

None identified

## **Consultation Undertaken:**

1. At its meeting on 9 September 2010, when considering performance on a range of Council services and cost indicators including homelessness, Members of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel shared the concern of officers that performance on homelessness may go down if the Homelessness Prevention Service was discontinued. The Panel appreciated that, apart from the “social cost” of either reducing or losing the service, the financial cost to the Council may be greater than the cost of keeping the service. The Panel asked if it could consider (“pre-scrutinise”) this report before it was considered by the Cabinet.

2. However, as due to committee cycles this would not be possible, the Panel asked for the report to be considered instead by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the first instance. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee officer Agenda Planning Group agreed that it would be more appropriate for the Housing Scrutiny Panel to “pre scrutinise” the report as it concerns a service within the Housing Directorate. The Panel considered the report at its meeting on 29 October 2010 and the Panel’s comments are as follows:

### **Add comments here**

3. The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has been consulted on the matter at the Housing Directorate’s quarterly Housing and CAB Liaison Meeting. The CAB has stressed the importance of the service and agrees that the Council should continue with the service at existing staffing levels.

4. A consultation exercise has been undertaken with all other interested partners. The results are attached at Appendix One.

5. All Homelessness Prevention staff have been consulted on the report and agree with its content. A copy of the report has been sent to side for comments. The Unison Branch Secretary has responded as follows:

6. From the outset, the branch will always expect the Council to resist from making any compulsory redundancies. However, in this instance it would be very short-sighted to seek to save money which in the long term will end up costing the Council considerably in providing temporary accommodation. Furthermore, and maybe more important than looking at the financial gains or losses involved, the Council has a civil and moral duty to provide this service. The figures set out in the report speak for themselves; clearly showing there is a need to provide this service and that those providing it are doing an excellent job. In the circumstances, Unison are pleased to pledge the support from the Epping Forest branch of Unison in the continued provision of the Council’s Homelessness Prevention Service.

## **Background Papers:**

Homelessness Strategy 2009/10 to 2011/12

Value for Money Audit on the Homeless Prevention Service

**Impact Assessments:**

A Customer Impact Assessment has been completed on the implications of the Homelessness Prevention Service not being continued at its current levels, as this would be a major change in policy. A copy of the Assessment is available on request.

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? Yes

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? Yes

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

**To be completed**

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?

**To be completed**

## APPENDIX ONE

### RESULTS OF CONSULTATION EXERCISE WITH PARTNER AGENCIES

Organisation	Benefits of service	Effects and implications of withdrawal of service
<b>Manager, MOAT Housing Ltd</b>	<p>“This service is exceptionally important, especially in the current economic climate. We have a very good relationship with the homelessness prevention team, which improves the effectiveness of the scheme.</p> <p>There are many benefits of the scheme; people are able to remain in their current home so there are no moving costs, no hassle of selling, no need for children to change schools, people remain near family and friends and are still close to their jobs. Many households have told us that it is such a relief that no-one need know that they have had to sell their home”.</p>	<p>“The people we help are families, elderly or disabled. Without the mortgage rescue scheme homes would be repossessed and households become homeless. This would prove more difficult and costly for the Council”.</p>
<b>Secretary, EFHAS</b>	<p>“EFDC has the knowledge and expertise in the areas of housing and benefits issues.</p> <p>EFHAS has found that people often need help to get over the ‘first hurdle’ when seeking accommodation in the private sector, and we are able to do this by providing the rent deposit guarantee”.</p>	<p>“Without the help of EFHAS, I think many households would end up homeless”</p>
<b>Family Mediation Officer, RELATE</b>	<p>“I class this scheme as being successful. Most of our work has been centred on young people, who are particularly vulnerable. Mediation has sometimes helped the young people to resolve the issues themselves”.</p>	<p>“If there was no support for these young people, who knows where they would end up? I think that by not resolving issues now, it would cause them more problems later on”.</p>

**APPENDIX ONE**

**RESULTS OF CONSULTATION EXERCISE WITH PARTNER AGENCIES  
(CONTINUED)**

<b>Manager, SAFE project</b>	“We work very closely with the prevention team, who are in regular communication with the families. This helps to manage the risks to the individual, the families and to our staff”.	“The vast majority of our referrals come through the homelessness prevention team. Without the team, extremely vulnerable young people, often only 16 or 17 years old, would probably become homeless”.
<b>CLG Homelessness Specialist Advisor, East &amp; Midlands Regions</b>	“Epping Forest DC provides a good homelessness prevention service and actively work to prevent clients from becoming homeless. This has assisted Epping to reduce the number of households applying as homeless and being placed in temporary accommodation”.	“The pressures on the service are only likely to increase in the next 6-18 months as changes to benefits and increased austerity measures affect people locally”.





## SCRUTINY



## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 28 October 2010**

**Subject: Review of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan**

**Officer contact for further information: Roger Wilson extension 4419**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins extension 4607**

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

**The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to undertake its 6-month review of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan which is attached as an appendix to the report.**

### **Report:**

1. 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 changes it was agreed that the Council's Strategy would be reviewed every three years. The Strategy links with the Council's Housing Strategy, Allocations Scheme, the Housing Services Strategy on Housing Advice and Allocations, and the Council Plan. The Strategy sets out achievements since 2006 and incorporates the needs and demands on the service and includes an Action Plan setting out work that needs to be undertaken over the coming three years.
2. 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 has been added to the Panel's Work Programme.
3. The Panel is asked to undertake the review of the Action Plan which is attached as an appendix to the agenda.

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**HOMELESS STRATEGY ACTION PLAN – 6 MONTH REVIEW BY THE HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL– OCTOBER 2010**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Progress</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Continue to keep the number of households in temporary accommodation to a minimum and within the Government's target	High	On-going	The Council met the Government's target (of reducing the numbers living in temporary accommodation by 50%) 3 years before the 2010 deadline	Target continues to be achieved with only 24 households in Hostel accommodation and 22 in other temporary housing	Housing Options Manager
Continue to keep the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for the single homeless to a minimum	High	On-going	Bed and Breakfast accommodation will only be used for the single homeless where there are severe management difficulties.	The Council has only 5 single homeless people living in bed and breakfast accommodation.	Asst Housing Options Manager (Homelessness)

Action	Priority	Target Date	Comments	Progress	Responsibility
Undertake a fresh tendering exercise for the Leader Lodge scheme	High	January 2011	As the proposal to develop the site with L&Q on shared ownership basis has fallen through, the scheme must be re-tendered	The scheme was retendered and the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed the site be sold to, and redeveloped by Moat. Moat subsequently withdrew due to concerns about North Weald being a designated protected area. The second best tender was not considered to be acceptable. Options for the future of Leader Lodge are being re-evaluated.	Director of Housing
Work with Brentwood and Uttlesford District Council to investigate cross boundary provision for young parents	High	January 2011	Site identified in Ongar. Funding agreed. Preferred partner East Living has been appointed	Currently on-site with completion being due in January 2011. EFDC now has nomination rights to 8 (of a total of 13) properties	Director of Housing

Action	Priority	Target Date	Comments	Progress	Responsibility
Continue to ensure 40% affordable housing on development sites	High	On-going	This now achieved through local plan	Through this approach, 133 new affordable homes are due to be completed this year with a further 193 new affordable homes in 2011/2012. In addition, developers are currently proposing provision of around 290 affordable homes on sites that do not yet have planning permission	Director of Housing
Work with Essex County Council and other partners on the delivery of appropriate provision for travelling families	High	March 2012	Work has commenced on a "Delivery Strategy" which will form part of the Epping Forest Gypsies and Travellers Plan, due to be finalised late 2009. The estimated number of pitches required by 2012 is around 34.	The requirement to provide a specified number of pitches for travelling families has been withdrawn. Pitch provision is now being dealt with under normal planning processes. The Delivery Strategy (drafted under the previous proposals) needs to be revised to reflect the changes. Housing officers are working with the Gypsy Roma & Traveller Project Group on a range of issues.	Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources)

Action	Priority	Target Date	Comments	Progress	Responsibility
To continuously review the financial support to given to the Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme	High	On-going	This is essential in tackling homelessness.	The Cabinet agreed in July 2009, that additional Government grant funding of £7,500 received, be passed to EFHAS and that the amount underwritten be increased to £60,000. However, in discussion with EFHAS, the Housing Options Manager has been advised that they may not be able to assist with any additional bonds, unless the Council assists them further	Housing Options Manager
Develop the use of the recently introduced Mortgage Rescue Scheme	High	On-going	Key to this objective is maintaining good working relations with Citizens Advice Bureau and Moat.	Completed 6 Mortgage Rescues being more than any other authority in Essex.	Housing Options Manager
Expand the "Sanctuary" Scheme for victims of domestic violence	Medium	On-going	5 schemes currently in place	6 Scheme now in place	Housing Options Manager

Action	Priority	Target Date	Comments	Progress	Responsibility
Convert the former Caretaker's flat for rooms for homeless 16-17 year olds at Norway House	Medium	September 2009	Completed	Completed	Asst Housing Options Manager (Homelessness)
To develop small scale "night stop" scheme where young single homeless people stay in private accommodation	Medium	December 2009	Prospective households need to be identified	No progress. Some work was undertaken by a local church with very little interest from owners. Scheme not as essential due to the additional provision at Norway House. Suggest action is deleted	Asst Housing Options Manager (Homelessness)
Report to Cabinet for consideration to be given for the Council to fund the homelessness prevention service, should the Government not continue to provide funding	Medium	December 2010	Awaiting decision from the Government.	The Government's Special Advisor on Homelessness has indicated that no further funding will be available for the service. Therefore, a report on the future of the service will be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Panel with their comments being passed to the Housing Portfolio Holder & the Cabinet in December 2010	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)

Action	Priority	Target Date	Comments	Progress	Responsibility
To continuously review the budget for Rental Loan Scheme	Medium	On-going	This is essential in tackling homelessness.	The Housing Portfolio Holder agreed in January 2010, that a virement of £7,000 be made from the finder's fee budget to fund additional rental loans. In 2009/2010 39 households were assisted. There is currently no scope for any further rental loans apart from using monies repaid.	Housing Options Manager
Keep under review the possibility of additional chalets at Norway House	Low	March 2011	This no longer a priority on account of fewer numbers of households in temporary accommodation	Position unchanged	Director of Housing
Improve percentage of homeless decisions within 33 days to 75%	Low	On-going	This no longer a priority on account of the complexity of cases dealt with	Around 45% of homeless decisions are made within 33 days which is due to the complexity of cases.	Housing Options Manager





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## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 28 October 2010**

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

**Subject: Housing Revenue Account Business Plan  
Key Action Plan (2010/11) - Progress Report**

**Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall –  
Director of Housing (01992 564004)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins, extension 4607**

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

**That the Panel considers the Six-Month Progress Report for the Key Action Plan contained within the HRA Business Plan 2010/11 (attached as an Appendix) and provides any feedback to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing accordingly.**

### **Report:**

1. In March 2010, the Council's latest Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan (2010/11) 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. The Six-Month Progress Report on the actions contained within the Key Action Plan 2010/11 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 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.

### **Reason for decision:**

The Scrutiny Panel's Terms of Reference require the Scrutiny Panel to review progress with the Key Action Plan.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to review progress with the Key Action Plan after 6 months.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will be consulted on the Progress Report at its next meeting, which will take place after the Scrutiny Panel's meeting.

**Resource implications:** Nil

**HRA Business Plan 2010/11  
6-MONTH REPORT ON KEY ACTION PLAN (October 2010)**

Action	Corporate Housing Objectives	Responsibility for Achievement	Target Date	Progress (as at 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2010)
<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 (Information/Strategy)	March 2011	<b>Research being undertaken</b> – Diversity profiling is a relatively new concept and senior officers are currently researching the subject, including attendance at seminars.
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	<b>Achieved</b> – September 2010
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	<b>Achieved</b> – The Director of Finance and ICT responded on behalf of EFDC, explaining that the Council did not support the proposals, due to the significant effect they would have on the General Fund and the proposed amount of debt the Council's HRA would have to take on, which is currently debt-free. In October, the current Government's Housing Minister announced that a statutory replacement regime would be included within the forthcoming Localism Bill, along the lines of the previous Government's proposals (but with the amount of debt for each authority not yet assessed), which would replace the current housing subsidy system, and <b>require</b> local authorities to take on specific amounts of debt, from April 2012

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	<b>No Progress</b> – This has been delayed due to other commitments <b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b>
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	<b>No progress</b> - This has also been delayed due to other commitments. <b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b>
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	<b>In Progress</b> – A number of individual Housing Excellence Plans have been produced. A difficulty has arisen since there is currently a hiatus with the Key Lines of Enquiries (KLOEs). In October, the Government announced the anticipated proposed abolition of the Tenant Services Authority and the Audit Commission. Prior to this, the TSA abandoned its consultation of new KLOEs to reflect the new Housing Regulatory Framework. Therefore, the current KLOEs do not reflect the current regime. Due to this, and the amount of work involved, the deadline for completion of the Housing Excellence Plans by individual Housing Managers has been extended <b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b>
7) Introduce an electronic records and document management system (Information@Work) for housing files	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Asst. Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources)	March 2011	<b>In Progress and Ahead of Schedule</b> – A lot of work has been undertaken, and the go-live date is currently 25 <sup>th</sup> November 2010
<b>Housing Management</b>				
8) Continue the Home Ownership Grants Scheme in 2010/11, enabling 6-12 tenants to purchase their own home and vacate their Council property for occupation by a housing applicant	HO 1	Housing Resources Manager	March 2011	<b>In Progress</b> – Based on the recommendations of the Housing Scrutiny Panel, the Cabinet agreed to reduce the amount of Home Ownership

				<p>Grant from £34,000 to £28,000 this year, but to increase the number of grants available from 5 to 6. Funding for a further 1 grant was carried forward from last year, totalling 7 grants available this year.</p> <p>26 applications have been received this year and a shortlist of 7 applicants has been compiled, in accordance with the agreed criteria, with a further 8 applications placed on a Reserve List. The shortlisted applicants appear to be progressing well.</p>
<p>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:</p> <p>(a) Production of a common application form for all HomeOption local authority partners;</p> <p>(b) Introduction of a facility for tenants to apply for the housing on-line;</p> <p>(c) Advertising vacant properties available for private rent.</p>	HO 2	Housing Options Manager	March 2011	<p><b>In Progress</b> - The Housing Scrutiny Panel has reviewed and considered options for the development of the HomeOption Scheme, and discussions are currently taking place with other 5 local authority partners within the Consortium.</p> <p>Once an approach has been finalised, the agreed changes will be implemented.</p>
<p>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</p>	HO 2	Director of Housing	March 2011	<p><b>Delayed</b> – An appointment of an existing member of staff was made to the new post, however, it has not yet been possible to proceed with the appointment, for confidential reasons associated with the appointee's current employment</p>
<p>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</p>	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Director of Housing	Dec 2010	<p><b>Delayed</b> – Protracted negotiations with the freeholder of the site (a charity) over the terms of its proposed lease to the selected housing association are still ongoing.</p> <p><b>Revised Target Date – July 2011</b></p>

<p>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)</p>	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Director of Housing	March 2011	<p><b>Delayed</b> – It is not currently viable for the Council to develop new affordable housing itself, due to complex accounting regulations that currently require the General Fund to meet a significant amount of the the loan repayments of any loan taken out by the Council.</p> <p>The Leader of Council has written to the Secretary of State, asking for the regulations to be changed. The response explained that the CLG is aware of the problem, and was seeking to overcome the problem.</p> <p>No change has yet been made, but the change may be made through the proposed legislation to introduce HRA Self Financing (see (3) above).</p> <p><b>Revised Target Date - July 2011</b></p>
<b>Tenant Participation</b>				
<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	<p><b>Achieved</b> – The Council's first Annual Report to Tenants under the new Housing Regulatory Framework was published just ahead of the 1<sup>st</sup> October deadline.</p> <p>This included details of performance against the 21 tenant-selected indicators in 2009/10, details of how the Council meets the new National Standards and a leaflet setting out all the Council's own Housing Service Standards, including revised ones following the Housing Scrutiny Panel's annual review of performance against the Housing Service Standards.</p>
<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	<p><b>Achieved</b> – The first report was provided to the Federation in July 2010, and the next report (for Quarter 2) will be provided in November 2010</p>



15) Introduce and maintain four "Tenant Talkback Panels", providing fora to provide qualitative feedback on the following housing services:  (a) Disabilities (b) Repairs and maintenance (c) Housing information (d) Housing allocations	HO 2 / 3 / 4	Tenant Participation Officer	Sept 2010	<b>Achieved</b> – In consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, it has been agreed that there should be just one "Talkback Panel", comprising a pool of interested tenants who can attend meetings on specific issues. The Talkback Panel has been convened on a few occasions to discuss repairs and maintenance issues, and once to review the draft Annual Report to Tenants (see (13) above).
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	HO 4	Tenant Participation Officer	June 2010	<b>Achieved</b> – June 2010
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	HO 2 / 3 / 4	Tenant Participation Officer	Dec 2010	<b>No Progress</b> – This has not yet been undertaken, due to other commitments
<b>Supporting People and Supported Housing</b>				
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	<b>Not Achieved</b> – It was not possible to submit a tender, since EFDC is not currently accredited with the Telecare Services Association (TSA). See (20) below for information on progress with TSA accreditation.
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	<b>In Progress</b> – Now that the extension to the Careline Control Centre has been completed (September 2010), arrangements are being made, where possible, for Careline to monitor EFDC's CCTV activity from live feeds.
20) Seek accreditation of the Council's Careline Service from the Telecare Services Association (TSA)	HO 2	Housing Manager (Older People's Services)	Dec 2010	<b>In Progress</b> - It was not possible to complete the TSA accreditation process, due to the undertaking of the extension to the Careline Control Centre.

				However, the extension has now been completed and EFDC's accreditation with the TSA is nearly complete.
21) Undertake a Strategic Review of the Council's Older People's Accommodation	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Asst Director of Housing (Operations)	Dec 2010	<p><b>Limited Progress</b> – The catalyst for the Strategic Review was EFDC's support for the PFI Bid by Essex CC to the Department of Health (DoH) for the development of an Extra-Care Housing Scheme in Epping Forest. The Council agreed in principle to the provision of free land for the proposed scheme and, because one potential source of a site for re-development would be an existing EFDC sheltered housing scheme, it was agreed to undertake a Strategic Review of the Council's Older People's Accommodation, jointly-funded by Essex CC.</p> <p>Essex CC's expression of Interest was accepted, and it was invited to submit an Outline Business Case for the PFI proposal.</p> <p>A consultant was jointly-selected by EFDC and Essex CC to undertake the review, but has not yet been appointed; this is due to the DoH's PFI programme being suspended, pending the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. In the meantime, Essex CC has stated that it will only jointly-fund the Strategic Review if the DoH proceeds with the PFI Scheme. The Director of Housing has informed Essex CC that EFDC will only undertake the Strategic Review if it is jointly funded by Essex CC.</p> <p><b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b></p>
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	<p><b>Delayed</b> – See (21) above.</p> <p><b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b> (subject to the DoH's PFI Programme going ahead)</p>

23) Expand the provision of supported housing for older people by the Council's Scheme Managers into the community, including for owner occupiers	HO 1 / 2	Housing Manager (Older People's Services)	March 2010	<b>In Progress</b> – This initiative (referred to as the “Hub and Spoke”) follows a review by the Essex Supporting People (SP) Team, and discussions have been held with the SP Team on its implementation. However, following the backdated withdrawal of Government funding for the SP Team, the Team's activities have had to be significantly cut-back, and no further work is being undertaken on the Hub and Spoke initiative. Notwithstanding this, it is still Housing's intention to introduce the Hub and Spoke approach in Epping Forest. <b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b>
<b>Housing Repairs and Maintenance</b>				
24) Implement a programme for repairs and maintenance expenditure over 5 and 30 years.	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager / Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	Ongoing	<b>Achieved</b> - The programmes for repairs and maintenance, which are linked to 5 and 30 year Business Plans, are progressing well. The Council has let around 16 Framework Agreements that specialise in areas of work such as Kitchens, Bathrooms, Heating, Rewires, Front Entrance Doors, Upvc Windows, and External Repairs and Redecorations amongst others. These are all focused on preventing homes from becoming non-decent.
25) Implement an upgrade to latest version of Codeman software	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager	Sept 2011	<b>No Longer Required</b> - Due to the cost of the software and its ongoing maintenance, it has been decided that a combination of the existing OHMS software and Excel is used, which is pre-loaded and updated on a continuous basis with remaining-life and condition data and collected from the ongoing Repairs and Redecoration Programme.

26) Publish clear service standards for planned maintenance, Decent Homes, repairs, Right to Repairs Scheme and leaseholder responsibilities, which are available in printed leaflet form and on the web site	HO 3 / 4	Housing Assets Manager	Dec 2010	<p><b>In Progress</b> – A number of service standards have been agreed and published, as part of the Housing Service Standards, but more detailed standards are proposed.</p> <p>Some of the more detailed have been drafted; some are to be completed. Once completed, these leaflets will go to the Talkback Panel for comments, before being published.</p> <p>On target for completion in December 2010.</p>
27) Publish the Voids Standards on the Council's website and issue a copy to all tenants in advance of them undertaking a viewing of a vod property or accepting a new tenancy.	HO 3 / 4	Customer Repairs Manager	Dec 2010	<p><b>No Progress</b> - This is planned to be reviewed as part of the training programme for the new "generic" Housing Repairs Officers, introduced as part of the Repairs Refresh Programme, prior to them starting to working generically from 1 November 2010.</p> <p>The Voids Standard is to be discussed with the Talkback Panel, when it next meets to discuss repairs &amp; maintenance issues.</p> <p><b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b></p>
28) Undertake a review of the repairs responsibilities to ensure they dovetail with other service strategies ie ASBO, introductory tenancies, demoted tenancies	HO 3	Customer Repairs Manager	Dec 2010	<p><b>Achieved</b> -The review has revealed the need to apply a more consistent approach to recharging tenants for aspects of work that are their responsibility as set out in the Tenancy Agreement.</p> <p>A report has been presented to and agreed by the Talkback Panel for repairs &amp; maintenance.</p>
29) Timetable at least one meeting each year with the Tenants Federation to discuss the repairs and maintenance expenditure programme.	HO 3 / 4	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)/ Housing Assets Manager	Ongoing	<p><b>Not Yet Required</b> - This is undertaken annually prior to the publication of the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan; the meeting will be held in March 2010.</p> <p><b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b></p>

30) Introduce Asbestos Record Cards in all properties, and maintain the records for contractors' and tenants' use.	HO 3	Customer Repairs Manager	April 2011	<b>In Progress</b> - This will be included in the specification for the contract for the new Private Repairs Management Contractor to implement once appointed. <b>Revised Target Date – April 2012</b>
31) Undertake 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.	HO 1 / 3	Housing Assets Manager	April 2011	<b>In Progress</b> –Essex CC Social Care is currently undergoing a Service Review, which has resulted in some concerns over the delivery of OT assessments for Council Tenants and other private sector residents. EFDC, along with other councils across Essex, have expressed concerns over the backlog of referrals and the lack of clarity over the future of the OT Service.
32) Explore options whereby emphasis is put on “fix first time” for responsive repairs.	HO 1 / 3	Customer Repairs Manager	Dec 2010	<b>In Progress</b> - This is included in the specification for the contract for the new Private Repairs Management Contractor, to implement once appointed. <b>Revised Target Date – April 2012</b>
33) Seek, through the Essex Hub, a framework agreement with specialist contractors for asbestos removal, door entry installations and maintenance, drainage clearance, as well as ad-hoc repairs where necessary	HO 1 / 3	Housing Assets Manager	March 2011	<b>Partially Achieved</b> - Contracts are now in place for door entry installations and maintenance. Framework Agreements for asbestos removal and off-street parking construction are currently out to tender. Tenders for other works are currently in the process of being drawn up.
34) 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.	HO 3 / 4	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	March 2010	<b>Achieved</b> - This new group, known as the Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group (part of the Talkback Panel) has been formed.
35) To continue with the Repairs Focus Group once set up, and create an action plan for inclusion in the Repairs Refresh Programme	HO 3	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	On going following first meeting	<b>In Progress</b> - The Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group has met on two occasions, with some very positive feedback and suggestions for improvement. The group now meets quarterly.

36) Continue feasibility studies into alternative fuel sources for properties in rural communities where mains gas is not available.	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager	April 2011	<p><b>In Progress</b> - Solar power has been trialled on two properties in rural areas. The benefits of the schemes are to be formally captured and reported to the Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group, Tenant and Leaseholder Federation and the Housing Portfolio Holder.</p> <p>On target for completion by April 2011. The next system to be trialled is air-source heat pumps.</p>
37) Explore the provision of external wall insulation for solid wall constructed properties, and seek grant funding to support future programmes	HO 1 / 3	Housing Assets Manager	April 2011	<p><b>Achieved</b> – This has been explored. However, funding is not currently generous enough for EFDC to pursue this option, as the costs are disproportionately high. Officers are constantly searching for grant options, which may lead to external wall insulation in the future.</p>
38) To review all projects with a contract value in excess of £1m on completion to identify any lessons learnt.	HO 1 / 3 / 4	Housing Assets Manager / Housing Repairs Managers	On-going	<p><b>Not Applicable to Date</b> - This is undertaken on an on-going basis and any lessons learnt are incorporated in any future contracts. However, the majority of housing contracts are long-term contracts over 5 or more years. The next contract to be reviewed is the Springfields Improvement Scheme.</p>
39) Seek to reduce the target response times for routine non-urgent repairs from 6-weeks to 4-weeks	HO 3	Housing Repairs Managers	April 2011	<p><b>In Progress</b> - This requirement is included in the specification for the contract for the new Private Repairs Management Contractor to implement once appointed. The target specified is much more challenging, requiring 98% of all non-urgent repairs to be undertaken in 2-weeks.</p> <p><b>Revised Target Date – April 2012</b></p>

40) Introduce generic repairs and voids officers.	HO 3	Housing Repairs Managers	April 2010	<b>In Progress</b> - This initiative will be introduced on 1 November 2010. <b>Revised Target Date - November 2010</b>
41) Hold site visits at blocks of flats with tenant representatives to monitor repairs to, and the condition of, communal areas	HO 3	Housing Repairs Managers	Apr 2011	<b>In Progress</b> - Following the recruitment of the three new Housing Repairs Manager posts within the Housing Repairs Service, this is to be rolled out by April 2011.
42) Appoint an External Repairs Management Contractor to oversee the combined Building Maintenance Works Unit and Repairs Team as agreed by the Cabinet in March 2008.	HO 1 / 3	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	Aug 2010	<b>In Progress</b> - The consultant appointed to undertake this innovative and unique tender exercise on EFDC's behalf has prepared the third draft of the Invitation To Tender, which incorporates the Service Agreement. Once agreed by the Repairs Advisory Group, the tender will be sent out in early November 2010. <b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b>
43) Implement a range of initiatives, as defined in the Repairs Refresh Programme: <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 review of the current stores systems</li><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></ul>	HO 1 / 3 / 4	External Repairs Management Contractor	Over a 3 year period after appointment.	<b>In Progress</b> - Each of these targets have been included in the contract as "Key Deliverables" for the new Private Repairs Management Contractor to implement, once appointed. Some are linked to stage payments, based on their performance.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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>				
44) To develop a Value for Money Strategy	HO 3	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	March 2010	<b>No Progress</b> - This has been delayed, due to other commitments. <b>Revised Target Date – April 2011</b>
45) To develop a separate Repairs and Maintenance Service Strategy	HO 3	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	July 2010	<b>No progress</b> - This has also been delayed, due to other commitments <b>Revised Target Date – February 2011</b>
46) To seek to include at least one local business on the list of tenderers for all future contracts.	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager / Housing Repairs Managers	On-going	<b>Achieved</b> - This is now a requirement of the Council's Contract Standing Orders, and is being complied with.

#### 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: 28 October 2010**

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

**Subject: Regulatory Framework Action Plan  
6-Monthly Progress Report**

**Officer contact for further information:  
Roger Wilson extension 4419**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins extension 4607**



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

**The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider progress made on the attached Regulatory Framework Action Plan as part of its Work Programme.**

### **Report:**

1. The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) which was introduced in April 2010 regulates Local Authority Housing and is 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 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.
3. However, it was recognised that some actions are required to meet the new Framework and to ensure the Housing Directorate is fully prepared for any Inspection. Therefore, the Panel agreed that a Regulatory Framework Action Plan be put in place. The Panel further agreed that progress on the Action Plan be monitored on a six-monthly basis and that it be added to its Work Programme.
4. On 4 August 2010, two representatives from the TSA visited the Council and met with the Director of Housing and the three Assistant Directors of Housing and the Principal Housing Officer (Information and Strategy). The meeting was very positive and they appeared to be happy with the progress made by the Housing Directorate on the Regulatory Framework.
5. They explained that, in accordance with the Framework, providers will be targeted for Short Notice Inspections if following an assessment of their Annual Report to tenants it is considered that there has been a Regulatory failure. This reduces the likelihood of the Council being targeted. A copy of the Council's Annual Report to tenants is attached to the report and was published on 1 October this year. A copy has been sent to the TSA.
6. The Panel is asked to undertake its 6-monthly review of the Regulatory Framework Action Plan. A copy of the Plan is attached and sets out the latest position on each of the actions.

**Reason for decision:**

The Regulatory Framework Action Plan sets out a list of actions required to ensure compliance with the TSA's new Regulatory Framework. The Housing Scrutiny Panel monitors progress against the Action Plan on a six-monthly basis as part of its Work Programme.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to have a Regulatory Framework Action Plan.

To have a Regulatory Framework Action Plan which is not monitored by the Panel

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have also received a detailed presentation on the TSA's Regulatory Framework and Short Notice Inspections, and will be consulted on progress made on the attached Regulatory Framework Action Plan their next 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 – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
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	Completion of a Tenant Participation Impact Statement 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	Achieved	Tenant Participation Impact Statement completed and approved by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and the Housing Scrutiny Member Panel.
4	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	Achieved	Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have been consulted and have selected 21 performance indicators which they will monitor on a quarterly basis.

## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
5	Submit an application for the Customer Service Excellence Award	Receipt of the new Award will continue to demonstrate the Council's commitment and success in providing excellent customer service, following holding the Charter Mark Award for the last 6 years	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)	Achieved	Following the one-day initial assessment, the Document Review and the two-day on-site visit, the Assessor has advised that although 11 partial non-compliances are allowed, he had not found any. The Housing Directorate has now been awarded Customer Service Excellence.
5	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	Achieved	Review completed, all Step One & Step Two complaints are monitored and will be published annually and analysed with services being changed when appropriate

## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
7	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	Achieved	Five documents are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRA Business Plan incorporating the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan</li> <li>• Customer Service Excellence Self Assessment</li> <li>• Tenants Handbook</li> <li>• Decent Homes Achievement Case Study</li> <li>• Housing Repairs Refresh Programme Case Study</li> </ul>
8	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)	Achieved	
9	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	Achieved	

## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
10	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	Achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TSA now call local standards local offers</li> <li>• Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have agreed local offers which comprise, Housing Service Standards, Housing Charter &amp; Tenant agreed Action Plan</li> <li>• Tenants consulted on proposed approach in their Annual Report</li> <li>• Action Plan agreed with Federation with all tenants being consulted in the next edition of "Housing News"</li> <li>• Housing Service standards reviewed and revised in consultation with the Federation with the latest standards being sent to all tenants in their Annual Report</li> </ul>

## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
Page 55					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Federation have considered performance against the standards</li> <li>• Federation have agreed 21 tenant selected performance indicators which they monitor quarterly with performance against these being reported in the Annual Report to tenants.</li> </ul>
11	Publish in the Annual Report to tenants 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	Achieved	
12	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	August 2010	Deadline amended Strategy – March 2011 Action Plan – December 2010
13	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)	August 2010	Deadline amended to March 2011

## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
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)	August 2010	Group has been formed, but not required to meet yet. In the meantime, being monitored by Housing Management Team
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)	August 2010	Progress has been made, with an initial audit undertaken, but an action plan needs to be drawn up
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	September 2010	Some achieved
17	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	October 2010	



## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
18	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	Approach currently being researched through officers attending courses
19	Update all Customer 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) Appropriate Managers	December 2010	Customer Impact assessment on Housing Management Rent Arrears Older People’s Services Allocations drafted.
20	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	
21	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	
22	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	

## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
23	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.	
24	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	
Page 58	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	
26	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)	On-going	Prepared, but continuing to develop
27	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)	On-going	Prepared, but continuing to develop

## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
28	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)	On-going	Prepared, but continuing to develop
29	Continue with the Annual events Plan, updated quarterly, which will be considered at each quarterly Customer Improvement 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	
Page 59	Discuss Value for Money initiatives, potential savings, and ways in which savings can be re-invested at Quarterly Continuous Improvement meetings	No comments	Director of Housing	On-going	
31	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	

## Regulatory Framework – Action Plan – Updated July 2010

Ref	Action	Comments	Responsible Officer	Deadline	Progress
32	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 were reported to the Housing Scrutiny Panel in March 2010	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)	On-going	
33	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 any Inspection	

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 28 October 2010**

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

**Subject: Housing Directorate's Service Strategies on Anti-Social Behaviour & Housing Information**

**Officers to contact for further information:**

**Lyndsay Swan extension 4146 (Housing Information Strategy)**

**Roger Wilson extension 4419 (Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins extension 4607**

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

**That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers and endorses the Housing Directorate's Service Strategies on Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Information, 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 13 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 the Housing Directorate in achieving the Customer Service Excellence award and 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 Strategies on Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Information 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 the Housing Directorate in achieving the Customer Service Excellence award and 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 on Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Information.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will be consulted on the Strategies at their November meeting. The Community Safety Partnership will be consulted on the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy at their November meeting. All comments will be given consideration prior to them being agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder.

**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 the Strategies

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 &  
Statement on Anti-Social Behaviour  
Policies and Procedures**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Housing Directorate Service Strategy relates to the Council's approach to the policies and procedures in relation to anti-social behaviour on housing estates. The Strategy sets out how this element of the service is delivered by Housing and includes links with other services both internally and externally.
- 1.2 Dealing with tenants who commit acts of anti-social behaviour is an important service to the community and is delivered through the Council's Area Housing Offices, which work in partnership with the Police and other agencies. It seeks to ensure that those who commit acts of anti social behaviour are dealt with effectively.
- 1.3 Tenant's responsibilities in respect of nuisance and anti-social behaviour are set out clearly under Section 6.2 of the Tenancy Agreement.
- 1.4 This Anti Social Behaviour Strategy has been formulated in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Act 1996 and the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003. It meets that part of the requirement under Section 218 (A) of the Housing Act 1996, that social landlords must publish a statement of their policies and procedures and an associated summary.
- 1.5 This Strategy has been formulated in consultation with the Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership and representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. It also includes information contained in Housing's Policies and Procedures. The efficiency of these systems was confirmed when Housing were awarded the international quality standard of ISO 9001:2000 accreditation for all of its services and the Customer Service Excellence award for excellence in customer care. This Strategy was considered and endorsed by the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel on 28 October 2010 and approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder on 9 November 2010.

**2. Background to Anti-Social Behaviour Policies and Procedures**

- 2.1 Tackling anti-social behaviour is a key part of the Housing Management role within Housing (covered by a separate Housing Management Strategy). Work on anti-social behaviour is delivered through two Area Housing Offices (north and south), the Limes Farm Estate Office, Chigwell, which is a sub office of the Area Housing Office (South).

- 2.2 In addition, important work is carried out by staff in the Environment and Street Scene Directorate including dealing with noise nuisance involving both tenants and owner-occupiers, dealing with fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles etc. (Graffiti removal is managed by the Safer Communities Team). Environment and Street Scene provide an emergency call-out service for noise complaints reported outside of normal office hours and is available to all Council tenants. The Council also employs a Safer Communities Co-ordinator who attends Community Safety Partnership meetings and acts as the Council's liaison officer on crime reduction issues.
- 2.3 At each of the Area Housing Offices the Area Housing Managers have formal Section meetings at least every two months to ensure staff communication on anti-social behaviour work and other services.
- 2.4 The Director of Housing chairs quarterly Customer Improvement meetings with the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) and each Area Manager to monitor performance on a number of areas, including the number of notices served for anti-social behaviour, and tenancy demotion orders etc. It is also an opportunity to discuss policies and procedures in order to maximise performance.
- 2.5 Area Housing Managers are responsible for monitoring the performance of their staff and ensuring the correct action is taken in response to any incidents of anti-social behaviour.

### **3. Coverage**

- 3.1 This Housing Service Strategy covers:
- a) Making a Complaint about Anti-Social Behaviour & its Definition
  - b) Security of Tenure: Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour.
  - c) Procedures for applying for Demoted Tenancy Orders & seeking Possession of a Demoted Tenancy.
  - d) Demoted Tenancy - Reviews.
  - e) Introductory Tenancies
  - f) Procedures for applying for Anti- Social Behaviour Orders & Injunctions
  - g) Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership
  - h) Data Sharing Protocol.
  - i) Police Dispersement and Property Closure Powers.
  - j) Anti Social Behaviour Operational Incident Panel.
  - k) Hate Incident Panel
  - l) District-wide Incident Diary.
  - m) The role of the Corporate Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator.
  - n) Policy on Dealing with Domestic Violence.
  - o) Racial, Harassment Policies.
  - p) Priority Transfers
  - q) Dealing with complaints about high hedges.
  - r) Mediation Services.
  - s) Protection and Training of Staff.
  - t) Dealing with Graffiti.
  - u) Complaints Procedure.
  - v) Appeals.



#### **4. Relationships with Other documents**

- 4.1 Tenants' responsibility in respect of Anti-Social Behaviour is set out in Section 6.2 of their Tenancy Agreement, which forms a contract between the tenant and the Council. The Standard Tenancy Agreement was reviewed during 2002 with the new Agreement coming into force in January 2003, with new conditions (set out in Section 8 of this Strategy) relating to Anti-Social Behaviour and Nuisance.
- 4.2 The Council has produced a summary of this Service Strategy in the form of an information leaflet to all tenants, explaining the action which will be taken should they experience acts of Anti-Social Behaviour. The leaflet is available at both Area Housing Offices, the Limes Farm Office, Chigwell and other Council and CAB offices, with relevant information featured from time to time in the tenants' magazine "Housing News".
- 4.3 The Council has adopted its Housing Charter, which sets out, in simple, clear and precise terms the Council's general approach to all its housing services. In addition, there are a number of agreed service standards which will be publicised setting out our aims in all aspects of our "interfaces" with customers.
- 4.4 The Council has a good working relationship with each of the three Citizens Advice Bureaux within the District, and holds quarterly liaison meetings.
- 4.5. A booklet entitled Housing Appeals and Complaints sets out for all tenants the Council's policies on such matters.
- 4.6 Housing has detailed Policies and Procedures for all of its functions, including the approach taken in regard to Anti-Social Behaviour and Nuisance.

#### **5. Aims and Objectives**

- 5.1 The aim of the Council's Housing Service Strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour Policies and Procedures is:

"To seek to improve the quality of life of the Council's tenants with a commitment to eradicate all types of anti-social behaviour, working closely with tenants, agencies and partnerships".

- 5.2 This aim will be met by:

a) Complying with the statutory requirements, as detailed in Section 6 of this Strategy.

b) Advising tenants of the action that can be taken should they become a victim of any anti-social behaviour incident.

c) Taking the appropriate action through the Courts against perpetrators.

d) Liaising with other agencies, particularly the Police.

e) Regularly reviewing the policy and procedure on anti-social behaviour in consultation with all relevant parties.

## **6. Statutory Requirements**

6.1 The relevant statutory requirements for Anti-Social Behaviour are as follows:

a) Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003:

- Closure Notices (Part 1 Section 1).
- Publishing of Policies and Procedures (Part 2 Section 12).
- Injunctions (Part 2 Section 12).
- Security of Tenure (Part 2 Section 12).
- Dispersal of Groups (Part 4 Section 30).
- The Environment/Noise/Graffiti (Part 6 Sections 40/41/42).
- High Hedges (Part 8 Sections 65/66/67).

b) Housing Act 1996:

- Introductory Tenancy Scheme (Section 124)
- Injunction against nuisance (Section 153 (a))

c) Housing Act 1985:

- Notice of proceedings for possession or termination (Section 83).
- Grounds and Orders for Possession (Section 84).
- Variation of terms of tenancy (Section 102 & 3).
- Provision of information and consultation (Section 104).
- Consultation on matters of housing management (Section 105).
- Demoted Tenancy Orders (Section 82A inserted by Section 14 (2) of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003).

d) Protection from Eviction Act 1977:

- Requirement of landlord to apply to Court before regaining possession.
- Any Notices served must give the tenant 28 days notice.

e) Local Government Act:

- Valid service of Notice (Section 233)

f) Human Rights Act (Articles 6,8, and 14):

- Rights of a fair trial, respect for family life, home and correspondence.

g) Data Protection Act:

- The protection and use of personal data held by the Council.

h) Crime and Disorder Act 1998

i) Disability Discrimination Act 1995

j) Homelessness Act 2002

k) Race Relations Act 1976

## **7. Client Consultation, Information & Involvement (Statutory Requirement)**

- 7.1 The way in which tenants and partner agencies will be consulted, informed and involved with regard to the Council's policies and procedures on Anti-Social Behaviour in accordance with the legislation is as follows:
- a) Consultation with the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.
  - b) Consultation with partner agencies through the Community Safety Partnership.
  - c) Policies and Procedures through the Cabinet or Housing Portfolio Holder.
  - d) One to one consultations with tenants.
  - e) Information to tenants in publications e.g. Summary leaflet of this Strategy, Housing News, etc.
  - f) Posters displayed throughout the District.
  - g) Quarterly liaison meetings with the Citizens Advice Bureaux.

## **8. General Principles – Anti Social Behaviour**

- 8.1 Section 5 of this Housing Directorate Service Strategy sets out the aims and objectives of dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour. This Section details the general approach taken and the procedures and policies which are in place in order to combat the problem.
- 8.2 The Council has agreed the following measures to be used to combat problems of anti-social behaviour;

### ***Making Complaints/Definition of Anti-Social Behaviour***

- 8.3 Anti social behaviour is defined in the Housing Act 1996 as:

*“conduct which is capable of causing nuisance annoyance to any person, directly or indirectly and relates to or affects the housing management functions of a relevant landlord or consists of, or involves, using or threatening to use housing accommodation owned or managed by a relevant landlord for an unlawful purpose”.*

It includes noise, intimidation, harassment, aggressive and threatening language, actual violence against people and property, selling drugs, hate incidents, abandoned cars and fly tipping. Those persons to whom the conduct may cause annoyance or nuisance include anyone who has the right to live in a property owned or managed by the Council, and those living in any other property in the neighbourhood and anyone else lawfully in such property, or in the locality, for example, working or using local facilities.

- 8.4 Any person who feels they are threatened with such behaviour can report the matter and seek advice in person, by letter or telephone, from housing management staff at either the Civic Offices, Epping the Area Housing Office at the Broadway Loughton, or the Limes Farm Office, Chigwell. Support will be offered to complainants, including keeping them informed of any developments and referring them to appropriate support services where necessary. Should any complainant need to provide statements at Court, officers will give them support. Every effort will be made to keep the identity of complainants confidential if requested.

***Security of Tenure: Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour***

- 8.5 The Council revised its Standard Tenancy Agreement in January 2002. This included more comprehensive conditions being placed upon tenants in terms of not committing acts of anti-social behaviour or nuisance. Section 6.2 of the standard Tenancy Agreement is as follows:

- Neither to cause by himself or his agents nor to allow members of his/her household or visitors to cause a nuisance or annoyance to other persons in the locality including neighbours or to any tenant, agent, employee or contractor of the Council.
- Not to cause or commit or allow anyone living with the Tenant or the Tenant's visitors to cause or commit any form of harassment or other anti-social behaviour. Harassment and anti-social behaviour is any act or omission which interferes with the peace and comfort of or which may cause nuisance annoyance or injury or offence to any other tenants, member of their household, visitor, neighbour, the Council including the Council's employees and contractors or any other member of the general public and includes (but is not limited to);
  - a) Harassment on the grounds of age, gender, race, culture, ability or lifestyle.
  - b) Violence or threats of violence to any person.
  - c) Abusive or insulting words or behaviour.
  - d) Offensive drunkenness.
  - e) Damage or threat of damage to property belonging to another person including damage to any part of a person's home.
  - f) Writing graffiti and in particular graffiti, which is abusive, threatening or insulting.
  - g) Making unnecessary or excessive noise by any means whatsoever including arguing and door slamming.
  - h) Using or allowed use of the Premises for prostitution and/or for dealing in or the illegal use of any controlled drugs.
  - i) Using the Premises for handling or storage of stolen property
  - j) Any nuisance or annoyance caused by pets including barking and fouling.
  - k) Playing ball games close to someone else's home.

- Should any such incidents occur, the Tenant accepts that the Council may serve a Notice of Seeking Possession on the Tenant to take possession of the Premises, seek to demote their tenancy or make an application to the Court to obtain an Injunction (with a possible power of arrest) against any person whether or not they are the Tenant in accordance with the Housing Act 1996, or Crime and Disorder Act 1998, or any legislation in force at the time.
- 8.6 The Council recognises that tackling anti social behaviour is a key part of improving the quality of life for its tenants. When a complaint relating to a breach of Section 6.2 of the Tenancy Agreement is made, the complainant will be asked to put the complaint in writing and be given the name of the Housing Management Officer who will investigate the case. The officer will interview the person to establish the nature of the problem, agree an action plan, and explain the powers available to deal with the situation.
- 8.7 The Housing Management Officer will, if appropriate, visit the perpetrator following a detailed study of the case, after referring to the Council's "No Lone Visit" guidance. During any visit the officer will advise the alleged perpetrator of the allegation and discuss with them the complaints without revealing the identity of the complainant if requested. When satisfied that the tenant is the cause of the problem and sufficient evidence is available, the perpetrator will be advised of the remedial action to be taken and the time limit within which the problem must be rectified.
- 8.8 The perpetrator will be advised in writing of the agreed action, with a full report placed on the tenancy file. If the problem remains unresolved a further visit will be made by the officer and a final warning and time limit be given. Failure to comply will result in a Notice of Seeking Possession being served, an anti-social behaviour order being sought, or an application being made to the Court for a Tenancy Demotion Order. In some circumstances more than one of these actions may be taken. If the perpetrator is committing serious undisputed acts of anti-social behaviour or nuisance then appropriate action will be taken immediately with all relevant agencies being notified. Area Housing Managers will ensure that cases are dealt with consistently across the District.

#### ***Demoted Tenancy Orders & Possession of a Demoted Tenancy***

- 8.9 As a local housing authority, the Council are able to apply to the County Court for a Demotion Order in respect of a secure tenancy. A Demotion Order ends a secure tenancy and, if the tenant remains in occupation of the property after the date that the secure tenancy is ended, creates, in the place of the secure tenancy, a less secure "demoted tenancy" for a minimum period of twelve months. Demoted tenants lose many of their rights, including the Right to Buy and any discount accrued for any demoted tenancy period, and succession rights are revised with any successor tenant not becoming secure until the end of the demoted tenancy period.
- 8.10 Demoted tenants are automatically promoted back to the higher form of security (i.e. secure tenant) after twelve months unless a Notice of Proceedings for Possession has been served during that period.

- 8.11 The Court may only make the Order if the tenant, another resident or visitor has behaved in a way which is capable of causing nuisance or annoyance, or if such a person used the premises for illegal purposes, and the Court is satisfied it is reasonable to make the Order.
- 8.12 The Area Housing Manager would authorise an application to the County Court for a Demoted Tenancy Order provided procedures set out in the previous section have been correctly followed, (Security of Tenure: Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour) and he is satisfied that there was sufficient evidence to prove that the tenant is committing acts of anti-social behaviour. At this point an appropriate, prescribed Notice will be served.
- 8.13 If the Court grants a Demoted Tenancy Order, the tenant will be advised in writing that their tenancy has been demoted for a period of 12 months and this is part of a warning system which informs them that, should they continue to carry out acts of anti-social behaviour, the Council will proceed to Court immediately for possession. Furthermore, tenants will be notified that, now their tenancy is demoted, it removes a number of their tenancy rights. However, they will be informed that if they stop committing anti-social behaviour, they can at a later date, regain the higher level of security and rights.
- 8.14 If the demoted tenant continues to carry out acts of anti-social behaviour the Council will proceed to Court for possession. This action will be authorised by the Area Housing Manager, who will satisfy himself that, prior to possession proceedings, all procedures have been followed correctly.

#### ***Possession of a Demoted Tenancy - Right to Review***

- 8.15 Under the regulations, following the service of the appropriate Notice, a demoted tenant may apply for a review of the decision to apply to Court for possession to an Officer who is senior to the person who took the decision, and who has not been involved in the case. The process for this review has been agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder, the officer reviewing the case will be the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) or in his absence, the Director of Housing. The demoted tenant has the right to request that the Review be by way of an oral "Hearing" which would be undertaken by the officer reviewing the case, in the presence of the Area Housing Manager who made the original decision. They would be given no less than five clear days notice of the Review.

#### ***Introductory Tenancy Scheme***

- 8.16 On 1 April 2006, the Council introduced an Introductory Tenancy Scheme for all new potentially secure tenants. Under the scheme, all new tenants are not secure until after a twelve-month "trial" period. During the twelve-month period, Introductory Tenants do not have the same statutory rights as secure tenants. Therefore, if the Council wished to seek possession of the property for any breach of a tenancy condition, (e.g. anti social behaviour) provided certain procedures are followed, the Introductory Tenancy could be terminated, simply by the issuing of a Notice of Proceedings without grounds having to be stated, with the courts having no alternative but to grant possession provided the Council has followed the correct procedures.

- 8.17 Before the Council applies to the court for possession, it will give the Introductory Tenant at least two warnings, then serve a Notice of Proceedings setting out the Council's decision to apply for such an order and the date before which the Council cannot apply for a court order, which must be at least four weeks from the date of service. If a notice has been served and the twelve-month trial period subsequently elapses, the tenancy continues to be an introductory tenancy until the proceedings have been determined.
- 8.18 Introductory Tenants who are served with notice are advised that they may request a review of the decision to seek possession within 14 days of the notice being served. The Council will not proceed with an application for possession until it knows whether the Introductory Tenant intends to exercise their right to review. If a review is requested, the Council will review its decision by way of an Officer Review Panel comprising the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) and the Area Housing Manager neither of whom would have had any involvement in the original decision to seek possession. The Reviews would be a "paper" review unless the tenant informs the Council that they wish to have an oral hearing.

#### ***Anti- Social Behaviour Orders & Acceptable Behaviour Contracts***

- 8.19 In normal circumstances where it is believed that any perpetrators have a willingness to alter their behaviour, an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) would be the first step in attempting to remedy the situation. In this case, following consultation with all agencies involved, representatives from both the Police and the Council would invite the perpetrators to attend a meeting to discuss the contract, seeking their agreement to abide by its terms for a specified period of time. If the conditions of the ABC are broken during its duration an application may be made to the Court for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO). If the acts of anti-social behaviour are particularly severe then the decision may be taken to apply for an ASBO in the first instance. Prior to obtaining either an ABC or an ASBO the Police and the Council would need to be satisfied that appropriate consultation had taken place and sufficient evidence was available including recorded diary incidents, etc.

#### ***Epping Forest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership***

- 8.20 The Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership is a multi-agency group "sharing the commitment" to tackle crime and disorder across the District. The lead agencies are Essex Police, Epping Forest District Council, Essex County Council, Essex Fire and Rescue Service and the Primary Care Trust. The Partnership has published a three-year Crime Reduction Strategy to tackle crime in the community. The Strategy has been written following an extensive crime audit and consultation process. The various agencies on the panel exchange information as a means of preventing and dealing with incidents and developing protocols. This Strategy has been considered and agreed by the Anti-Social Behaviour Group.

### ***Hate Incident Panel***

- 8.21 The Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership, which comprises representatives from numerous local agencies, set up a Hate Incident Panel in 2002 which is chaired by the Area Housing Manager (North). The multi-agency Panel considers and attempts to resolve cases of Hate Crime. An information pack is available giving advice on how the Police, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Essex Racial Equality Council, West Essex Victim Support etc. can help those in need of assistance. Any Anti-Social Behaviour involving a hate incident will be referred to the Hate Incident Panel.

### ***Anti-Social Behaviour & Violent Crime Tasking and Operational Groups***

- 8.22 The Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership set up an Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinating Group in January 2000. An action plan is monitored at each meeting. The Panel have undertaken a range of activities including, in liaison with the Council's Planning and Economic Development Services, producing a designing-out crime leaflet, assisting in the promotion of the Housing Directorate's twenty-four hour emergency Careline alarm service to clients who have experienced a bogus caller incident, and monitoring CCTV installations within the District.

### ***Police Dispersement and Property Closure Powers***

- 8.23 Part Four of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act provides powers to the Police to establish "designated areas" in which it has been recognised that there are, or have been, anti-social behaviour problems. In these areas the Police can use "dispersement powers" to break up groups of two or more people. Through the Community Safety Partnership, where Housing staff are concerned about such behaviour on its estates, the Area Housing Manager for the area will attend the meetings to discuss the possibility of using these powers with all other agencies. Similarly, the same approach would be taken should there be any concerns that one of the Council's tenanted properties is being used for the production of Class A drugs, and Property Closure Powers are believed to be appropriate.

### ***District – Wide Incident Diary***

- 8.24 The District-wide crime and anti-social behaviour incident diary has been introduced by the Community Safety Partnership. This provides a simple means for the public to report incidents on a standard form used by all appropriate agencies. The incident diary will assist in monitoring trends in crime reporting and will assist with liaison and exchange of information between these agencies.



### ***Corporate Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator***

- 8.25 The Council employs its own Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator. The purpose of this post is to be the key co-ordinator in all matters relating to anti-social behaviour, and to ensure the production of agreed protocols to deliver a strategic and corporate response to such issues. The Co-ordinator participates in multi-agency task groups where cases of anti-social behaviour are considered and appropriate actions agreed and recorded including collation of evidence and prepared statements. In addition, the post-holder is responsible for attending public meetings, participating in the provision of training, implementing a media strategy to maximise publicity and acting as a deterrent and to help to reduce the fear of crime.

### ***Policy on Dealing with Domestic Violence***

- 8.26 The Council supports the 'Stay Safe' scheme operated by Harlow Women's Aid, launched in January 2003. The aim of Stay Safe is to assist women experiencing, or at threat of, domestic violence to remain safely in their own homes, rather than to seek to move. It can also be used to support women moving on from a refuge. Support is intensive and of the same extent and standard as that given to women in a refuge. Regular risk assessments are made. Meetings take place away from homes and, on average; the support worker will spend around 3 hours per week on each case. Tailor made plans are made, setting out the action required to provide the practical support, information, advice and guidance needed in each case. The plans are kept under review. The scheme is funded from the Supporting People budget.
- 8.27 Although referrals to Stay Safe may be made by other agencies, most are through the Council's Homelessness Prevention Service, which monitors use of the scheme. It has capacity for 12 cases at any time.
- 8.28 The Council, working in partnership with East Thames Housing Group has provided a women's refuge "Brook Haven" on a site provided by the Council in the north of the District. It provides three two bedroom and two one bedroom flats. The scheme employs three staff through East Thames Living to manage the scheme.
- 8.29 The Council has a Priority Move policy whereby; if any tenant is confirmed as being either a victim or a potential victim of domestic violence they will be given additional priority for a move to like-for-like accommodation in another area.
- 8.30 The Housing Directorate's twenty-four hour emergency Careline alarm Service offers alarms to those victims or potential victims of domestic violence, which enables them to summon help should they need urgent assistance.

### ***Racial and Harassment Policies***

- 8.31 The Council has a written statement of equal opportunity in the provision of housing services. In addition, the Race Relations Code of Practice in Rented Housing has been adopted. In accordance with the code, the ethnicity of housing applicants and applicants housed are recorded and monitored annually. The ethnicity of sheltered housing residents is monitored separately. Statistical information is reported on an annual basis to the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel.
- 8.32 Equal opportunities are set out in the Housing Charter and the Council has a recruitment and selection policy which aims to eliminate discrimination.
- 8.33 The eligibility criteria for the allocation of housing ensures applicants are given fair access. Details are set out in the Council's Allocations Scheme.
- 8.34 Customer Impact Assessments have been undertaken for all of the Council's relevant services with action plans drawn up for service improvements.
- 8.35 The Council's Housing Directorate has a separate Harassment Strategy.

### ***Priority Moves***

- 8.36 In exceptional circumstances, it is necessary for some tenants to be given additional priority for an urgent move to alternative accommodation for housing management reasons. Such circumstances include victims of serious anti-social behaviour, domestic violence etc. Housing follow strict procedures to ensure fairness to others on the housing register. Priority moves are agreed at Assistant Director level on the basis that the tenant is personally at risk at their current address. Advice is often sought from the Police, Social Services, GPs, Hate Incident Panel, etc. before any decision is made. Priority moves are only made on a like-for-like basis, to ensure that applicants do not seek transfers to "improve" their housing situation.

### ***Complaints about High Hedges***

- 8.37 Housing receive few complaints about high hedges. However, should any be received in the future, in accordance with Part 8 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 where the complainant alleges that his reasonable enjoyment of his property is being adversely affected by the height of a high hedge situated on land occupied by one of its tenants or any resident, an investigation will be undertaken by either the Environment and Street Scene or the Planning and Economic Development Directorate.
- 8.38 If the investigating officer finds that the complainant has not taken all reasonable steps to resolve matters, the matter will not be proceeded with.
- 8.39 If it is found that the hedge specified in the complaint is adversely affecting the complainant's reasonable enjoyment of the domestic property specified, the tenant or resident will be asked to undertake the required remedial work to reduce the hedge. If the tenant or resident fails to comply, consideration will be given to taking legal action to require the tenant to comply.

- 8.40 Should the tenant refuse, then a remedial notice will be issued with a copy being sent to every complainant and every owner and every occupier of the neighbouring land notifying each of those persons of the reason for the decision. The tenant will have the right to appeal against the notice to the appropriate Directorate.
- 8.41 If the decision taken is that no action should be taken, then all appropriate persons will be notified of the reason for not proceeding.

### ***Mediation Services***

- 8.42 Mediation is a way of solving disputes between tenants by using a professional mediator who is completely impartial, experienced at mediation techniques, and who has not been previously involved with the problem. The mediator works with the parties concerned in order to construct a solution. This is a voluntary, non-judgemental process with all proceedings being confidential, taking place at a neutral venue avoiding, if necessary, face-to-face contact between the parties. Any agreement reached can be put in writing and signed by all parties.
- 8.43 The process can be used when attempting to resolve matters of anti-social behaviour on housing estates, or serious disputes between neighbours, which may lead to breaches of tenancy conditions and Court action.
- 8.44 The Council has a budget for meeting the cost of mediation and works in partnership with an accredited mediation service to provide the mediation.

### ***Protection and Training of Staff***

- 8.45 The Council has a Health and Safety Policy, which is circulated to all staff who sign to confirm receipt. The Housing Directorate has a Service Safety Team, chaired by the Area Housing Manager (South). Any safety issues are reported to the relevant Area Housing Manager. Reporting of health and safety incidents is a standard agenda item at the monthly meeting of all housing Managers. There is also a comprehensive accident reporting procedure in place.
- 8.46 The Council has a Lone Worker Policy which includes guidance to staff. A procedure is in place where any staff working outside of normal hours contact the Council's out of hours service to confirm that they have returned home safely.
- 8.47 All front-line staff attend courses on handling aggression and restraining techniques courses, and are provided with personal attack alarms.
- 8.48 Appropriate staff are trained on the procedure for third party reporting of hate incidents.
- 8.49 All training needs are identified as part of the annual Performance Development Review process.
- 8.50 All appropriate staff have been briefed on the requirements of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 and the contents of this Strategy

### ***Dealing with Graffiti***

- 8.51 The graffiti removal service is provided by the Council's Safer Communities Team free of charge. Any person who wishes to report graffiti on housing-owned land can do so by using the graffiti hotline. All reports are referred to a specialist contractor with any offensive graffiti being removed within 7 days of it being reported. Other types of graffiti would be removed within 14 days, or possibly sooner, depending on the demands on the service at the time.

### ***Compliments & Complaints Procedure***

- 8.52 Should any customer, including a tenant, of the Council wish to praise a service or member of staff, they can fill in the form contained in the Council's corporate Compliments and Complaints booklet and send it to the Chief Executive who will make sure the compliment is passed on to the service or person concerned.
- 8.53 If any customer, including a tenant or housing applicant of the Council, is unhappy because the Council has either failed to do something we should have done, done something we should not have done, or agreed to do something but has then been slow to act, they can follow the step-by-step complaints process.
- 8.54 There are five steps to the complaints procedure as follows:
- Under Step One, the customer is asked to try and resolve the problem with the member of staff dealing with the matter. If the customer has a disability which makes it difficult for them to use a telephone or computer, someone can contact the Council on their behalf, or arrangements will be made for them to meet in person with a member of staff.
  - Under Step Two, if the customer is unhappy with the way in which the matter was dealt with, they can complain to the relevant Head of Service. The Head of Service, or another senior officer, will then review the decisions made so far and look at what other action the Council may need to take.
  - Under Step Three, if customers are still unhappy they can complain to the Chief Executive who may investigate the matter personally, or more usually ask the Corporate Complaints Officer to investigate the matter. At this stage the customer may ask their local councillor to review the matter.
  - Under Step Four, if the customer is unhappy with the outcome of Step Three, they can appeal to the Complaints Panel which is a Panel of five district councillors.
  - Under Step Five (being the final Step), if a customer cannot resolve the complaint with the Council, they may take the case to the Local Government Ombudsman.

## **Appeals**

- 8.55 If a tenant is unhappy with a decision taken by a Housing Manager, in the first instance, they can appeal to the appropriate Assistant Director of Housing who will review the decision. If they are still unhappy and wish to appeal further, they can proceed to either the Housing Appeals and Review Panel, or Step 3 of the Customer complaints and Compliments scheme depending on the nature of the matter.
- 8.56 The Housing Appeals and Review Panel enables Council tenants and other housing clients to appeal against decisions made by Council officers on certain matters relating to housing. The Panel is made up of five District Councillors who would independently review any decision.
- 8.57 People making appeals are able to attend a hearing and, if they wish, bring someone with them to present their case on their behalf. At the hearing the appellant can explain to the Panel why they disagree with the decision taken.
- 8.58 A comprehensive Housing Appeals and Review Application Pack, including guidance notes and application form is sent out to tenants on request.

## **9. Action Plan**

- 9.1 The following actions (some of which are contained in Sections 8 and 9 of this Strategy) will be undertaken in the future by Housing to combat the problem of anti-social behaviour and nuisance;

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Officer/s</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Resources Implications</b>
Continue the Demoted Tenancy process when appropriate cases arise	Asst. Director of Housing Area Housing Managers	When cases arise	Within existing Resources
Produce and circulate an updated summary leaflet of the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for the general public	Asst. Director of Housing Principal Housing Officer (Information)	December 2010	Within existing Resources
Consider increasing the number of CCTV installations	Area Housing Managers	On-going	Within existing resources

## 10. Future Developments

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

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 powers          Experience of housing management staff          The Community Safety Partnership          The multi agency Anti-Social Behaviour Group          The Council's Safer Communities Team          Standard Tenancy Agreement          Greater knowledge of the public due to the production of this Strategy and summary leaflet          New women's refuge          Mediation service</p>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <p>Staffing levels below the national and county average          Lenient approach of the Courts          Reluctance of victims to provide evidence</p>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>Introductory Tenancy Scheme          Increased CCTV installations</p>	<p><b>Threats</b></p>

## 11. Resourcing the Strategy

- 11.1 For housing management purposes the Epping Forest District is split into two areas, with one Area Housing Office based at The Broadway, Loughton in the south of the district and the other based at the Civic Offices, Epping.
- 11.2 The number of staff involved in covering all housing management duties in 2006/2007 is 14 full-time equivalent. Area Housing Managers are based at each of the Area Housing Offices. One of the Housing Management Officers at each of the Area Housing Offices is designated as an Assistant Area Housing Manager, as well as at the Limes Farm Estate Office, Chigwell.
- 11.3 All staff is included in the Council's Performance Development Review process, whereby they have an annual interview to assess their own performance and to discuss their targets for the forthcoming year and their training needs. There is a six-monthly update on progress. All new staff receive induction training and have access to a mentor. Training received by staff, which relates to this Strategy, is as follows:

- Court skills training
- Dealing with aggression
- Various IT courses
- Staff briefings on various matters
- Data Protection training
- Recruitment and selection training for Managers
- Protection of vulnerable adults from abuse
- Performance Development Review training for Managers and Seniors
- Managing sickness absence training

11.4 Housing Management staff delivering the Strategy in 2010/11 is approximately 3.5 FTE, which is within the staffing levels detailed in Paragraph 13.2. This is based on the estimate that all staff in the Section spends around 25% of their time on aspects of the Strategy. The projection for the number of staff, required to deliver the Strategy over the following three years is detailed in the following table;

<b>Staff Resources Projections</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>2006/2007</b>	<b>2007/2008</b>	<b>2008/2009</b>	<b>2009/2010</b>
<b>Housing Management Staff</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.5</b>

## **12. *Reviewing the Strategy***

12.1 The Strategy for Anti-Social Behaviour will be reviewed by the Housing Scrutiny Panel in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and the Anti-Social Behaviour Group, no later than October 2013.

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**Epping Forest District Council**  
**HOUSING SERVICE STRATEGY ON**  
**INFORMATION**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Housing Service Strategy relates to the Council's approach to the provision of information on housing issues.
- 1.2 The information service is provided by the Housing Directorate in conjunction with other relevant Directorates especially the Deputy Chief Executive's Office and Finance.
- 1.3 This Housing Service Strategy sets out how the information service will be delivered. The strategy was formulated in consultation with representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. It was approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder on ?????.

## **2. Background to the Service**

- 2.1 The availability of clear and easily understood information is an essential part of good customer care. There is also a duty to inform Council tenants, leaseholders and social housing applicants of their rights and responsibilities. The main recipients of such information are:
  - a) Council tenants and leaseholders;
  - b) Applicants for social housing;
  - c) Homeless people and people at risk of becoming homeless;
  - d) People seeking advice on general housing issues;
  - e) People with special housing needs;
  - f) Other residents of the district;
  - g) Council staff and members; and
  - h) Housing associations, other partners and agencies.

The provision of information is a two-way process. In addition to disseminating information on housing services, the Council seeks information in the form of feedback from its client groups.

- 2.2 There is a statutory duty to inform in certain cases. The Council is required to inform tenants regularly of their rights with respect to repairs, the Right to Buy and other key issues. In addition any changes to legislation or Council policy must be reported to tenants, leaseholders and applicants. In some cases the Council may be required by law to consult with the client group on prospective changes, such as new Tenancy Conditions. Accurate information and statistics must be provided to

the Government by set deadlines for the annual Business Plan Statistical Appendix (BPSA), Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA), and other statistical returns. Statistics and information must be collected and provided to the Council's Performance Improvement Unit. In particular a number of housing performance indicators are required. Those who receive information, or share information of this kind with the Council, include;

- a) the Government;
  - b) other Council Directorates;
  - c) other local authorities; and
  - i) other agencies such as housing associations and research bodies.
- 2.3 Local performance indicators are set for the Housing Directorate in consultation with members. Performance and cost data is also required for the Housemark online benchmarking system which provides comparative data for local authorities and housing associations on a national and regional basis. Other information and statistics are required by senior housing management to monitor performance and assist in the development of housing policy and strategies.
- 2.4 The Housing Directorate has established a number of service standards in compliance with the regulatory framework of the Tenant Services Authority. The Service Standards and Housing Charter set out the Council's promises to customers, and give details of the services they can expect to receive.
- 2.5 It is also considered good practice to ensure that the Council's staff and Council members are well informed on housing performance, strategy and policy issues.
- 2.6 The Housing Information and Strategy team consists of the Principal Housing Officer (Information) and a part-time Housing Assistant. The Team also includes the Tenant Participation Officer and a Senior Housing Officer (Quality and Performance). It is based within the Housing Resources Section of the Housing Directorate, reporting to the Housing Resources Manager. Housing information is sourced from the Director and Assistant Directors of Housing, Housing Managers, staff with specialist knowledge, other Council services, the Government, other housing organisations and outside agencies.
- 2.7 The Information and Strategy Team is responsible for the annual Business Plan Statistical Appendix (BPSA), Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA). These Government returns involve the provision of statistical data which support the Council's Housing Strategy, the HRA Business Plan and the Private Sector Housing Business Plan. The Housing Strategy assesses the District's current and future housing needs, and sets out the Council's general approach towards meeting those needs for the following three years. The Strategy is also available to the public for information purposes. Housing's Business Plans follow the Council's key Corporate aims and analyse the Council's current service. The HRA Business Plan lists the Council's strategies and includes a 30 year financial plan. Assessments of the District's future housing needs may be required by the Government in the form of Housing Needs Surveys and/or Strategic Housing Market Assessments. The Information and Strategy Team provides statistics and assistance in the production of these documents and the housing element of other corporate plans.

- 2.8 The Housing Directorate provides written information to tenants and other residents mainly through the publication of its own literature and contributions to corporate publications. These currently include;
- a) "Housing News" - a newsletter for all tenants and leaseholders (approximately 7,500 at 31.03.10). Applicants on the Housing Register are prospective tenants and copies of Housing News are distributed to all applicants where they contain relevant information (approximately 5,500 at 31.03.10).
  - b) "The Forester" - a newspaper normally delivered four times a year to all residents of the district;
  - c) "In House" - a regular newsletter for staff within the Housing Directorate;
- 2.9 Every new tenant is given a copy of the *Tenants Handbook* produced by the Housing Information and Strategy team. This publication is in the form of a binder containing a set of leaflets. These cover Housing's service standards and Tenants Charter, the conditions of tenancy; rents and housing management; maintenance and repairs; advice on moving home and exchanges; services for the elderly; successions; the right to buy; garage rentals; appeals, complaints and reviews; other general information.
- 2.10 A range of leaflets produced by the Housing Information and Strategy team provide information on specific issues, such as advice on homelessness and introductory tenancies.
- 2.11 Every housing applicant is given an *Application Pack* which includes a leaflet on applying for housing, an application form with guidance, information on choice based lettings and any other relevant matters such as covering letters and forms.
- 2.12 Under the regulatory framework of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), housing providers (including local authorities) are required to produce an Annual Report by no later than 1 October each year. This will assess how the Housing Directorate is currently meeting its own standards and measuring compliance. The Council is required to share the Report with tenants and the TSA.
- 2.13 The Council has an area dedicated to Housing on its website. The Strategy and Information Team is responsible for publishing and updating any housing information relevant to tenants, leaseholders, applicants, private owner-occupiers and the general public. This includes facilities to report repairs and to download leaflets and forms. Visitors to the Council's website can request information on housing and these requests are dealt with by the Team.
- 2.14 An intranet computerised information system is available to all council staff with access to a computer. The Housing Information and Strategy team publishes and updates information on housing for Housing staff and for all Council employees. This includes: information specific to each section (Needs, Assets and Repairs, Management, Resources, Private Sector Housing and Older Peoples Services); general information; Housing policies and strategies; risk assessments; work instructions and other quality management system documents; and publications.
- 2.15 News items, events and issues relating to new Council policy are reported to the media in conjunction with the Council's Public Relations and Marketing Section.

- 2.16 Housing applicants, tenants and leaseholders are given information directly through interviews at the office, home visits and day-to-day telephone contact with housing officers. Occupants of sheltered housing are given information through their contacts with Scheme Managers.
- 2.17 Council tenants and leaseholders are given information, and consulted on Council policy, through the District-wide Tenants' and Leaseholders Federation, estate-based tenants' associations, the Leaseholders Association, the Sheltered Housing Forum, the Rural Tenants' Forum, consultation days and other formal and informal residents groups.
- 2.18 The Council has formalised its approach to tenant participation, and the provision of information to tenants, in a Tenant Participation Agreement signed by the Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.
- 2.19 Estate-based residents' associations are encouraged to have Local Tenant Participation Agreements setting out their approach to involving residents and providing information.
- 2.20 Consultation on special issues is carried out through surveys, special editions of 'Housing News', public meetings, individual consultations or other means as appropriate.
- 2.21 Equalities monitoring is conducted for strategic profiling purposes, and to help tailor the provision of services to clients, through the use of profiling questions which are included in application forms and surveys.
- 2.22 The Tenant Participation Officer provides information through direct contact with individual tenants and tenants' associations, and through involvement with the District-wide Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.
- 2.23 Detailed information on the Council's housing stock is maintained by the Team to produce an annual analysis of stock changes. This is required for Finance subsidy claims and Government statistics.
- 2.24 Statistical data on housing stock and social housing lettings is provided to the Government in conjunction with the Housing IT Team and is submitted using NROSH and CORE electronic systems.

### **3. Coverage**

- 3.1 This Housing Service Strategy covers the Council's:
- a) general approach to providing information to tenants, leaseholders, housing applicants, private owner-occupiers and other residents;
  - b) approach to providing information for people with special needs, including people with disabilities, older people and those with special language needs;
  - c) approach to providing information and statistical returns requested by the Government;
  - d) commitment to provide the information required for corporate performance monitoring;

- e) commitment to respond to requests for information from other Council services, individuals and agencies.

#### **4. Relationships with other documents**

- 4.1 This Housing Service Strategy forms part of the Council's overall Housing Strategy, which is set out in the *Housing Strategy 2009-2012*.
- 4.2 The Council has adopted its *Housing Charter* which sets out, in simple, clear and precise terms the Council's general approach to all its housing services.
- 4.3 The Council's general approach to providing information to tenants is set out in the District-wide *Tenant Participation Agreement* and in the *Local Tenant Participation Agreements*.
- 4.4 The Council has adopted a published *Equal Opportunities Policy in the Provision of Housing Services* which sets out its commitment to equal opportunities in the provision and quality of its housing services.
- 4.5 Guidance on the provision of *National Indicators* is provided annually.
- 4.6 The Government provides guidance annually on the *BPSA* and *HSSA* submission, and other housing information requirements.
- 4.7 Procedures for obtaining and providing information are set out in the Housing Directorate's *Quality Process Manual* and *Work Instructions*.

#### **5. Aim and Objectives**

- 5.1 The aim of this strategy is:
  - "To provide relevant, timely, clear and accurate information for the Council's tenants, leaseholders, housing applicants, other residents of the district, Council staff, the Government and other individuals or bodies with an interest in the Housing Directorate".
- 5.2 This aim will be met by;
  - a) producing publications for the Council's client groups on its housing services, policies and performance;
  - b) ensuring that all such published information is well presented and easy to understand;
  - c) making provision for people who may have difficulty accessing information, and those who need information provided in another format or language;
  - d) ensuring that housing applicants, tenants and leaseholders are given up to date information on Council policies and conditions, and on their rights;
  - e) producing annual Business Plans with statistical appendices as required, strategy documents, housing needs surveys and/or housing market assessments and statistical returns for the Government;

- f) providing information for the Council's corporate plans as required;
- g) developing systems to monitor and report housing performance;
- h) measuring performance against Housing's Service Standards where possible;
- i) developing the Council's approach to the way information is provided by;
  - ensuring its publications are consistent in quality of presentation and readability;
  - continually increasing the flow of information to the target groups;
  - providing information in a form suitable for any people with special needs;
  - make the best use of all types of media available for the dissemination of information.

## **6. Statutory requirements**

6.1 The provision of information is good practice and in some areas there are statutory requirements. In other areas the Council is asked to respond to requests for information from the Government. These responses can play an important part in attracting funding which can result in an improved level of service.

- a) Housing Act 1985:
  - Provision of information about tenancies (Section 104);
  - Consultation on matters of housing management (Section 105); and
  - Information about housing allocation (Section 106).
- b) Housing Act 1996:
  - Duty of local housing authority to provide advisory services in relation to homelessness (Section 179).
- c) Housing Act 2004:
  - Duty of local housing authority to provide information to help tenants decide whether to exercise the Right to Buy (Section 189).
- d) Local Government Act 1999:
  - Under the directives on Best Value the Secretary of State may order the Council to provide performance indicators (Section 4a);
  - Duty of local authorities to report on performance standards (Section 4b); and
  - General duty to meet the Government's directives on Best Value (Section 3).
- e) Section 204, Housing and Regeneration Act 2008:
  - Requirement of registered housing providers to publish an annual report for tenants to be shared with tenants and the Tenant Services Authority (TSA).

- 6.2 Housing statistics, information on performance and complaints monitoring reports are published regularly in the tenants newsletter.
- 6.3 The Council is not required as a statutory duty to submit a Housing Strategy, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, Housing Needs Survey or Housing Market Assessment. However, under Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985, the Council has a duty to consider the housing conditions and needs of the District with respect to the provision of further housing accommodation. In any event these submissions play an important part in attracting additional financial resources which are largely used for maintaining and improving the Council's own stock or for building new social housing in partnership with RSLs, the TSA and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

## **7. Client Consultation, Information and Involvement**

- 7.1 Tenants will be involved and consulted on the Council's arrangements for the provision of information through:
- consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and tenants' associations, on service delivery and any proposed changes to the service and strategy;
  - tenant satisfaction surveys providing opinions on the overall landlord service and surveys on satisfaction with specific services, such as repairs;
  - feedback forms included in Council publications and on the website; and
  - exit surveys following interviews with housing officers.
- 7.2 The District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement sets out the Council's commitment to tenant participation and states that the Council will enable its tenants 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.

## **8. General principles**

### *a) Information for client groups*

- 8.1 All the information published by the Housing Directorate should be well presented, accurate and written in plain English.
- 8.2 The needs of older people and those with disabilities will be taken into account in the preparation of information.
- 8.3 *Housing News*, the Council's newsletter for all tenants and leaseholders, will be published at least three times a year to include items on: Council policy, Council services, application criteria, opportunities for participation, housing performance and; general items of information. Information for applicants will be included in *Housing News* as required and distributed to that client group.

- 8.4 *Leaflets* for Council tenants, applicants, homeless people and owner-occupiers will be published and updated as necessary to ensure all residents are fully informed of their rights and responsibilities, and the housing services available to them from the Council and other organisations.
- 8.5 The Council's *Housing Application Pack* will be kept up to date so that all applicants for social housing are fully informed of the Council's policies and the law relating to them.
- 8.6 The *Tenants Handbook* will be updated as necessary.
- 8.7 The Housing area of the Council's Website will be kept up to date to provide news and information that may be sought by tenants, leaseholders, applicants and members of the general public.
- 8.8 Information for staff on housing matters will be published on the Council's intranet and kept up to date.
- 8.9 Information on housing news items, major projects or significant policy changes will be reported to the public through the media on an ad hoc basis.
- 8.10 Where issues will affect a defined group of tenants, the necessary information may be provided through public meetings, through tenants' groups or by individual consultation.

b) *Information required by the Government*

- 8.11 The Council will prepare, consult with others, produce and distribute a three year *Housing Strategy*, according to the Government's guidelines.
- 8.12 Information will be collected for the production of the Council's annual *Business Plan Statistical Appendix (BPSA)* and *Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA)* according to the Government's guidelines and timetable.
- 8.13 The Council will obtain accurate information and complete any statistical returns requested by the Government or its agencies, including the quarterly and annual *Housing Activity Returns (P Forms)*, *National Register of Social Housing (NROSH)* and *Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales in Social Housing in England (CORE)* by the dates given.
- 8.14 The Council will carry out an annual housing stock reconciliation as required by the Finance service for its subsidy claim to the Government.

c) *Performance Management System*

- 8.15 The Housing Directorate will meet its obligations to provide statistics required by the Council including the provision of figures for any *National Indicator*, details of consultation exercises and the establishment and co-ordination of local performance indicators. Requests for information will be met within the timetables set by the Council's Performance Improvement Unit.
- 8.16 The Housing Directorate is required to report on performance against standards and monitor improvement under the TSA Regulatory Framework. The Housing Strategy and Information Team will work with housing managers, other Council



services and other local authorities to assist in the benchmarking of individual services for this purpose.

## 9. Future Developments

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

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Knowledgeable and committed staff</li> <li>❖ Customer Service Excellence Award</li> <li>❖ All tenants, leaseholders and applicants receive up to date news and housing information via tenants newsletter</li> <li>❖ All tenants receive a Tenants Handbook</li> <li>❖ All housing applicants receive an Application Pack</li> <li>❖ Welcome pack for sheltered housing residents and Careline users</li> <li>❖ Information on all housing services available online</li> <li>❖ Staff are regularly updated on housing matters through in-house magazine</li> <li>❖ Information procedures reviewed as part of Quality Management System ISO 9001:2008</li> <li>❖ Feedback on housing information services through Tenants Satisfaction Survey and other mechanisms</li> <li>❖ Tenants’ groups including the District-wide federation are consulted on information issues</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Council website does not have full interactive functionality, for example customers are unable to make housing applications online</li> <li>❖ Customers wishing to seek housing information online are unable to access a PC at the Civic Offices or at the Limes Farm Housing Office</li> <li>❖ Some diversity profiling has been conducted but a comprehensive profile of the client group is lacking</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Action plan to improve the housing information service</li> <li>❖ More involvement of customers in reviewing the provision of housing information</li> <li>❖ Provide information in different formats for customers with special needs where required</li> <li>❖ Take advantage of new technology as appropriate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Major changes in legislation</li> <li>❖ Major changes in government requirements for statistics and/or information</li> <li>❖ Failure of IT or communications systems</li> </ul>

## 10. Action Plan

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>RESOURCES REQUIRED</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>ACTIONED BY</b>
<b>General provision of information</b>			
Complete any outstanding actions relating to meetings of the Customer Perspective Group.	Within existing resources	March 2011	Principal Housing Officer (Information)
<b>Annual Report</b>			
Produce an annual report in accordance with the TSA guidance on annual reports to tenants	Within existing resources	Oct 2010	Principal Housing Officer (Information)
<b>Website</b>			
Update the website to ensure accuracy of information and working links.	Within existing resources	Oct 2010	Principal Housing Officer (Information)
Provide more on-line functionality to the website include online housing applications though links to OHMS system	Within existing resources	Oct 2011	Principal Housing Officer (IT)
Provide PC at Civic Offices and Limes Farm Housing Office principally for accessing HomeOption and HomeSwapper	Within existing resources	Oct 2010	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)
<b>Tenant participation</b>			
Review and update the District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement setting out the ways in which information will be provided	Within existing resources	June 2011	Tenant Participation Officer (TPO)
Use Tenants Talkback Panel "Reading Group" to discuss the format of Housing's 2010 Annual Report	Within existing resources	Sept 2010	Tenant Participation Officer (TPO)
<b>Equality and diversity</b>			
Work with Assistant Housing Manager (Options) and Principal Housing Officer (IT) to collect additional profiling data on all homeseekers as part of the signing up process.	Within existing resources	Oct 2010	Principal Housing Officer (Information)
Work with other Essex authorities to update the Essex-wide report "Facing the facts" to include faith and ethnicity profiling	Within existing resources	Oct 2011	Principal Housing Officer (Information)

<b>Tenant satisfaction</b>			
Consider Housing's approach to tenant satisfaction surveys in light of the Government's decision to discontinue the requirement to conduct 'STATUS' tenant satisfaction surveys	Within existing resources	Oct 2010	Director of Housing
Review and report annually responses to the online satisfaction monitoring form provided on the Council's website.	Within existing resources	March 2011	Principal Housing Officer (Information)
Seek comments on satisfaction with the Council's newsletter.	Within existing resources	March 2011	Principal Housing Officer (Information)

## 11. Funding the Strategy

11.1. This is a relatively small-scale service funded primarily by the Housing Revenue Account. 1.5 FTE staff are employed exclusively for strategy and information functions. A part-time Senior Quality and Performance Officer and a full-time Tenant Participation Officer (TPO) are also attached to this Section, with responsibility for a number of information related functions. The Housing Assistant, TPO and Senior Quality and Performance Officer are supervised by the Principal Housing Officer (Information). This supervisory role forms part of the duties of the PHO, in addition to the information functions set out in this strategy and other housing strategy related responsibilities. Demand for the information service peaks at certain times of year and is gradually increasing overall due to statutory requirements. However, an increase in the number of staff is not anticipated.

	Staff Resource Projections			
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
<b>Av no. staff to provide service (FTE p/a)</b>	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8

Staff Resource Breakdown – 2010/11	
Post(s)	FTE
Principal Housing Officer (Information)	1.0
Housing Assistant (Info/Strategy)	0.5
Tenant Participation Officer	0.2
Senior Quality and Performance Officer	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.8</b>

## 12. Key Targets & Performance Monitoring

12.1 The information service responds to the needs of its client groups, requests for information, and any statutory requirements. There are no key targets for this service.

12.2 The Council will monitor the performance of its Information Strategy through;

- a) requests for feedback and comments from the client group;
- b) feedback from the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;
- c) timely submission of returns to the Government;
- d) perception of the HSSA and BPSA submissions by the Government;
- e) feedback from officers;
- f) the results of tenant satisfaction surveys;
- g) feedback from the website.

### **13. Reviewing the Strategy**

13.1 Officers will review this Strategy annually. They will consider the feedback received from the groups listed at 12.2.

13.2 The whole strategy will be reviewed by the Housing Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in April 2013 for renewal September 2013. Individual elements may be reviewed earlier if this should prove necessary.