

Scrutiny Standing Panel Agenda



Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel Tuesday, 13th March, 2012

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:
democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors S Murray (Chairman), A Mitchell MBE (Vice-Chairman), Ms R Brookes, K Chana, Mrs A Grigg, Ms J Hart, Mrs S Jones, W Pryor, D Stallan, H Ulkun and Mrs J H Whitehouse

SUBSTITUTE NOMINATION DEADLINE:

16:30

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. SUBSITUTE 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. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 3 - 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.

5. COUNCIL RESPONSE TO CLG CONSULTATION PAPER ON REVISED ALLOCATIONS CODE OF GUIDANCE (Pages 11 - 60)

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN KEY ACTION PLAN 2011/12 - 12 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT (Pages 61 - 70)

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

7. HRA BUSINESS AND REPAIRS/MAINTENANCE BUSINESS PLANS 2012/13 (Pages 71 - 184)

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

8. HOUSING DIRECTORATE'S SERVICE STRATEGIES ON EMPTY COUNCIL PROPERTIES, OLDER PEOPLE'S SERVICES & HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT (Pages 185 - 226)

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

9. SOLAR PV TO COUNCIL HOUSING (Pages 227 - 230)

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

10. 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.

11. FUTURE MEETINGS

To consider the forward programme of meeting dates for the Panel which are as follows:

- (a) Tuesday 24 July 2012 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1;
- (b) Tuesday 23 October at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1;
- (c) Tuesday 29 January 2013 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1; and
- (d) Tuesday 19 March at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1.

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 – 2011/2012

Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Scheduled Date	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
(1) Presentation by Mears on proposed approach to Repairs Management Contract	Low	July 2011	Completed – July 2011	19th July 2011 25th October 2011 28th November 2011 (Joint with Finance & Performance Management Scrutiny Panel) 31st January 2012 5th March 2012 13 th March 2012 + Special Meeting (to be Arranged)
(2) Annual Report on the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme	Low	July 2011	Completed – July 2011	
(3) HouseMark Benchmarking Report of Housing Services	Low	July 2011	Completed – July 2011	
(4) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants	Medium	July 2011	Completed – July 2011	
(5) Housing Performance Indicators - 2010/11 Out-turn (Tenant-Selected & KPIs)	Low	July 2011	Completed – July 2011	
(6) 12-Month Progress Report on Housing Strategy Action Plan 2010/11	Low	July 2011	Completed – July 2011	
(7) Housing Strategy Action Plan 2011/12	High	July 2011	Completed – July 2011	
(8) Performance against Housing Service Standards and Review	Medium	July 2011	Completed – July 2011	
(9) Six-monthly Progress Report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan	Low	October 2011	Completed - 25 th October 2011	

(10) Approach to future Council House-building Programme	High	October 2011	Completed - 25 th October 2011
(11) HRA 30-Year Financial Plan in Preparation for HRA Self-financing	High	October 2011	Completed - 28 th November 2011
(12) Briefing on the proposed Council rent increase for 2010/11	Low	January 2012	Not Required – Following detailed consideration of the HRA Financial Plan and associated rent increases, this is not required this year
(13) Housing Service Strategy on Empty Properties (Review and update)	Medium	October 2011	Completed - 5 th March 2012
(14) Review of Private Sector Housing Strategy	High	January 2012	Completed - 5 th March 2012
(15) Six-monthly Progress report on Housing Strategy Action Plan 2011/12	Low	January 2012	Completed - 5 th March 2012
(16) Feed-in Tariff Scheme for Council Housing Stock	High	July 2011	Considered on 25th October 2011 – but requires further consideration at 13th March 2012 meeting
(17) Housing Service Strategy on Housing and Neighbourhood Management (Review and update)	Medium	March 2012	On Agenda - for 13 th March 2012 meeting
(18) 12-monthly Progress report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan	Low	March 2012	On Agenda - for 13 th March 2012 meeting
(19) Housing Service Strategy on Empty Council Properties (Review and update)	Low	March 2012	On Agenda - for 13 th March 2012 meeting

(20) Housing Service Strategy on Older Peoples Housing (Review and update)	Medium	March 2012	On Agenda - for 13 th March 2012 meeting
(21) HRA Business Plan 2012/13	High	March 2012	On Agenda - for 13 th March 2012 meeting
(22) Housing Service Strategy on Repairs and Maintenance (New)	Medium	October 2011	Deferred to 2012/13 Work Programme – Due to officer workload
(23) Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency (Review and update)	Medium	October 2011	Deferred to 2012/13 Work Programme – Due to officer workload
(24) Housing Service Strategy on Home Ownership (Review and update)	Medium	January 2012	Deferred to 2012/13 Work Programme – Due to officer workload
(25) Housing Service Strategy on Rent Administration (Review and update)	Medium	March 2012	Deferred to 2012/13 Work Programme – Due to officer workload
(26) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	High	October 2011	Deferred to the October 2012 – To await the Commencement Order for this part of the Localism Act and publication (and consideration by officers) of the final version of the new Code of Guidance on Allocations.
Items added after the original Work Programme was agreed			
(27) Provision of smoke detectors in Communal blocks or Council properties	Medium	October 2011	Completed - 31 st January 2012

(28) Consideration of Council response to CLG Consultation Paper <i>"Reinvigorating the Right to Buy and one for one replacement"</i>	Low	January 2012	Completed - 31 st January 2012
(29) Presentation and review of the success of the Council's Social Housing Fraud Pilot Scheme and consideration of recommendations to the Cabinet	High	January 2012	Completed - 31 st January 2012
(30) Consideration and recommendations to Cabinet of proposed housing service improvements and service enhancements, as a result of the additional resources available from HRA self financing	High	March 2012	Completed - 5 th March 2012
(31) Consideration of Council response to CLG Consultation Paper <i>"Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England"</i>	Low	March 2012	On Agenda - for 13 th March 2012 meeting
(32) Homelessness Strategy – Revision and update	High	March 2012	Deferred to 2012/13 Work Programme – Due to officer workload and the need to provide figures for the whole year 2011/12

<p>(33) Outcome report on the implementation of new licences for park home sites</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>October 2011</p>	<p>Deferred until for a special meeting at a later date – This had been delayed from the originally scheduled date, due to the resignation of both the Technical Officer (Private Sector) and the Environmental Health Officer undertaking the site inspections, which has delayed the programme, and to await the outcome of liaison meetings with site owners and representatives of residents associations, held before Christmas.</p> <p>A report was included on the Scrutiny Panel’s Agenda for its meeting on 31st January 2012, but was deferred to a special meeting of the Scrutiny Panel to allow the Essex Fire Authority to provide detailed written advice on the fire safety aspects of the issue.</p>	
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Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 13 March 2012

Portfolio: Housing – Councillor Mrs M McEwen

Subject: Council response to CLG Consultation Paper on Revised Allocations Code of Guidance

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

Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins ext 4607



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the CLG Consultation Paper “Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local authorities in England”, which is attached as Appendix 2 to the report be noted;**
- (2) That consideration be given to the proposed Council response to the Consultation Paper attached as Appendix 1; and**
- (3) That the Scrutiny Panel considers whether any different or additional comments should be included within the Council’s response.**

Report:

1. In January of this year, the Department for Communities and Local Government issued a consultation paper on “Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England”. The Consultation Paper is attached as Appendix 2 to the report. The closing date for responses is 30 March 2012.
2. A proposed response by the Council to each of the questions asked within the Consultation Paper is set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
3. The Scrutiny Panel is invited to consider the proposed Council response and whether any different or additional comments should be included within the response.

Reason for decision:

4. Responding to the Government’s Consultation Paper is an opportunity for the Council to influence and comment on the future guidance on the new arrangements for the allocation of accommodation.

Options considered and rejected:

5. Not to respond to the Government’s Consultation Paper

Consultation undertaken:

6. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will be consulted on the Council’s agreed response at their meeting on 28 March 2012 and will be invited to submit its own views to the CLG directly.

APPENDIX

Consultation Questions	Proposed Response
Chapter One	
1. Does your allocations scheme/transfer policy already provide for social tenants who are under-occupying to be given priority?	Yes. Tenants who wish to “downsize” are given both Band One priority (the highest priority) and also a financial incentive.
2. Do you intend to revise your allocation scheme in order to make it easier for under-occupying social tenants to downsize to more appropriately sized accommodation?	Members will give the matter consideration later in the year, once the final guidance has been issued.
3. If so, what changes to your allocations scheme will you be considering – to make it easier for under-occupying tenants to downsize?	May consider removing any penalties for refusals of tenancy offers for those downsizing and also reduce the Council’s current age restriction for occupying bungalows for those downsizing.
<i>Other comments on Chapter One:</i>	Paragraphs 1.7 &1.8 – Paragraph 1.7 states that transfer applicants with “reasonable preference” are to be treated on the same basis as new applicants, whereas authorities may set their own transfer policies for transfer applicants who do not have reasonable preference. This therefore means that <u>any</u> priority could be given to transfer applicants who are not entitled to reasonable preference. For example, they could be given greater priority than transfer applicants in reasonable preference categories. There should be provisions to prevent any authority from prioritising in this way.

Consultation Questions	Proposed Response
Chapter Two	
<i>Comments on Chapter Two</i>	<p>Paragraph 2.5 – The Council welcomes the opportunity to have its own eligibility criteria for its waiting list and the proposal that an applicant can be treated as ineligible if they are guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour.</p> <p>Paragraph 2.6 – The Council considers it very unfortunate that the existing legislation allows for a right to a review on eligibility as this will be administratively cumbersome, when local authorities can adopt their own criteria which will probably result in significantly more reviews especially where the rules are absolutely clear e.g. no local connection. The Council would ask the Government to consider amending the legislation.</p>
Chapter Three	
<p>4. Do you agree that members of the Armed Forces and former Service personnel should not be disqualified on residency grounds? Is 5 years from the date of discharge an appropriate time limit for this restriction? If not, what would be a more appropriate period?</p>	<p>The Council supports the proposal that members of the Armed Forces and former service personnel should not be disqualified on residency grounds. However, we believe an appropriate time limit would be 3 years from the date of discharge because this is considered to be a more appropriate period within which they could have found settled accommodation. It would also be helpful if “members of the Armed Forces and Service personnel” was more clearly defined than is set out under Section 374 of the Armed Forces Act. Does it include clerical workers for example?</p>
<p>5. Does the draft guidance provide sufficient clarity on how to implement the new power for housing authorities to set their own allocations qualification criteria? If not, in what areas would more guidance be useful?</p>	<p>For the avoidance of doubt, it could be made clearer that if an applicant has “reasonable preference” but does not meet the eligibility criteria for joining the housing register, (e.g. non-local applicants), then they can still be excluded from the list.</p>

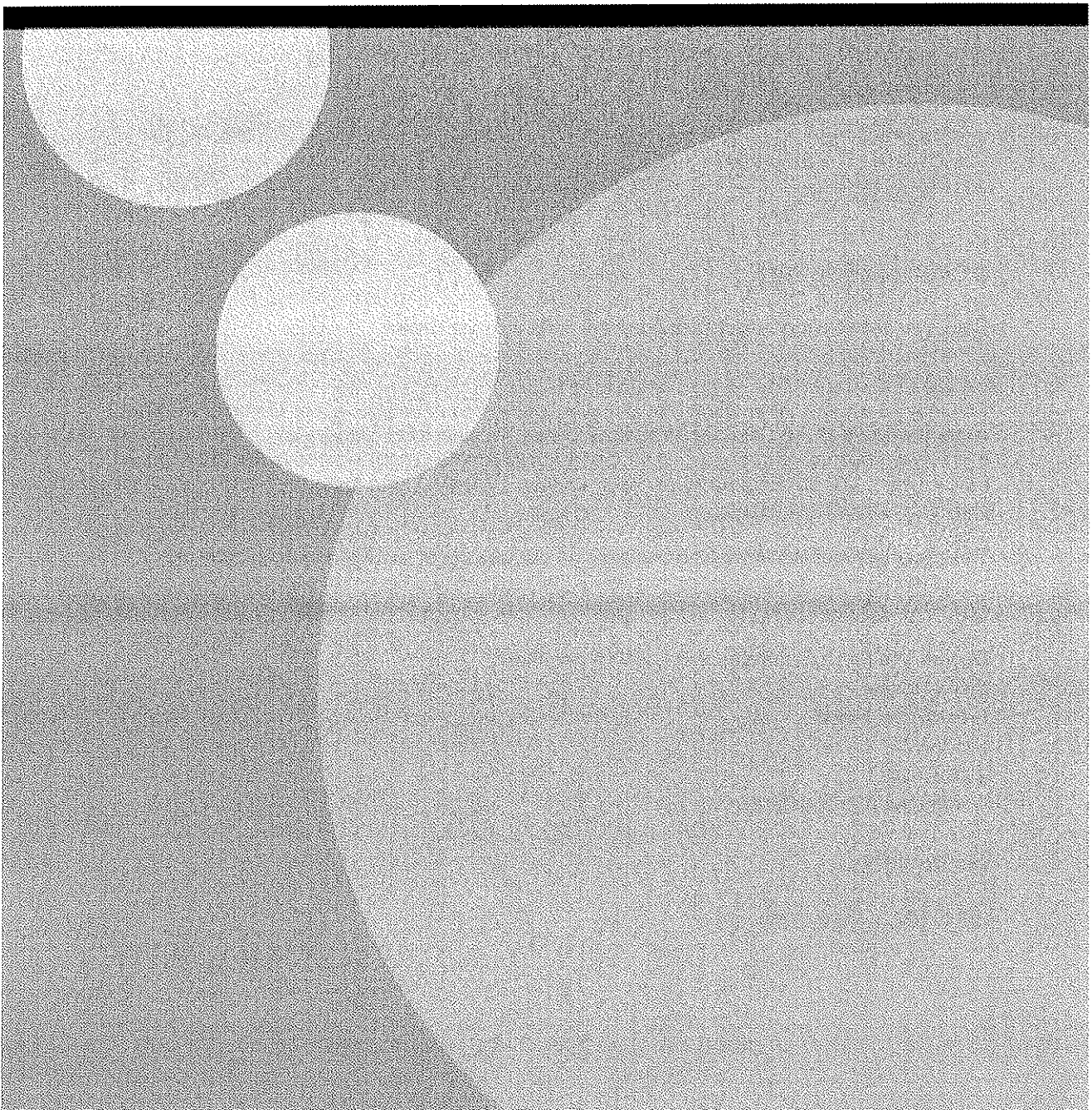
Consultation Questions	Proposed Response
Chapter Four	
<p>6. Do you agree that the bedroom standard is an appropriate measure of overcrowding for the purpose of according reasonable preference? If not, what measure do you consider would be more appropriate?</p>	<p>No. Bearing in mind the shortage of accommodation it is considered reasonable for same sex persons to share a bedroom irrespective of their age. Therefore, it is suggested that there should be the following two bullet points included in Paragraph 4.11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married or cohabiting couples • Two persons of opposite sex over the age of 5 years
<p>7. Should this guidance provide advice on how to define “overcrowding” for the purpose of according additional preference? If so, would an appropriate measure be two bedrooms or more short of the bedroom standard?</p>	<p>The Council considers that “overcrowding” should be determined based upon the current requirements of the Housing Act Part X.</p>
<p>8. How does your allocation scheme currently define “overcrowding” for allocation purposes? Does it, for example, use the bedroom standard, the statutory overcrowding standards in Part 10 of the housing Act 1985, or another definition? If the last of these please provide brief details.</p>	<p>“Where the permitted number, in accordance with the provisions of S.326 of the Housing Act 1985 is exceeded”. However, applicants lacking a bedroom are also given some (although less) priority.</p>
<p>9. The Government proposes to regulate to require housing authorities to frame their allocations scheme to provide for former Service personnel with urgent housing needs to be given additional preference for social housing. Do you agree with this proposal?</p>	<p>The Council generally supports the proposal. It would be helpful if Paragraph 4.19 was clearer. Does this mean that former members of the Armed Forces will be given additional preference above those applicants (who are not former members of the Armed Forces), who are already in reasonable preference categories?</p>
<p>10. Does your allocations scheme already make use of the flexibilities within the allocation legislation to provide for those who have Served in the Armed Forces to be given greater priority for social housing? If so, how does your scheme provide for this?</p>	<p>No</p>

Consultation Questions	Proposed Response
<p>11. If not how do you intend to take advantage of the flexibilities in the allocation legislation to provide for former members of the Armed Forces to be given greater priority for social housing? If so what changes might you be considering?</p>	<p>The Council does intend to provide greater priority for members of the Armed Forces for social housing. Members will be considering the matter on receipt of the final guidance. The Council welcomes the proposal to disregard any lump sums received by a member of the Armed Forces as compensation for injury of disability sustained on active service.</p>
<p>12. Does your allocations scheme already provide for some priority to be given to people who are in work, seeking work, or otherwise contributing to the community? If so, how does your scheme provide for this?</p>	<p>Our scheme gives some priority to applicants who are needing to move to be nearer to their place of work, or to take up a permanent offer of employment, or a long-term training opportunity which may lead to employment.</p>
<p>13. If not, do you intend to revise your allocation scheme to provide for more priority to be given to people who are in work, seeking work, or otherwise contributing to the community? If so, how does your scheme provide for this?</p>	<p>Members will be considering whether or not they wish to give further priority to people who are in work, on receipt of the final guidance. It may be difficult to define what “contributing to the community” means.</p>
<p>14. Are there other ways in which housing authorities can frame their allocation scheme to meet the needs of prospective adopters and foster carers?</p>	<p>The Council considers that there is a marked difference between an adopter and a foster carer as adoption is a more long-term permanent arrangement. If the Council decides to use Flexible Tenancies in the future, these could be granted to adopters and foster carers for an appropriate fixed-term and be reviewed at the end of the period under the assessment criteria. The guidance may want to include this approach as a possible way of dealing with prospective adopters and foster carers. It is suggested that Children’s Services should notify the Council when an appropriate point has been reached in the adopting/fostering process where any person is likely to be accepted.</p>

Consultation Questions	Proposed Response
15. Does the draft guidance provide sufficient clarity on the extent of flexibilities available to housing authorities when framing their allocation schemes?	Yes, subject to the comments made under each consultation question.
<i>Comments on Chapter Four</i>	Under Paragraph 4.38. It is considered that providing an additional bedroom for carers who are not residing at the property could be open to abuse and the potential a waste of a bedroom. The Council would currently only consider granting an additional bedroom if a carer (an identified person) was living at the accommodation as their only or principle home and can demonstrate that they have given up permanent accommodation to enter into the arrangement.

Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England

Consultation



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Ministerial foreword

Social housing is of enormous importance - for the millions who live in it now, and for the many more who look to social housing to provide the support they need to live safe, healthy and prosperous lives.

The Localism Act makes fundamental changes to the social housing system which will make the system fairer, striking a proper balance between the needs of new and existing tenants.

Currently, many are trapped by their housing – lacking incentives to work, and often unable to move even if they want to. Our reforms will enable councils and social landlords to make social housing a springboard to success.

But it's important that councils and social landlords seize the opportunity which these changes offer to make the best use of this precious resource, so that more people benefit from a social home when they need it and for as long as they need it. This draft guidance points councils to the new and existing flexibilities within the allocation legislation which allow them to tailor local services to real local needs.


The guidance makes clear that we expect social homes to go to people who genuinely need them, such as hard working families and ex-servicemen and women, and not to those who do not – such as people who already own a home that is suitable for them to use.

It encourages councils to adopt a modern measure of overcrowding – so families in crowded housing will find it easier to move into more suitably sized homes. It encourages councils to prioritise tenants who want to downsize, helping those whose children have fled the nest to move to smaller, more manageable properties.

I know that several councils are already starting to introduce a new flexible approach to allocations – prioritising those who show responsibility by making an effort to find work. This guidance will help others follow suit. And it will help councils reward those who contribute in other ways, such as people who are looking to adopt or foster a child in need of a stable, loving family.

Through the Military Covenant, the Government has made clear its responsibility to support our armed forces in return for the important contribution they make to the country. That is why, alongside the guidance, we are consulting on new regulations which will bring an end to the unfair treatment of service families in need of a social home - ensuring they get the priority for social housing they deserve, and that those who have to move from base-to-base do not lose their qualification rights.

This new draft guidance and the draft armed forces regulations are an important part of the Government's commitment to make the social housing system more flexible and responsive, to get the best out of our four million social homes, and to make the system fairer for all. I look forward to receiving your views.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Shapps', with a period at the end.

Rt Hon Grant Shapps, MP

The consultation process and how to respond

Scope of the consultation

Topic of this consultation:	Proposed new statutory guidance to local housing authorities on the allocation of social housing; and proposed regulations designed to improve access to social housing for former and serving armed forces personnel.
Scope of this consultation:	The consultation seeks views on the content of the new guidance and desirability and practicability of the proposed changes in the regulations.
Geographical scope:	England.
Impact Assessment:	Not applicable.

Basic information

To:	This consultation is aimed primarily at local authorities. Housing associations, social housing tenants and waiting list applicants, as well as voluntary and community organisations representing tenants and applicants are also expected to have an interest.
Body/bodies responsible for the consultation:	Department for Communities and Local Government.
Duration:	5 January 2012 to 5 pm on 30 March 2012.

Enquiries:	Please contact Frances Walker: frances.walker@communities.gsi.gov.uk 0303 444 3655
How to respond:	By email to: housingreform@communities.gsi.gov.uk Or by post to: Frances Walker Department for Communities and Local Government Zone 1/J9, Eland House Bressenden Place London SW1E 5DU
Additional ways to become involved:	Not applicable.
After the consultation:	The Government will take into account the responses to this consultation when finalising the guidance and taking forward the regulations.
Compliance with the Code of Practice on Consultation:	The consultation complies with the Code.

CHAPTER 1

Scope of guidance and definition of an allocation

- 1.1 The Secretary of State is issuing this guidance to local housing authorities (referred to in this guidance as 'housing authorities') in England under s.169 of the Housing Act 1996 ('the 1996 Act'). Housing authorities are required to have regard to this guidance in exercising their functions under Part 6 of the 1996 Act ('Part 6'). In so far as this guidance comments on the law, it can only reflect the Department's understanding at the time of issue. Housing authorities will still need to keep up to date on any developments in the law in these areas.
- 1.2 This guidance replaces the following:
- Code of guidance on the allocation of accommodation, issued November 2002
 - Code of guidance on choice based lettings, issued August 2008
 - Circular 04/2009: Housing allocations – members of the armed forces
 - Fair and flexible: statutory guidance on social housing allocations, issued December 2009.
- 1.3 This guidance is specifically for housing authority Members and staff. It is also of direct relevance to Private Registered Providers. Private Registered Providers have a duty under s.170 of the 1996 Act to cooperate with housing authorities to such extent as is reasonable in the circumstances in offering accommodation to people with priority under the housing authority's allocation scheme.

Definition of an 'allocation'

- 1.4 For the purposes of Part 6, the allocation of housing by a housing authority is defined in s.159(2) as:
- selecting a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of housing accommodation held by them (ie by that authority)
 - nominating a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of housing accommodation held by another person (ie by another housing authority);
or

- nominating a person to be an assured tenant of housing accommodation held by a Private Registered Provider (or Registered Social Landlord in Wales).
- 1.5 The term 'assured tenant' includes a person with an assured shorthold tenancy (as well as a full assured tenancy) and includes Affordable Rent properties¹. 'Secure tenant' includes a person with a flexible tenancy granted under s.107A of the Housing Act 1985.

Allocations to existing tenants

- 1.6 Provisions in relation to existing tenants are contained in s.159(4A) and (4B).
- 1.7 Under s.159(4A) and (4B), the provisions of Part 6 do not apply in relation to an allocation of accommodation by a housing authority to an existing tenant of a housing authority or a Private Registered Provider unless:
- the allocation involves a transfer
 - the transfer is made at the tenant's request, and
 - the housing authority is satisfied that the tenant has reasonable preference for an allocation.
- 1.8 Accordingly, social housing tenants applying to the housing authority for a transfer and who are considered by the authority to have reasonable preference for an allocation must be treated on the same basis as new applicants in accordance with the requirements of s.166A(3) (see chapter 4 for guidance on the application of s.166A).
- 1.9 Transfers at the tenant's request, where the authority is satisfied that the tenant does not have reasonable preference, do not fall within Part 6. As a result, housing authorities may set their own transfer policies in relation to these tenants. Housing authorities should consider carefully how to make the best use of this flexibility. Providing social housing tenants with greater opportunities to

¹ Rented housing let by Private Registered Providers to households who are eligible for social rented housing. Affordable Rent is not subject to the national rent regime but is subject to other rent controls that require a rent (including service charges, where applicable) of no more than 80% of the local market rent.

² Inserted by s.154 of the Localism Act 2011.

move within the social sector can help to promote social and economic mobility, as well as meeting individual tenants' specific needs and aspirations. It can also help make the best use of social housing stock.

- 1.10 Authorities may want to consider the importance of giving existing social tenants who are under-occupying their accommodation appropriate priority for a transfer. This will be important in the light of measures in the Welfare Reform [Bill 2011] which, subject to Parliamentary approval, will reduce Housing Benefit entitlement for working age tenants in the social rented sector who are under-occupying their property (as measured in accordance with the Local Housing Allowance size criteria) from April 2013. Ensuring that under-occupiers are given sufficient priority for a transfer will make it easier for tenants to downsize to more suitably sized accommodation, and help authorities to tackle overcrowding in their area. Authorities may also wish to consider whether there are other provisions in their transfer policy which might make it more difficult for under-occupiers to move, such as a prohibition against tenants transferring where they have accrued minor rent arrears, and the scope for removing or revising these in relation to under-occupiers.

Consultation questions:

- 1. Does your allocation scheme/transfer policy already provide for social tenants who are under-occupying to be given priority?**
- 2. Do you intend to revise your allocation scheme in order to make it easier for under-occupying social tenants to downsize to more appropriately sized accommodation?**
- 3. If so, what changes will you be considering?**

- 1.11 Transfers that the housing authority initiates for management purposes do not fall within Part 6. These would include a temporary decant to allow repairs to a property to be carried out.
- 1.12 The renewal of a flexible tenancy in the same property also does not fall within Part 6; neither do mutual exchanges between existing tenants, including exchanges between secure and assured tenants and those with flexible tenancies (under s.107A of the Housing Act 1985). See Annex 1 for a full list of exemptions.

CHAPTER 2

Overview of the amendments to Part 6 made by the Localism Act 2011

- 2.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduces significant amendments to Part 6. The main policy objectives behind these amendments are:
- To enable housing authorities to better manage their housing waiting lists by giving them the power to determine which applicants do or do not qualify for an allocation of social housing within their district. Housing authorities will be able to operate a more focused waiting list which better reflects local circumstances and can be understood more readily by local people. It will also be easier for housing authorities to manage unrealistic expectations by excluding people who have little or no prospect of being allocated accommodation
 - To make it easier for existing social tenants to move by removing the constraints of Part 6 from those social tenants who apply to the housing authority for a transfer, unless they have reasonable preference. As a result, housing authorities will be able to strike an appropriate balance between meeting the needs of existing tenants and new applicants for social housing, while making best use of their stock. Part 6 continues to apply to transferring tenants with reasonable preference, ensuring they continue to receive priority under the housing authority's allocation scheme
 - To maintain the protection provided by the statutory reasonable preference criteria – which ensure that the priority for social housing goes to those in the greatest need.
- 2.2 The detailed changes to Part 6 contained in the Localism Act 2011 are set out in the following paragraphs.
- 2.3 Under s.159, housing authorities are obliged to comply with the provisions of Part 6 in the allocation of introductory and secure tenancies in their own or another housing authority's stock and the nomination of applicants to assured tenancies in Private Registered Providers' stock. Secure tenancies now include new flexible tenancies (s.107A of the Housing Act 1985). The term 'allocation' applies to a transfer at the request of an existing secure, introductory or assured tenant, but only where the housing authority is satisfied that he or she has 'reasonable preference' for an allocation. Existing secure, introductory and assured tenants

seeking a transfer who are not considered to have reasonable preference are outside the scope of Part 6. (The provisions in s.159(5) which bring all transferring tenants within the allocation rules continue to apply to allocations by authorities in Wales.)

- 2.4 New s.160ZA replaces s.160A in relation to allocations by housing authorities in England. Section 160A continues to apply to allocations by housing authorities in Wales.
- 2.5 Social housing may only be allocated to ‘qualifying persons’ and housing authorities in England are given the power to determine what classes of persons are or are not qualified to be allocated housing (s.160ZA(6) and (7)). These are new requirements and are in addition to the provisions on eligibility in respect of persons from abroad (s.160ZA(2) and (4)) which continue to be set centrally. The power for a housing authority to decide that an applicant is to be treated as ineligible by reason of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him unsuitable to be a tenant is redundant and has therefore been repealed (in relation to England). The power is no longer required, as housing authorities may set their own qualification criteria, including (but not limited to) disqualifying people who are guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour.
- 2.6 New s.166A requires housing authorities in England to allocate accommodation in accordance with a scheme which must be framed to ensure that certain categories of applicants are given reasonable preference for an allocation of social housing. With certain exceptions, s.166A replicates the provisions in s.167 which continues to apply to allocations by housing authorities in Wales. Section 166A(9) includes a new requirement for an allocation scheme to give a right to review a decision on qualification in s.160AZ(9), and to be informed of the decision on the review and the grounds for it. This is in addition to the existing right to review a decision on eligibility. Section 166A(12) is also new and provides that housing authorities must have regard to their homelessness and tenancy strategies when framing their allocation scheme.
- 2.7 The provisions in s.167 which allow for no preference to be given to a person guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour (s.167(2B) – (2D)) are not reproduced in s.166A. This is consequent on the decision to omit the unacceptable behaviour provisions from new s.160ZA. However, the power to take behaviour – whether good or poor - into account in determining priorities between people in the reasonable preference categories remains (new s.166A(5)(b)).
- 2.8 The requirement for an allocation scheme to contain a statement of the authority’s policy on offering a choice of accommodation or the opportunity to express preferences about their accommodation is retained (s.166A(2)). However, the requirement to provide a copy of this statement to people to whom they owe a homelessness duty (under s.193(3A) or s.195(3A) of the 1996 Act) is

repealed³. This is because, following the changes to the main homelessness duty made by the Localism Act 2011, there can no longer be a presumption that the homelessness duty will be brought to an end in most cases with an allocation under Part 6.

³ Repealed by s.148(2) and s.149(3) of the Localism Act 2011.

CHAPTER 3

Eligibility and qualification

- 3.1 Housing authorities must consider all applications for social housing that are made in accordance with the procedural requirements of the authority's allocation scheme (s.166(3)). In considering applications, authorities must ascertain:
- if an applicant is eligible for an allocation of accommodation, and
 - if he or she qualifies for an allocation of accommodation.
- 3.2 The provisions concerning eligibility and qualification for an allocation of accommodation are contained in s.160ZA. (Section 160A continues to apply to an allocation of accommodation by local authorities in Wales.)

Eligibility

- 3.3 An applicant may be ineligible for an allocation of accommodation under s.160ZA(2) or (4).
- 3.4 Authorities are advised to consider an applicant's eligibility at the time of the initial application and again when considering making an allocation to him or her, particularly where a substantial amount of time has elapsed since the original application.

Joint tenancies

- 3.5 Under s.160ZA (1)(b), a housing authority must not grant a joint tenancy to two or more people if any one of them is a person from abroad who is ineligible. However, where two or more people apply and one of them is eligible, the authority may grant a tenancy to the person who is eligible. In addition, while ineligible family members must not be granted a tenancy, they may be taken into account in determining the size of accommodation which is to be allocated.

Existing tenants

- 3.6 The provisions relating to the eligibility of persons from abroad do not affect the eligibility of an applicant who is already a secure or introductory tenant or an assured tenant of a Private Registered Provider. Most housing authority tenants and tenants of Private Registered Providers (and Registered Social Landlords in Wales) who apply to a local authority for a transfer fall outside the scope of the allocation legislation (s.159(4A)); while transferring tenants who are considered

to have reasonable preference for an allocation are specifically exempted from the eligibility provisions by virtue of s.160ZA(5).

Persons from abroad

3.7 A person will not be eligible for an allocation of accommodation under Part 6 if he or she is a person from abroad who is ineligible for an allocation under s.160ZA of the 1996 Act. There are two categories for the purposes of s.160ZA:

- (i) *a person subject to immigration control* - such a person is not eligible for an allocation of accommodation unless he or she comes within a class prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State (s.160ZA(2)), and
- (ii) *a person from abroad other than a person subject to immigration control* - the Secretary of State may make regulations to provide for other descriptions of persons from abroad who, although they are not subject to immigration control, are to be treated as ineligible for an allocation of accommodation (s.160ZA(4)).

3.8 The regulations that set out which classes of persons from abroad are eligible or ineligible for an allocation are the Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006 (SI 2006 No.1294) ('the Eligibility Regulations').

Persons subject to immigration control

3.9 The term 'person subject to immigration control' is defined in s.13(2) of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 as a person who under the Immigration Act 1971 requires leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom (whether or not such leave has been given).

3.10 Only the following categories of persons do not require leave to enter or remain in the UK:

- (i) British citizens
- (ii) certain Commonwealth citizens with a right of abode in the UK
- (iii) citizens of an EEA country ('EEA nationals'⁴), and their family members, who have a right to reside in the UK that derives from EU law. The question of whether an EEA national (or family member) has a particular right to reside in the UK (or in another Member State) will depend on the

⁴ European Economic Area nationals are nationals of any EU member state (except the UK), and nationals of Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

circumstances, particularly the economic status of the EEA national (e.g. whether he or she is a worker, self-employed, a student, or economically inactive)

- (iv) persons who are exempt from immigration control under the Immigration Acts, including diplomats and their family members based in the UK, and some military personnel.

3.11 Any person who does not fall within one of the four categories in paragraph 3.10 will be a person subject to immigration control and will be ineligible for an allocation of accommodation unless they fall within a class of persons prescribed by regulation 3 of the Eligibility Regulations (see paragraph 3.13 below).

3.12 If there is any uncertainty about an applicant's immigration status, housing authorities are recommended to contact the UK Border Agency using the procedures set out in Annex 7.

Persons subject to immigration control who are eligible for an allocation of accommodation

3.13 Regulation 3 of the Eligibility Regulations provides that the following classes of persons subject to immigration control are eligible for an allocation of accommodation:

- i) *a person granted refugee status*: persons granted refugee status are granted 5 years' limited leave to remain in the UK.
- ii) *a person granted exceptional leave to enter or remain in the UK without condition that they and any dependants should make no recourse to public funds*: this status is granted for a limited period where there are compelling humanitarian and/or compassionate circumstances for allowing them to stay. However, if leave was granted on condition that the applicant and any dependants should not be a charge on public funds, the applicant will not be eligible for an allocation of accommodation. Exceptional leave to remain (which is granted at the Secretary of State's discretion outside the Immigration Rules) now takes the form of 'discretionary leave'.
- iii) *a person with current leave to enter or remain in the UK with no condition or limitation, and who is habitually resident in the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland (the Common Travel Area)*: such a person will have indefinite leave to enter (ILE) or remain (ILR) and will be regarded as having settled status. However, where ILE or ILR status was granted as a result of an undertaking that a sponsor would be responsible for the applicant's maintenance and accommodation, the person must have been resident in the Common Travel Area for five years since the date of entry - or the date of the sponsorship undertaking,

whichever is later - for the applicant to be eligible. Where all sponsors have died within the first five years, the applicant will be eligible for an allocation of accommodation.

- iv) *a person who has humanitarian protection granted under the Immigration Rules*⁵: humanitarian protection is a form of leave granted to persons who do not qualify for refugee status but who would face a real risk of suffering serious harm if returned to their state of origin (see paragraphs 339C-344C of the Immigration Rules (HC 395)).

Other persons from abroad who may be ineligible for an allocation

3.14 By virtue of regulation 4 of the Eligibility Regulations, a person who is not subject to immigration control and who falls within one of the following descriptions is to be treated as a person from abroad who is ineligible for an allocation of accommodation:

- (i) a person who is not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (subject to certain exceptions - see paragraph 3.16 below)
- (ii) a person whose only right to reside in the UK is derived from his status as a jobseeker (or his status as the family member of a jobseeker). For this purpose, 'jobseeker' has the same meaning as for the purpose of regulation 6(1)(a) of the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/1003) ('the EEA Regulations')
- (iii) a person whose only right to reside in the UK is an initial right to reside for a period not exceeding three months under regulation 13 of the EEA Regulations
- (iv) a person whose only right to reside in the Common Travel Area is a right equivalent to one of the rights mentioned in (ii) or (iii) above and which is derived from EU Treaty rights.

3.15 See Annex 3 for guidance on rights to reside in the UK derived from EU law.

⁵ Inserted by the Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Miscellaneous Provisions) (England) Regulations 2006

Persons exempted from the requirement to be habitually resident

- 3.16 Certain persons from abroad are eligible for an allocation of accommodation even though they are not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area. Such a person is eligible for an allocation even if not habitually resident, if he or she is:
- a) an EEA national who is in the UK as a worker (which has the same meaning as it does for the purposes of regulation 6(1) of the EEA Regulations)
 - b) an EEA national who is in the UK as a self-employed person (which has the same meaning as in regulation 6(1) of the EEA Regulations)
 - c) a person who is treated as a worker for the purposes of regulation 6(1) of the EEA Regulations, pursuant to the Accession (Immigration and Worker Authorisation) Regulations 2006 (ie nationals of Bulgaria and Romania who are required to be authorised by the Home Office to work until they have accrued 12 months uninterrupted authorised work)⁶
 - d) a person who is a family member of a person referred to in (a) to (c) above,
 - e) a person with a right to reside permanently in the UK by virtue of regulation 15(c), (d) or (e) of the EEA Regulations
 - f) a person who left Montserrat after 1 November 1995 because of the effect of volcanic activity there
 - g) a person who is in the UK as a result of his deportation, expulsion or other removal by compulsion of law from another country to the UK. Such persons could include EEA nationals, where the UK immigration authorities were satisfied that the person was settled in the UK and exercising EU Treaty rights prior to deportation from the third country. Where deportation occurs, most countries will signal this in the person's passport and provide them with reasons for their removal.
- 3.17 On (a) and (b), authorities should note that a person who is no longer working or no longer in self-employment will retain his or her status as a worker or self-employed person in certain circumstances. On (c), authorities should note that

⁶ As of 1 May 2011, nationals of the 8 Eastern European countries (A8 nationals) which acceded to the EU in 2004 are no longer required to register with the Workers Registration Scheme in order to work in the UK. Regulation 4(2)(c) of the Eligibility Regulations no longer applies to applications from A8 workers as of that date. Rather applications from A8 workers should be considered on the same basis as those from other EU workers under regulation 4(2)(a).

accession state workers requiring authorisation will generally only be treated as a worker when they are actually working as authorised and will not retain 'worker' status between jobs until they have accrued 12 months continuous authorised employment. On (d), authorities should note that 'family member' does not include a person who is an extended family member who is treated as a family member by virtue of regulation 7(3) of the EEA Regulations (see Annexes 3 and 4 for further guidance).

The habitual residence test

- 3.18 The term 'habitual residence' is intended to convey a degree of permanence in the person's residence in the Common Travel Area; it implies an association between the individual and the place of residence and relies substantially on fact.
- 3.19 Applicants who have been resident in the Common Travel Area continuously during the two year period prior to their housing application are likely to be habitually resident. A period of continuous residence in the Common Travel Area might include periods of temporary absence, e.g. visits abroad for holidays or to visit relatives. Where two years' continuous residency has not been established, housing authorities will need to conduct further enquiries to determine whether the applicant is habitually resident (see Annex 5 for further guidance).

Qualification

- 3.20 Housing authorities may only allocate accommodation to people who are defined as 'qualifying persons' (s.160ZA(6)(a)). However, subject to the requirement not to allocate to persons from abroad who are ineligible and the exception for members of the armed forces in paragraph 3.23 below, a housing authority may decide the classes of people who are, or are not, qualifying persons.
- 3.21 In developing their qualification criteria, housing authorities are strongly encouraged to consult with their tenants and residents, partner Private Registered Providers and relevant statutory agencies and voluntary and community organisations. In framing their qualification criteria, authorities will need to have regard to their duties under the equalities legislation, as well as the requirement in s.166A(3) to give overall priority for an allocation to people in the reasonable preference categories.
- 3.22 There may be sound policy reasons for applying different qualification criteria in relation to existing tenants from those which apply to new applicants. So, for example, where residency requirements are imposed, authorities may wish to ensure they do not restrict the ability of existing social tenants to transfer to

another property within the district to take up work or to downsize to a smaller home.

Members of the armed forces

- 3.23 [The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces Personnel) (England) Regulations 2012] provide that authorities must not disqualify members of the armed forces on residency grounds. This prohibition extends to applications from former service personnel, where the application is made within five⁷ years of discharge. These provisions recognise the special position of members of the armed forces whose employment requires them to be mobile and who are likely therefore to be particularly disadvantaged by residency requirements.

Question 4

Do you agree that members of the armed forces and former service personnel should not be disqualified on residency grounds? Is 5 years from the date of discharge an appropriate time limit for this restriction? If not, what would be a more appropriate period?

Joint tenants

- 3.24 In the case of an allocation to two or more persons jointly, at least one of the persons must be a qualifying person (s.160ZA(6)(b)) and all of them must be eligible (see paragraph 3.5 above).

Fresh applications

- 3.25 An applicant who has been deemed not to qualify in the past may make a fresh application if the person considers that he or she should now be treated as qualifying, but it will be for the applicant to show that his or her circumstances have changed (s.160ZA(11)).

⁷ 5 years reflects guidelines issued by the local authorities associations which propose a working definition of normal residence for the purposes of establishing a local connection (see paragraph 4.1(i) to Annex 18 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006).

Question 5

Does the draft guidance provide sufficient clarity on how to implement the new power for housing authorities to set their own allocations qualification criteria? If not, in what areas would more guidance be useful?

Reviews of decisions on eligibility and qualification

- 3.26 Subsections 160ZA (9) and (10) provide that, when a housing authority decides that an applicant is ineligible by virtue of s.160ZA (2) or (4) or is not a qualifying person, it must give the applicant written notification of the decision. The notification must give clear grounds for the decision which must be based firmly on the relevant facts.
- 3.27 Under s.166A(9)(c), applicants have the right to request a review of any decision as to eligibility or qualification, and a right to be informed of the decision on review and the grounds for that decision.
- 3.27 For more detail on reviews and decisions, see further Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

Framing an allocation scheme

- 4.1 Housing authorities are required by s.166A(1) of the 1996 Act to have an allocation scheme for determining priorities, and for defining the procedures to be followed in allocating housing accommodation; and they must allocate in accordance with that scheme (s.166A(14)). All aspects of allocation procedure should be covered in the scheme, including the people by whom decisions are taken.
- 4.2 The requirement to have an allocation scheme applies to all housing authorities, regardless of whether or not they retain ownership of housing stock and whether or not they contract out the delivery of any of their allocation functions (see further Chapter 6).
- 4.3 When framing or modifying their allocation scheme, housing authorities must have regard to their current tenancy and homelessness strategies (s.166A(12)).

Choice and preference options

- 4.4 Section 166A(2) provides that an allocation scheme must include a statement as to the housing authority's policy on offering people who are to be allocated housing accommodation a choice of accommodation, or the opportunity to express preferences about the accommodation to be allocated to them.
- 4.5 It is for housing authorities to decide, in the light of local circumstances, and after appropriate consultation with their local community and Private Registered Providers, what their policy is on providing a choice of accommodation or the ability to express preferences about accommodation.

Reasonable preference

- 4.6 In framing their allocation scheme so as to determine priorities in the allocation of housing, housing authorities must ensure that reasonable preference is given to the following categories of people, as set out in s166A(3):

- (a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act)
- (b) people who are owed a duty by any housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under s.192(3)
- (c) people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions
- (d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability⁸, and
- (e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).

4.7. In framing their allocation scheme to give effect to s.166A(3), housing authorities should have regard to the following considerations:

- the scheme must be framed so as to give reasonable preference to applicants who fall within the categories set out in s.166A(3), over those who do not
- although there is no requirement to give equal weight to each of the reasonable preference categories, housing authorities will need to demonstrate that, overall, reasonable preference has been given to all the reasonable preference categories
- there is no requirement for housing authorities to frame their scheme to afford greater priority to applicants who fall within more than one reasonable preference category (cumulative preference) over those who have reasonable preference on a single, non-urgent basis⁹.

4.8 Otherwise, it is for housing authorities to decide how to give effect to the provisions of s.166A(3) in their allocation scheme. In particular, a scheme may provide for other factors than those set out in s.166A(3) to be taken into account in determining which applicants are to be given preference under a scheme, provided they do not dominate the scheme at the expense of those in s.166A(3) (see paragraphs 4.25 to 4.27 below).

⁸ The words 'including grounds relating to a disability' were added by the Housing Act 2004.

⁹ (*R (on application of Ahmad) v Newham LBC* March 2009)

Restricted persons

- 4.9 Applicants should not be given reasonable preference under paragraph (a) or (b) of s.166A(3) if they would only qualify for reasonable preference by taking into account a 'restricted person' within the meaning of Part 7 (s.166A(4)). A restricted person is a person subject to immigration control who is not eligible for homelessness assistance because he or she does not have leave to enter or remain in the UK or has leave which is subject to a 'no recourse to public funds' condition (s.184(7) of the 1996 Act).

Homeless or owed a homelessness duty

- 4.10 Housing authorities are required to frame their allocation scheme to give reasonable preference to people who are homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act or who are owed certain homeless duties under that part. This remains the case, notwithstanding the amendments made by the Localism Act to Part 7 which give housing authorities the power to end the main homelessness duty with an offer of private rented accommodation, without requiring the applicant's consent. This means that housing authorities will still be able to end the main homelessness duty with an offer of social housing where they decide this is appropriate. The term 'homeless within the meaning of Part 7' includes people who are intentionally homeless, and those who are not in priority need.

Overcrowding

- 4.11 The Secretary of State is aware that, in determining whether housing is 'overcrowded' for the purpose of according reasonable preference, many housing authorities look at whether the number of persons sleeping in the dwelling contravenes the 'bedroom standard'. The Secretary of State takes the view that the bedroom standard is an appropriate measure of overcrowding for allocation purposes, and recommends that all housing authorities should adopt a similar approach. The bedroom standard allocates a separate bedroom to each:

- married or cohabiting couple
- adult aged 21 years or more
- pair of adolescents aged 10-20 years of the same sex
- pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex.

Question 6

Do you agree that the bedroom standard is an appropriate measure of overcrowding for the purpose of according reasonable preference? If not, what measure do you consider would be more appropriate?

Question 7

Should this guidance provide advice on how to define 'severe overcrowding' for the purpose of according additional preference? (See paragraph 4.18 below.) If so, would an appropriate measure be two bedrooms or more short of the bedroom standard?

Question 8

How does your allocation scheme currently define 'overcrowding' for allocation purposes? Does it, for example, use the bedroom standard, the statutory overcrowding standards in Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985, or another definition? If the last of these, please provide brief details.

Medical and welfare grounds

- 4.12 The medical and welfare reasonable preference category includes people who need to move because of their disability or access needs, and authorities are reminded that this would include people with a learning disability as well as those with a physical disability.
- 4.13 In the case of applicants with access needs which are not met by their existing accommodation, authorities should consider, together with the applicant, whether their needs would be better served by staying put in their current accommodation, if appropriate aids and adaptations were put in place.
- 4.14 'Welfare grounds' would encompass a wide range of needs, including, but not limited to, the need to:
- Provide a secure base from which a care leaver, or a person who is moving on from a drug or alcohol recovery programme, can build a stable life
 - Provide accommodation, with appropriate care and support, for those who could not be expected to find their own accommodation, such as young adults with learning disabilities who wish to leave

the family home so that they can live independently within the community

- Provide or receive care or support. This would include foster carers, those approved to adopt, or those being assessed for approval to foster or adopt, who need to move to a larger home in order to accommodate a looked after child or a child who was previously looked after by a local authority.

4.15 It is important for housing authorities to work closely with social services at the local level, to ensure that those whom social services identify as having housing needs (as part of a community care assessment, for example) are given appropriate priority for suitable housing which meets those needs.

Hardship grounds

4.16 This would include, for example, a person who needs to move to a different locality in order to give or receive care, to access specialised medical treatment, or to take up a particular employment, education or training opportunity.

4.17 Possible indicators of the criteria which apply to reasonable preference categories (c) and (d) are given in Annex 2.

Additional preference

4.18 Section 166A(3) gives housing authorities the power to frame their allocation scheme so as to give additional preference to particular descriptions of people who fall within the statutory reasonable preference categories and who have urgent housing needs. All housing authorities must consider, in the light of local circumstances, the need to give effect to this provision. Examples of people with urgent housing needs to whom housing authorities should consider giving additional preference within their allocation scheme include:

- those who need to move for urgent medical reasons, eg because of a life threatening illness or sudden disability
- families in severe overcrowding such that it poses a serious health hazard
- those who are homeless and require urgent rehousing – as a result of violence, fire or flood.

4.19 In the case of former members of the armed forces¹⁰, authorities must ensure

¹⁰ As defined by s.374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006. This provides that 'the regular forces'

that their allocation scheme is framed to give additional preference to those applicants who fall within one or more of the reasonable preference categories and who have urgent housing needs¹¹. Other ways in which former and serving members of the armed forces can be given appropriate priority for an allocation are considered at paragraphs 4.34 and 4.35 below.)

Question 9

We propose to regulate to require housing authorities to frame their allocation scheme to provide for former service personnel with urgent housing needs to be given additional preference for social housing. Do you agree with this proposal?

Determining priorities between households with a similar level of need

- 4.20 Section 166A(5) provides that authorities may frame their allocation scheme to take into account factors in determining relative priorities between applicants in the reasonable (or additional) preference categories. Examples of factors which may be taken into account are given in the legislation: financial resources, behaviour and local connection. However, these examples are not exclusive and authorities may take into account other factors instead or as well as these.

Financial resources

- 4.21 This would enable a housing authority, for example, to give less priority to owner occupiers (wherever the property is situated) or to applicants who are financially able to secure alternative accommodation in the private sector.

means the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the regular army or the Royal Air Force. The 'the regular army' means any of Her Majesty's military forces other than: (a) the Army Reserve; (b) the Territorial Army; and (c) forces raised under the law of a British overseas territory.

¹¹ [The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference For Former Armed Forces Personnel) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/[xxxx]).]

Behaviour

- 4.22 Housing authorities would be able to take account of good as well as bad behaviour. So, for example, authorities could provide for greater priority to be given to applicants who have been model tenants or have benefited the community.

Local connection

- 4.23 Local connection is defined in accordance with s.199 of the 1996 Act. Broadly, a person has a local connection if they have a connection because of normal residence there (either current or previous) of their own choice, employment there, family associations, or special circumstances. Residence in an area is not of a person's own choice if it is the consequence of being detained in prison or detained in hospital under the Mental Health Act.
- 4.24 As a result of changes to s.199 introduced in 2008¹² a person serving in the armed forces can establish a local connection with a local authority district through residence or employment there, in the same way as a civilian.

Including local priorities alongside the statutory reasonable preference categories

- 4.25 Section 166A(11) of the 1996 Act provides that, subject to the reasonable preference requirements (and to any regulations made under s.166A), it is for housing authorities to decide on what principles their allocation scheme is to be framed.
- 4.26 As the House of Lords made clear in the case of *R (on application of Ahmad) v. Newham LBC*¹³ (*Ahmad*), s.166A(3)¹⁴ only requires that the people encompassed within that section are given 'reasonable preference'. It 'does not require that they should be given absolute priority over everyone else'¹⁵. This means that an allocation scheme may provide for other factors than those set out in s.166A(3) to be taken into account in determining which applicants are to be given preference under a scheme, provided that:

¹² Amendment to s.199 of the 1996 Act made by s.315 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 with effect from 1 December 2008.

¹³ [2009] UKHL 14

¹⁴ Previously s.167(2), which continues to apply to allocations by housing authorities in Wales.

¹⁵ Baroness Hale

- they do not dominate the scheme, and
- overall, the scheme operates to give reasonable preference to those in the statutory reasonable preference categories over those who are not

The Secretary of State would encourage authorities to consider the scope to take advantage of this flexibility to meet local needs and local priorities.

- 4.27 The House of Lords in *Ahmad* also made clear that, where a housing authority's allocation scheme complies with the reasonable preference requirements and any other statutory requirements, the courts should be very slow to interfere on the ground of alleged irrationality¹⁶.

Local lettings policies

- 4.28 Section 166A(6)(b) of the 1996 Act enables housing authorities to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference categories, provided that overall the authority is able to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of s.166A(3). This is the statutory basis for so-called 'local lettings policies'. Local lettings policies may be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management and policy objectives.
- 4.29 Before adopting a local lettings policy, authorities should consult with those who are likely to be affected and in particular with tenants and residents.
- 4.30 Local lettings policies should be published and should be revised or revoked where they are no longer appropriate or necessary.

Hard to let properties

- 4.31 Housing authorities may need to go outside the reasonable preference categories in order to fill hard to let stock and this is a matter to which authorities may wish to have regard when setting their qualification criteria.

¹⁶ Lord Neuberger

Under-occupation

- 4.32 When framing the rules which determine the size of property to allocate to different households and in different circumstances under Part 6, housing authorities are free to set their own criteria, provided they do not result in a household being statutorily overcrowded. However, in setting these criteria, authorities will want to take account of the provisions in the Welfare Reform [Bill] (mentioned in paragraph 1.9) which will reduce the amount of Housing Benefit working age claimants receive if they under-occupy a property. Where an allocation is likely to lead to a property being under-occupied and there is a possibility that Housing Benefit may not meet the full rent as a result, authorities should explore the implications of this with the household before an offer of accommodation is accepted.

Equal opportunities

- 4.33 Housing authorities are subject to the general public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010. As well as the duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, housing authorities are subject to a duty to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not, and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. The protected characteristics are age, race, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and gender reassignment.

Members of the armed forces

- 4.34 Housing authorities must frame their allocation scheme to give 'additional preference' to former members of the regular armed forces who fall within any of the statutory reasonable preference categories and are considered to be in urgent housing need (see paragraph 4.19 above).
- 4.35 Authorities are also strongly encouraged to take into account the needs of other serving or former service personnel when framing their allocation schemes. Examples of ways in which authorities can ensure they are given appropriate priority, include:
- using the flexibility within the allocation legislation to set local priorities alongside the statutory reasonable preference categories so as to give preference, for example, to those who have recently

left, or are close to leaving, the armed forces¹⁷ (see paragraph 4.25 above)

- using the power to determine priorities between applicants in the reasonable preference categories, so that applicants in housing need who have served in the armed forces are given greater priority for social housing over those who have not (see paragraph 4.20 above)
- if taking into account an applicant's financial resources in determining priorities between households with a similar level of need (see paragraph 4.21 above), disregarding any lump sum received by a member of the armed forces as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active service
- setting aside a proportion of properties for former members of the armed forces under a local lettings policy (see paragraph 4.28 above).

Question 10

Does your allocation scheme already make use of the flexibilities within the allocation legislation to provide for those who have served in the armed forces to be given greater priority for social housing? If so, how does your scheme provide for this?

Question 11

If not, do you intend to take advantage of the flexibilities in the allocation legislation to provide for former members of the armed forces to be given greater priority for social housing? If so, what changes might you be considering?

Households in work or seeking work

- 4.36 Local authorities are urged to consider how they can use their allocation policies to support those households who want to work, as well as those who – while unable to engage in paid employment - are contributing to their community in other ways, for example, through voluntary work. The flexibilities which authorities are encouraged to make use of to meet the needs of service personnel would apply equally here. This might involve, for example, framing an

¹⁷ MoD issues a Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement to Occupy Service Living Accommodation 6 months before discharge.

allocation scheme to give some preference to households who are in low paid work or employment-related training, even where they are not in the reasonable preference categories; or to give greater priority to those households in the reasonable preference categories who are also in work or who can demonstrate that they are actively seeking work. Alternatively, it might involve using local lettings policies to ensure that specific properties, or a specified proportion of properties, are allocated to households in particular types of employment where, for example, skills are in short supply.

- 4.37 Authorities should also consider how best they can make use of the new power to offer flexible tenancies to support households who are in low paid work, and incentivise others to take up employment opportunities. Flexible tenancies, by offering a time limited period of stability, may prove an attractive option both for those entering or re-entering the labour market and for authorities concerned to make the best use of their stock. At the end of the fixed term of the flexible tenancy, the authority will be able to decide whether to reissue the tenancy or support the tenant to move out of social housing, based on their published policy on tenancies.

Question 12

Does your allocation scheme already provide for some priority to be given to people who are in work, seeking work, or otherwise contributing to the community? If so, how does your scheme provide for this?

Question 13

If not, do you intend to revise your allocation scheme in light of the guidance in paragraphs 4.36 and 4.37? If so, what changes might you be considering?

Carers

- 4.38 In making accommodation offers to applicants who receive support from carers who do not reside with them but may need to stay overnight, housing authorities should, wherever possible, take account of the applicant's need for a spare bedroom.

Prospective adopters and foster carers

- 4.39 When considering housing applications from prospective foster carers or adopters who would require an extra bedroom to accommodate a foster or adoptive child, authorities will wish to weigh up the risk that the application to foster or adopt may be unsuccessful (leading to the property being under-occupied), against the wider benefits which would be realised if the placement was successful.
- 4.40 Children's services have a duty under s.22G of the Children Act 1989 to ensure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of the looked after children in their area. As a matter of good practice, we would expect housing authorities to work together with children's services to best meet the needs of prospective and approved foster carers and adopters, so that children's services can meet their s.22G duty. One way to strike an appropriate balance would be to set aside a quota of properties each year for people who need to move to larger accommodation in order to foster or adopt a child on the recommendation of children's services.

Question 14

Are there other ways in which housing authorities can frame their allocation scheme to meet the needs of prospective adopters and foster carers?

General information about particular applications

- 4.41 Under s166A(9), allocation schemes must be framed so as to give applicants the right to request from housing authorities general information that will enable them to assess:
- (a) how their application is likely to be treated under the scheme and, in particular, whether they are likely to fall within the reasonable preference categories
 - (b) whether accommodation appropriate to their needs is likely to be made available and, if so, how long it is likely to be before such accommodation becomes available.

Notification about decisions and the right to a review of a decision

4.42 Under s166A(9), allocation schemes must also be framed so as to give applicants the following rights about decisions which are taken in respect of their application:

- (a) the right, on request, to be informed of any decision about the facts of the applicant's case which has been, or is likely to be, taken into account in considering whether to make an allocation to him; and
- (b) the right, on request, to review a decision mentioned in (a) or a decision that the applicant is ineligible or does not qualify for an allocation. The applicant also has the right to be informed of the decision on the review and the grounds for it.

Question 15

Does the draft guidance provide sufficient clarity on the extent of flexibilities available to housing authorities when framing their allocation scheme?

CHAPTER 5

Allocation scheme management

- 5.1 Section 168(1) of the 1996 Act requires a housing authority to publish a summary of their allocation scheme and, if requested, to provide a free copy of that summary. Under s.168(2), housing authorities must also make the full scheme available for inspection at their principal office and, if requested, provide a copy of it on payment of a reasonable fee. It is recommended that authorities also publish their full scheme on their website.
- 5.2 Section 168(3) provides that, when an alteration is made to a scheme reflecting a major change of policy, an authority must ensure within a reasonable time that those likely to be affected by the change shall have the effect brought to their attention, taking such steps as the housing authority consider reasonable. A major policy change would include, for example, any amendment that affects the relative priority of a large number of people being considered for social housing. It might also include a significant alteration to procedures. Housing authorities should be aware that they still have certain duties under s.106 of the Housing Act 1985.

Consulting on allocation schemes

- 5.3 Section 166A(13) requires housing authorities, before adopting an allocation scheme, or altering an existing scheme to reflect a major change of policy, to:
- send a copy of the draft scheme, or proposed alteration, to every Private Registered Provider¹⁸ with which they have nomination arrangements, and
 - ensure that those Private Registered Providers have a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposals.
- 5.4 The Secretary of State considers that housing authorities should include all those who may be affected by, or have an interest in, the way social housing is allocated when consulting on a new allocation scheme or making major changes to it. It will be important to engage with a wide range of partners in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, as well as applicants, existing tenants and the wider community.

¹⁸ And, where relevant, every Registered Social Landlord in Wales with which they have nomination arrangements.

Advice and information

- 5.5 Section 166(1)(a) requires a housing authority to ensure that advice and information is available free of charge to everyone in their district about the right to apply for an allocation of housing accommodation. This would include general information about the procedures for making an application; as well as information about qualification criteria and how applicants are prioritised.
- 5.6 If a person is likely to have difficulty in making an application without assistance, the authority must secure that any necessary assistance is available free of charge (s.166(1)(b)). There is no requirement for the authority to provide that assistance itself. However, where an authority relies on other organisations and individuals to provide such assistance, it will need to ensure that the needs of all relevant applicants can be addressed.
- 5.7 Section 166(1A) requires housing authorities to inform applicants that they have the right to certain general information, as follows:
- information that will enable them to assess how their application is likely to be treated under the authority's allocation scheme, and, in particular, whether they are likely to fall within the reasonable preference categories, and
 - information about whether accommodation appropriate to their needs is likely to be made available to them and, if so, how long it is likely to be before such accommodation becomes available.
- 5.8 Section 166(4) prohibits housing authorities from divulging to other members of the public that a person is an applicant for social housing, unless they have the applicant's consent. Furthermore, authorities should process any personal data which they hold about applicants consistently with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- 5.9 If landlords are unclear about their obligations and responsibilities under the Data Protection Act they should contact the Information Commissioner.

Elected members involvement in allocation decisions

- 5.10 The Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997/483) restrict elected members' involvement in allocation decisions in certain specified circumstances. They prevent an elected member from being part of a decision-making body at the time the allocation decision is made, when either:
- the accommodation concerned is situated in their division or electoral ward, or

- the person subject to the decision has their sole or main residence in the member's division or electoral ward.

5.11 The regulations do not prevent an elected Member from representing their constituents before the decision making body, or from participating in the decision making body's deliberations prior to its decision. The regulations do not prevent elected Members' involvement in policy decisions that affect the generality of housing accommodation in their division or electoral ward; for example, that allocation of units in a certain block of flats should not be let to older persons or to households including young children.

Offences related to information given or withheld by applicants

5.12 Section 171 makes it an offence for anyone seeking assistance from a housing authority under Part 6 of the 1996 Act to:

- knowingly or recklessly give false information, or
- knowingly withhold information which the housing authority has reasonably required the applicant to give.

5.13 It is for individual housing authorities to determine when these provisions apply and when to institute criminal proceedings. However, the circumstances in which an offence is committed could include:

- any false information given on an application form for social housing
- any false information given in response to subsequent review letters
- any false information given or submitted by applicants during the proceedings of a review.

5.14 Ground 5 in Schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by s.146 of the 1996 Act) enables a housing authority to seek possession of a tenancy granted as a result of a false statement by the tenant or a person acting at the tenant's instigation.

Fraudulent or incorrect allocations

- 5.15 Authorities may also wish to take action to minimise the risk of staff allocating incorrectly or even fraudulently, for example by allocating to applicants who do not have sufficient priority under the allocation scheme, or who do not meet the authority's qualification criteria. Appropriate steps might include vetting staff who take allocation decisions or providing for allocation decisions to be validated, perhaps by employing senior staff to undertake random checks.

Decisions and reviews

Information about decisions and reviews

- 5.16 Housing authorities must inform applicants that they have the right to information about certain decisions which are taken in respect of their application and the right to review those decisions (s.166(1A)).
- 5.17 Housing authorities must notify an applicant in writing of any decision that he or she:
- is ineligible for an allocation of accommodation under s.160ZA(2) or (4) (persons from abroad), or
 - is not a qualifying person under s.160ZA(7).
- 5.18 The notification must give clear grounds for the decision, which must be based firmly on the relevant facts of the case. Section 160ZA(10) provides that, where a notification is not received by an applicant, it can be treated as having been given to him or her, if it is made available at the housing authority's office for a reasonable period.
- 5.19 An applicant also has the right, on request, to be informed of any decision about the facts of their case which has been, or is likely to be, taken into account in considering whether to make an allocation to them (s.166A(9)(b)).
- 5.20 Under s.166A(9)(c) applicants have the right to request a review of any of the decisions mentioned in paragraphs 5.15 and 5.17 above and to be informed of the decision on the review and the grounds for it.

Procedures on review

- 5.21 It is important that an authority's review procedures are clearly set out, including timescales for each stage of the process, and that the review process accords with the principles of transparency and fairness. Failure to put in place a fair

procedure for reviews, which allows for all relevant factors to be considered, could result in a judicial review of any decision reached. The following are general principles of good administrative practice which should be incorporated in a review process:

- i. The applicant should be notified of the timescale within which they must request a review. A period of 21 days from the date the applicant is notified of the decision is well-established as a reasonable timescale. However, a housing authority should retain some discretion to extend this time limit, in exceptional circumstances
- ii. The applicant should be notified that the request for review should be made in writing, and that it would also be acceptable for the request to be submitted by a representative on behalf of the applicant. The applicant should also be advised of the information which should accompany the request
- iii. In cases where an authority believes that an applicant may have difficulty in understanding the implications of a decision on ineligibility or disqualification, it would be good practice to make arrangements for the information to be explained verbally
- iv. The review should be carried out by an officer in a senior position to the officer who made the original decision. As an alternative, an authority may wish to appoint a panel of officers to consider the appeal. If so, it should not include any person who was involved in the original decision
- v. The review should be considered on the basis of council policy, legal requirements and all relevant information. This might include information provided by the applicant on any relevant developments since the original decision was made - for instance, the settlement of arrears or establishment of a repayment plan, or departure of a member of the household responsible for anti-social behaviour
- vi. Reviews should be completed wherever practicable within a set deadline. The applicant should be notified of any extension to this deadline and the reasons for this
- vii. In notifying an applicant of their right to make written submissions, an authority may also want to consider advising the applicant that provision can be made for verbal representations to be made, if the applicant requests this

- viii. The applicant must be notified in writing of the outcome of the review. The notification must set out the reasons for the decision. This will assist the applicant and the authority if, for example, the applicant is not satisfied with the outcome and decides to seek a judicial review or to take their case to the [Housing Ombudsman]

CHAPTER 6

Working with Private Registered Providers and contracting out

Working with Private Registered Providers

Statutory framework for cooperation

- 6.1 Private Registered Providers have a duty under s.170 of the 1996 Act to cooperate with housing authorities – where the authority requests it - to such extent as is reasonable in the circumstances in offering accommodation to people with priority under the authority's allocation scheme. Similarly, s.213 of the 1996 Act provides that, where a Private Registered Provider has been requested by a housing authority to assist them in the discharge of their homelessness functions under Part 7, it must also cooperate to the same extent.

Nomination agreements

- 6.2 Housing authorities must comply with the requirements of Part 6 of the 1996 Act when they nominate an applicant to be the tenant of a Private Registered Provider. A housing authority nominates a person to accommodation held by a Private Registered Provider when it does so 'in pursuance of any arrangements (whether legally enforceable or not) to require that housing accommodation, or a specified amount of housing accommodation, is made available to a person or one of a number of persons nominated by the authority' (s.159(4)).
- 6.3 Nomination agreements should set out the proportion of lettings that will be made available; any criteria which the Private Registered Provider has adopted for accepting or rejecting nominees; and how any disputes will be resolved. Housing authorities should ensure that robust monitoring arrangements are in place to monitor effective delivery of the terms of the nomination agreement. This will be crucial, to ensure that housing authorities can demonstrate they are meeting their statutory obligations under Part 6.

Affordable Rent

- 6.4 The Secretary of State expects that Affordable Rent homes will be allocated in the same way as social rent properties and that existing lettings arrangements operated by local authorities and Private Registered Providers will continue to apply. The statutory and regulatory framework for allocations provides scope for

local flexibility, and local authorities and Private Registered Providers may wish to exercise this discretion in relation to Affordable Rent in order to meet local needs and priorities in the most effective way possible.

Contracting Out

- 6.5 The *Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Allocation of Housing and Homelessness Functions) Order 1996* (SI 1996/3205) enables housing authorities to contract out certain functions under Part 6 of the 1996 Act. The Order is made under s.70 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 (the 1994 Act). In essence, the Order allows the contracting out of administrative functions, while leaving the responsibility for making strategic decisions with the housing authority.
- 6.6 Schedule 1 to the Order lists the allocation functions which may not be contracted out:
- adopting or altering the allocation scheme, including the principles on which the scheme is framed, and consulting Private Registered Providers
 - making the allocation scheme available at the authority's principal office.
- 6.7 The Order therefore provides that the majority of functions under Part 6 may be contracted out. These include:
- i) making enquiries about and deciding a person's eligibility for an allocation
 - ii) carrying out reviews of decisions
 - iii) making arrangements to secure that advice and information is available free of charge to persons within the housing authority's district on how to apply for housing
 - iv) making arrangements to secure that any necessary assistance is made available free of charge to anyone who is likely to have difficulty in making a housing application without such assistance, and
 - v) making individual allocations in accordance with the allocation scheme.

6.8 The 1994 Act provides that a contract made:

- i) may authorise a contractor to carry out only part of the function concerned
- ii) may specify that the contractor is authorised to carry out functions only in certain cases or areas specified in the contract
- iii) may include conditions relating to the carrying out of the functions, e.g. prescribing standards of performance
- iv) shall be for a period not exceeding 10 years and may be revoked at any time by the Minister or the housing authority. Any subsisting contract is to be treated as having been repudiated in these circumstances
- v) shall not prevent the authority from itself exercising the functions to which the contract relates.

6.9 The 1994 Act also provides that the authority is responsible for any act or omission of the contractor in exercising functions under the contract, except:

- where the contractor fails to fulfil conditions specified in the contract relating to the exercise of the function
- where criminal proceedings are brought in respect of the contractor's act or omission.

6.10 Where a housing authority has delegated or contracted out the operation of its allocation functions to an external contractor, the contractor must be made aware of the provisions of Part 6 and advised how the legislation and this guidance may apply to them.

6.11 Where there is an arrangement in force under s.101 of the Local Government Act 1972 by virtue of which one authority exercises the functions of another, the 1994 Act provides that the authority exercising the function is not allowed to contract it out without the principal authority's consent.

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 13 March 2012

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr M. McEwen

**Subject: Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
Key Action Plan (2011/12) - 12-Month Progress
Report**



Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall – Director of Housing (01992 56 4004)

Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Panel considers the Twelve-Month Progress Report for the Key Action Plan contained within the HRA Business Plan 2011/12 (attached as an Appendix) and provides any feedback to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing accordingly.

Report:

1. In March 2011, the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan for 2011/12 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 following 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. A Six-Month Progress Report on the actions contained within the Key Action Plan 2011/12 was reported to the Housing Scrutiny Panel in October 2011. An updated Twelve-Month Progress Report is attached as an Appendix to this report for consideration.
4. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the Progress Report and to feed back to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing any comments it considers appropriate. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation is due to be consulted on the Progress Report at its meeting scheduled for 28th March 2012.
5. The proposed new Housing Revenue Account Business Plan for next year (2012/13), incorporating a new Key Action Plan, is reported elsewhere on the agenda.

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HRA Business Plan 2011/12
ACTION PLAN – 6-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT
(as at 1st March 2012)

Action	Corporate Housing Objectives	Responsibility for Achievement	Target Date	6-Month Progress Report <i>(as at 1st March 2012)</i>
Housing General				
1) Seek re-accreditation of the ISO 9001:2008 Quality Assurance Award for the whole of the Housing Directorate for a further 3 years	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4	Housing Resources Manager	May 2011	Achieved – Re-accreditation was awarded in May 2011
2) Prepare for HRA self-financing and formulate a robust and credible Financial Plan, based on sound treasury management, that meets the housing needs of tenants and the housing stock.	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5	Director of Finance / Director of Housing	Jan 2012	Achieved – The strategic approach to the 30-Year HRA Financial Plan was approved by the Cabinet on 5 th Dec 2011, following consultation with the Housing and Finance & Performance Management Scrutiny Panels and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. At its meeting in March 2012, the Cabinet will finalise the Financial Plan and agree the arrangements for funding the self-financing debt.
3) Successfully complete the implementation of the electronic records and document management system (Information @Work) within the Housing Directorate	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Asst Director of Housing (Private Sector & Resources)	Dec 2011	In Progress – This was delayed due to members' decision not to agree sufficient resources to fully implement the project. A scaled-back approach is now being progressed, with different ways of working.
4) Undertake a Tenant Satisfaction Survey using a methodology agreed with HouseMark, whereby the results can be benchmarked with other landlords	HO 2 / 3 / 4	Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Information)	Dec 2011	In Progress – HouseMark has now adopted a standard methodology (called STAR) and preparations for EFDC's survey during 2012 are underway

Housing Management

5) Consider whether the Council should use the new fixed term tenancies proposed under the Decentralisation and Localism Bill and, if so, formulate a Tenancy Scheme setting out the proposed operation of the scheme	HO 2	Asst Director of Housing (Operations)	March 2012	In Progress – A Members Information Session on the housing aspects of the Localism Act was cancelled due to lack of numbers and is being re-arranged. Following the Information Session, the Cabinet will consider the Council's general approach to this optional scheme, and the Housing Scrutiny Panel will be asked to consider and recommend the detailed Tenancy Policy.
6) Relocate the Limes Farm Estate Office to the newly refurbished Limes Farm Community Centre	HO 2	Area Housing Manager (South)	Feb 2012	Achieved – The new Limes Centre was opened in February 2012, and the Estate Office has re-located to the new building
7) Consider whether or not the Home Ownership Grant Scheme (which enables tenants to purchase their own home and vacate their Council property for occupation by a housing applicant) should be re-introduced in 2012/13	HO 1	Housing Resources Manager	Sept 2011	Achieved – In Sept 2011, the Cabinet reviewed the Scheme and agreed to suspend it for a further year, but to review again in Sept 2012
8) Work with the Council's five local authority partners of the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme to introduce a facility for tenants to apply for the housing on-line.	HO 1 / 2	Housing Options Manager	March 2012	In Progress – A review of the Locata system established that a better system could be introduced by EFDC, solely, itself. The test system is near completion and it is hoped to be able to go-live before the end of the current financial year
9) Subject to the approval of the Leader of Council, undertake a 1-year pilot scheme to identify and tackle "social housing fraud, through the creation of a new post of Housing Officer (Fraud), part-funded from funding provided by the CLG	HO 1 / 2	Director of Housing	March 2012	Achieved – The officer was appointed in May 2011; a review of the Scheme was undertaken by the Housing Scrutiny Panel in Jan 2012. The Scheme has been very successful; the Scrutiny Panel is recommending to the Cabinet in March 2012 that the temporary part-time post be made permanent and full-time. The Panel also agreed to consider the creation of a 2 nd post on the list of possible housing improvements and service enhancements.

10) Transfer the lease of land and properties at Marden Close, Chigwell Row, to one of the Council's Preferred RSL Partners – following a competitive exercise – for the 20 existing bedsits to be converted into 10 one bedroom flats	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Director of Housing	March 2012	Revised Approach – The charity that owns the freehold (Trust for London) has not agreed to the proposed approach. However, an alternative way forward has been identified which would enable the whole site to be redeveloped by EFDC, which is currently under discussion with Trust for London and Chigwell PC. It is envisaged that a report will be submitted to the Cabinet in Spring 2012.
11) Undertake a feasibility exercise – in partnership with an appointed development agent - for the development of Council-owned land by the Council, to provide additional affordable housing (subject to the Government changing the housing finance accounting regulations, to avoid the General Fund having to meet loan costs)	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Director of Housing	March 2012	Achieved – The Cabinet agreed its approach to a new Council Housebuilding Programme on 5 th Dec 2011, on the recommendation of the Housing Scrutiny Panel in Oct 2011. The process of appointing a Development Agent through EU procurement procedures is currently underway.
12) Introduce the Leasehold Services module of the OHMS integrated housing system, to improve the efficiency of the leasehold service	HO 1 / 2 / 5	Housing Resources Manager	March 2012	No Progress – Due to other commitments, and key staff vacancies within the Housing Resources Section, no progress has been possible. However, it is hoped to implement the module in 2012/13.
13) Introduce the provision of rent and other Council payments by credit card for tenants	HO 2 / 5	Asst. Director of Finance & ICT (Revenues)	July 2011	Achieved – Cabinet agreed the principle and credit card payments were introduced in late-2012, for a fee.
Tenant Participation				
14) Provide an Annual Report to all tenants, including performance against tenant-selected indicators in 2010/11	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4	Director of Housing	Sept 2011	Achieved – The 2 nd Annual Report was published by the regulatory deadline of 1 st October 2011, and was despatched to all tenants and members.
15) Introduce a new Tenants Scrutiny Panel, to scrutinise the performance of the Housing Service and to undertake service reviews	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4	Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Information)	Sept 2011	In Progress – The Tenant Participation Officer is researching the subject and discussions have been held with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

16) Following consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, make a new "Local Offer" to tenants for 2012/12, setting out the housing service tenants can expect, including the formulation of a new Tenant-Agreed Action Plan	HO 2 / 3 / 4	Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Information)	Feb 2012	In Progress – The only required update to the Local Offer is an updated Tenant-Agreed Action Plan, which will be discussed with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in March 2012.
17) Produce an updated Tenant Participation Impact Assessment, documenting how tenants have participated in decision-making in 2010/11, and the impact of their participation, and proposals for tenants to participate in 2011/12	HO 4	Tenant Participation Officer	June 2011	Achieved – The Impact Assessment was produced in June 2011
18) 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	Mar 2012	Delayed – No progress has been made due to other commitments
Supporting People and Supported Housing				
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)	Sept 2011	Achieved – The system has been set up and is operational. It is currently being rolled out across all sheltered schemes
20) Update the remaining sheltered housing schemes with Piper Haven alarm equipment with the latest Piper Communicall equipment	HO 2 / 3	Housing Manager (Older People's Services)	Nov 2011	Achieved – All equipment has now been updated with Piper Communicall
21) Introduce a programme of providing scooter stores at sheltered housing schemes	HO 2	Housing Assets Manager	Jan 2012	In Progress – The Council's architect is currently undertaking the project
22) Investigate and implement a more cost effective business continuity solution for the Careline Service	HO 1 / 2	Housing Manager (Older People's Services)	Dec 2011	Achieved – On review, it has been agreed to retain the current business continuity solution, which is to continue to contract with Tunstall Telecom to provide the service if EFDC's Careline Control Centre goes down.
23) Remodel the support provision at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey from a frail older people's scheme to a sheltered housing scheme, including the provision of a new Scheme Manager post provided by the Council	HO 2	Housing Manager (Older People's Services)	Dec 2011	Achieved – Cabinet agreed to remodel Jessopp Ct to a sheltered scheme from Dec 2011, and the new Scheme Manager was appointed in Dec 2011.

24) 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)	Feb 2011	Delayed – Although EFDC already does this to a large extent, no progress has been made on this project by the Essex Supporting People Team, which is leading on this project.
Housing Repairs and Maintenance				
25) Implement a programme for repairs and maintenance expenditure over 5 and 30 years.	HO 1 / 3 / 5	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	March 2011	Achieved - The planned maintenance programmes are in progress, delivering improvements to Council homes across the district to maintain the Decent Homes Standard.
26) Implement an upgrade to the latest version of the NHER Energy Efficiency software, to capture "Level 1" data	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager	Sept 2011	Achieved – The upgrade has been implemented
27) Publish clear service standards for planned maintenance, Decent Homes, repairs, Right to Repairs and leaseholder responsibilities, which are available in printed leaflet form and on the web site	HO 3 / 4	Housing Assets Manager	July 2011	Achieved – a Void Standard and approach to rechargeable works has been agreed and implemented, following consultation with the Repairs and Maintenance Focus Group.
28) Publish the Voids Standards on the EFDC website and issue a copy to all tenants in advance of them undertaking a viewing or a void offer.	HO 3 / 4	Customer Repairs Manager	Dec 2011	Achieved – The Standards have been published, following consultation with the Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group.
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)	Jan 2012	Achieved – The Programme has been discussed with the Federation
30) Introduce Asbestos Record Cards in all properties, and maintain the records for contactors' and tenants' use.	HO 3 / 4	Customer Repairs Manager	April 2012	In Progress – The format for the future production of a "Property Information Pack", which includes the Asbestos Record Card, has been agreed with the Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group. Stationary has been ordered and a roll-out planned, commencing in March 2012.

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 3 / 5	Housing Assets Manager	April 2012	No Progress – Due to uncertainties around the OT Service.
32) Explore options whereby emphasis is put on “fix first time” for responsive repairs.	HO 1 / 3	Mears Direct	Dec 2011	In Progress – This is an integral part of the Repairs Refresh Programme. Ways of integrating a “fix first time” approach to the out of hours emergency service is to be agreed.
33) Seek, through the Essex Procurement Hub, a framework agreement with specialist contractors for, drainage clearance, UPVC window installation and maintenance, external repairs and redecorations, digital TV maintenance, bathroom adaptations, Energy Efficiency as well as ad-hoc repairs where necessary	HO 1 / 3	Housing Assets Manager	March 2012	Partly Achieved – Drainage clearance is no longer required, due to the transfer of responsibility for private shared drains to the water utility companies. Framework Contracts have been let for external repairs and redecorations, UPVC windows and doors replacement and maintenance as well as external repairs and redecorations. Other contract renewals are in hand.
34) Continue to work with the Repairs Focus Group, once set up, and create an action plan for inclusion in the Repairs Refresh Programme	HO 3 / 4	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	Quarterly	Achieved - The group meet on a quarterly basis, and is proving to be a very positive forum for discussion and new ideas.
35) Continue feasibility studies into alternative fuel sources for properties in rural communities where mains gas is not available.	HO 1 / 3	Housing Assets Manager	April 2012	Achieved – Solar thermal and air source heat pumps are currently being trialled. Since the Government reduced the Feed-in Tariff, the installation of Solar PV Panels on roofs has been suspended.
36) Explore external wall insulation for solid wall constructed properties, and seek grant funding to support future programmes	HO 1 / 3	Housing Assets Manager	April 2012	In Progress – A scheme in Willingale is being considered, subject to CERT funding and tender.
37) Review all projects with a contract value in excess of £1m on completion to identify any lessons learnt.	HO 3 / 5	Housing Assets Manager / Mears Direct	April 2012	Ongoing – This is a process that occurs as part of the contract procedures and Contract Standing Orders

<p>38) Seek to reduce the target response times for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • routine repairs from 6-weeks to 2-weeks • Urgent repairs from 5-days to 3-days • Emergency repairs from 24 hrs to 4 hours • Void turnaround times from 6-weeks to 2-weeks 	HO 1 / 3	Mears Direct	April 2012	<p>In Progress – This is an integral part of the Repairs Refresh Programme, and has now commenced following the introduction of Mears Direct's new IT System in January 2012.</p>
<p>39) Appoint an external Repairs Management Contractor to oversee the Housing Repairs Service as agreed by the Cabinet in March 2008.</p>	HO 1 / 3	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	May 2011	<p>Achieved – Mears Direct was appointed in May 2011 for an initial three-year period</p>
<p>40) Implement a range of initiatives, as defined in the Repairs Refresh Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Develop better pricing models for works undertaken and where necessary recharged to ensure value for money. • Build the team to ensure excellent HR practices are used, which will build a skilled, high performance, customer focused and motivated team. • Introduce an IT system for developing an effective R&M service from the point of order to completion and post inspection actions. To include mobile working for operatives. • 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. • 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. 	HO 1 / 3	Mears Direct	April 2012	<p>Partly Achieved – This is an integral part of the Repairs Refresh Programme, and has now commenced following the introduction of Mears Direct's IT system in January 2012.</p> <p>A separate supplies tender will be required, which will involve an EU compliant procedure. Expressions of interest have been sought and a shortlist drawn up for invitation to tender.</p>

41) Develop a Value for Money Strategy	HO 1 / 3	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	March 2012	No Progress – Due to other priorities. However, savings identified and realised are captured as part of the quarterly Continuous Improvement Meetings held by the Director of Housing, Assistant Directors and individual Housing Managers throughout the Housing Directorate, so that value for money initiatives and savings can be identified, captured and reported.
42) Develop a separate Repairs and Maintenance Housing Service Strategy	HO 3	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	July 2011	No progress - Due to other priorities
43) Seek to include at least one local business on the list of tenderers for all future contracts.	HO 3	Housing Assets Manager / Mears Direct	April 2012	Achieved and Ongoing – However, this process has to be fair and equitable to avoid a legal challenge for failing to allow others to tender.

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: 13th March 2012

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr M. McEwen

**Subject: Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
Business Plan 2012-13**

Officer contact for further information:

Alan Hall – Director of Housing (01992 564004)

Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2012/13, incorporating the HRA Financial Plan and the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan 2012/13 (attached as an Appendix to this report), be recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder for adoption.

Background

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

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

HRA Business Plan 2012/13

3. The latest draft HRA Business Plan 2012/13 is attached. It should be noted that the following sections will be circulated separately prior to the meeting:

- Plain English Summary
- Key Action Plan (Chapter 12)
- Senior Staff Structure Chart (Appendix 3)

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

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

- Updated statistics for 2010/11
- General updated information throughout the Business Plan to ensure that it remains current
- Updated Plain English Summary
- Updated comments of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation on the latest Business Plan (Section 1.7)
- Updated Summary of Key Activities and Achievements in 2011/12 (Section 3.5)
- Updated section on Key Housing Priorities and Action Plan to Meet the Objectives (Section 3.6)
- New section on Workforce Development Planning (Section 4.13)
- New section on Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements (Section 4.15)
- New section on Council Housebuilding Programme (Section 4.16)
- Updated section of Benchmarking Housing Performance and Costs (Section 6.2)
- New section on the Council's Equality Report and new Equality Scheme (Section 7.2)
- New section on Rent levels and Rent Increases – based on the new HRA Financial Plan (Section 8.7)
- Deletion of the Chapter on Housing Stock Options Appraisals – since this is no longer relevant
- Completely new Chapter on the updated HRA Financial Plan and cash flows (based on the new self-financing system) (Chapter 10 and Appendices 6(a) and 6(b))
- New Key Action Plan (Chapter 12)
- Updated Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan (Appendix 1)
- Updated Appendix on Performance on Performance Indicators and Future Targets (Appendix 5)

HRA Financial Plan

6. Chapter 10 and Appendices 6(a) and 6(b) of the Business Plan set out the Council's new HRA Financial Plan, in preparation for the introduction of self-financing for the HRA by the Government later in March 2012.

7. The new Financial Plan has been produced by the Council's HRA Business Planning Consultants, CIHConsult, following the Cabinet's approval of the Council's strategic approach to the HRA Financial Plan in December 2011.

8. At the time of writing, the new HRA Financial Plan is due to be signed-off by the Cabinet at its meeting on 12th March 2012 (the day before this meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Panel). Therefore, any changes agreed by the Cabinet at the meeting will be reported orally and included in the final version of the HRA Business Plan.

9. Since the Cabinet will have approved the HRA Financial Plan prior to the Housing Scrutiny Panel meeting, there will be no scope for the Scrutiny Panel to amend Chapter 10 of Appendices 6(a) or 6(b) of the Business Plan. However, in the future, it is proposed that the Financial Plan will be formally reviewed quarterly by officers and bi-annually by the Housing Scrutiny Panel. Therefore, any comments that the Scrutiny Panel may have on the Financial Plan will be taken into account when reviewing and updating the Financial Plan at the first formal review.

Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan 2012/13

10. An important part of the HRA Business Plan relates to the Council's objectives, strategies and plans relating to the repair and maintenance of the Council's housing stock over the next 30 years. This includes the Council's plans to ensure that the Council continues to meet the Government's decent homes standard in the short term, and maintains

the Council's housing stock to a full modern standard in the longer term, following the additional resources that have been made available as a result of HRA Self Financing. As in previous years, the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan forms Appendix 1 to the main HRA Business Plan.

Scrutiny Panel

11. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and recommend the HRA Business Plan 2012/13, incorporating the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan, to the Housing Portfolio Holder for adoption.

12. The draft HRA Business Plan is also due to be discussed by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation at their meeting on 28 March 2012, and the Housing Portfolio Holder will be advised, and take account, of their comments before she adopts the final version of the Business Plan.

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Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012 - 2013



Director of Housing
Alan Hall FCIH



Epping Forest
District Council

March 2012

Copies of this Business Plan are available in Large print.

Please ring 01992 564292 for a large print copy.

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Plain English Summary

[To Follow]

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is the twelfth annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan that the Council has produced. It complies with the requirements of the Government's financial framework for the HRA. It has been produced in accordance with both the "Guidance on Business Plans" and the guidance on "Effective Housing Strategies and Plans" issued by the predecessor to the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Plan has been developed by a corporate team of officers from Housing and Finance/ICT. The Plan was adopted by the Council's Housing Portfolio Holder after consultation with the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

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

With effect from March April 2012, the Government is introducing a new system of self financing for the HRA, to replace the discredited Housing Subsidy System. This involves the Council paying a significant lump sum to the Government, financed from a very large loan. The Council has assessed the detailed effects and implications of self-financing on the Council and, as a result, has formulated a completely new 30-Year HRA Financial Plan, which is set out in Chapter 10.

It is a requirement of the Council's Audit and Governance Committee that all of the Council's Business Plans are completed and published by 31 March each year - before the start of the following the financial year. In order to assist readers, a comprehensive Glossary of Terms is provided at Appendix 2.

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

1.2 Fit for Purpose Standard

The Council's HRA Business Plan has previously been assessed as being fully "fit for purpose" by the Government. The format of the HRA Business Plan has remained broadly the same since this "fit for purpose" assessment, although the content has been significantly updated over the years.

1.3 Links with the Council's Housing Strategy

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

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

Due to the current number of uncertainties that affect the Council's strategic approach to housing, it is not planned to update the Housing Strategy during 2012 as originally envisaged, but during 2013 for a further 3 year period.

1.4 Purpose of the Business Plan

The purpose of this Business Plan is to:

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

1.5 Development of the Business Plan in 2012

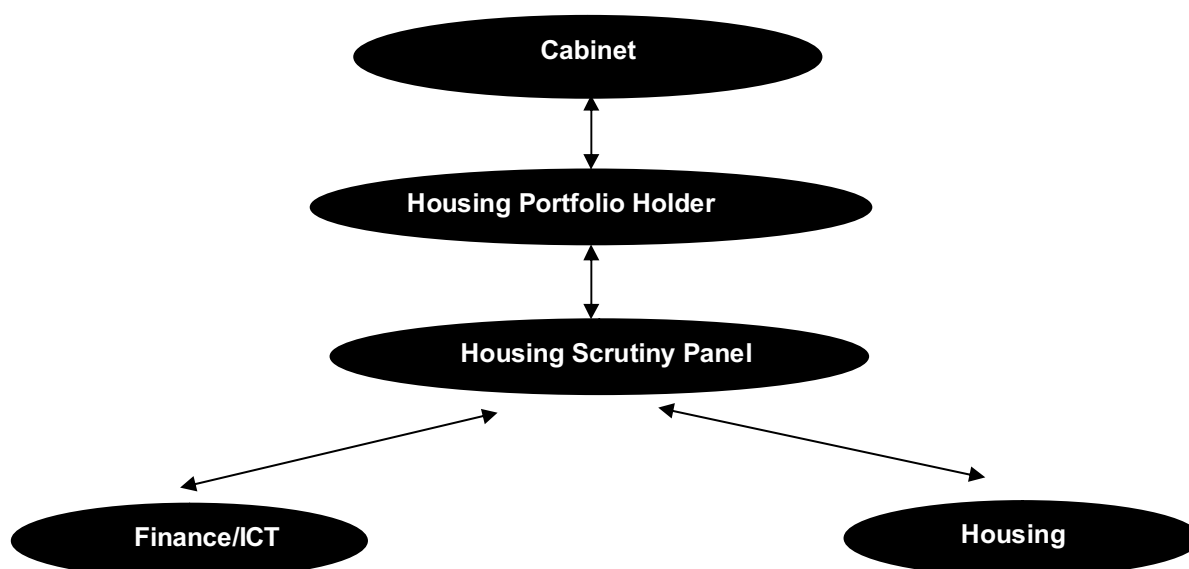
The Council has consistently developed and updated its Business Plan, since the time the first one was produced in 2001. All the statistics and information within this latest Business Plan referred to as the "last financial year" - and the most up to date information - relates to 2010/11, which is the last year that full year statistics are available.

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

- Updated statistics for 2010/11
- General updated information throughout the Business Plan to ensure that it remains current
- Updated Plain English Summary
- Updated comments of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation on the latest Business Plan (Section 1.7)
- Updated Summary of Key Activities and Achievements in 2011/12 (Section 3.5)
- Updated section on Key Housing Priorities and Action Plan to Meet the Objectives (Section 3.6)
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- New Key Action Plan (Chapter 12)
- Updated Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan (Appendix 1)
- Updated Appendix on Performance on Performance Indicators and Future Targets (Appendix 4)

1.6 Management Structure – Policy and Priority Setting

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



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

1.7 Comments of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation

Section 4.7 explains the role of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The Federation has been consulted on this latest version of the Business Plan. Having considered the Business Plan, the Federation said:

TO BE INSERTED, FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WITH THE FEDERATION ON 28TH MARCH 2012 – The Federation's comments last year were :

- The Business Plan continues to be a comprehensive document, which is well thought out, interesting and well written, especially the Plain English Summary, which is easy to read and helps to put the detailed Business Plan in context;
- We agree and support the objectives, the key housing priorities and the action plan;
- We are pleased to note that the Government's proposed introduction of self-financing for the HRA from April 2012 should provide a secure financial future for the Council's housing service, and should enable the Council to invest sufficient resources in its housing stock to keep it properly maintained for many years;
- We are pleased to note that, during the year, the Council met the Decent Homes Target, 7 months earlier than the Government's deadline, and has plans and resources in place to ensure that no homes become non-decent;
- We are impressed with the benefits already being obtained from the Repairs Refresh Programme, particularly improved performance, efficiency savings, an improved structure and the introduction of a Tenant Liaison Office post;
- We fully support the innovative appointment of a private repairs management contractor and feel that this will result in further improvements to the Housing Repairs Service;
- We are pleased to note that the Council's Careline Service has achieved full accreditation from the Telecare Services Association, for all aspects at the same time, which we understand is the first time in the country.
- We continue to support the Council's intention to re-commence a Council House-building Programme, if the Government changes its accounting regulations - which would make viable, the currently unviable, situation for the Council's General Fund.

2. Strategic Context and Linkage to Other Plans

2.1 The Epping Forest District

The Epping Forest District comprises a mix of rural and urban character, covering an area of 131 square miles, with a population of around 120,000. There is no major centre of the District. There are around 12

towns and larger villages, ranging in population size from 2,000 to 30,000. It is an attractive Metropolitan Green Belt area, with good road and rail links to London, so is popular with commuters.

The southern parts of the District border Greater London and are more populous and urbanised, including Loughton, Chigwell, Buckhurst Hill and Waltham Abbey. There was a total of 54,197 dwellings in the District as at April 2011, of which 12% were Council-owned.

2.2 Housing Service Planning Matrix

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

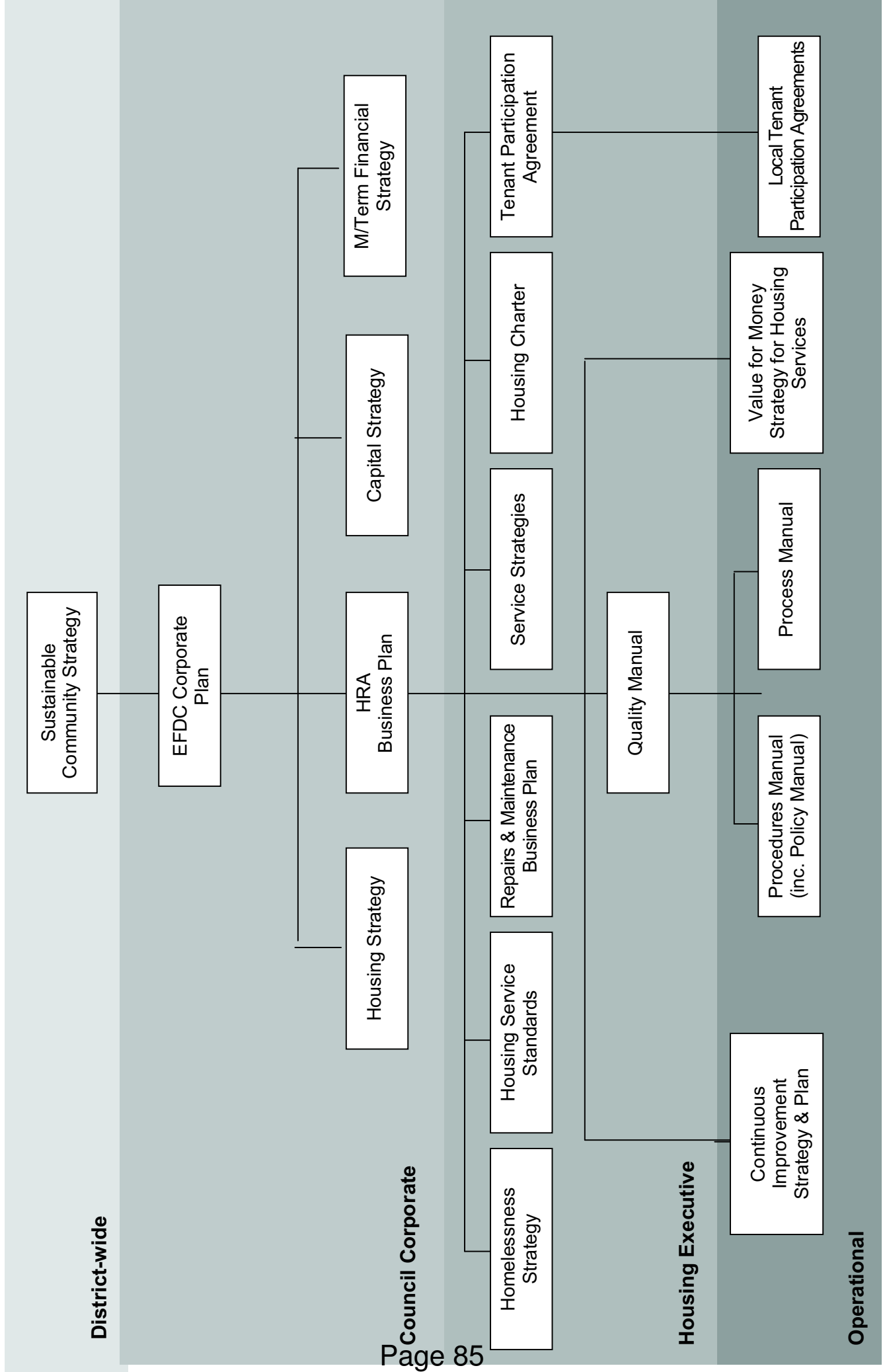
The Housing Planning Matrix reproduced on the next page illustrates, in graphical form, how the Council's housing services are planned and delivered.

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

<i>Sustainable Community Strategy</i>	The long term vision for the District, produced by One Epping Forest, the Local Strategic Partnership for the District. One Epping Forest comprises all of the statutory agencies working in the District, including the Council, together with representatives of the voluntary sector.
<i>Corporate Plan</i>	The Council's prime strategic document, that sets out the Council's strategic direction for the planning and delivery of all its services over a four-year period. The Council adopted its latest Corporate Plan in early 2011, which will be effective until April 2015.
<i>Housing Strategy</i>	See Section 1.3 above.
<i>Capital Strategy</i>	Provides the Council's strategies on how capital projects will be planned, funded, delivered and monitored, together with details of the Council's HRA and General Fund Capital Programmes. The Strategy is updated annually.
<i>Medium Term Financial Strategy</i>	Sets out the approach the Council intends to take in relation to revenue and capital expenditure, income and fees and charges, for both the HRA and the General Fund.
<i>Housing Service Standards</i>	A set of housing standards that clients of the Housing Directorate can expect in relation to the delivery of their housing service.
<i>Housing Service Strategies</i>	A series of separate documents, produced to a common format, that set out how individual housing services and strategies are delivered in detail (eg. rent arrears, tenant participation, empty properties). They provide detailed objectives, policies, targets, performance information and financial/staffing resource availability.
<i>Housing Charter</i>	Sets out the principles by which housing services will be delivered from the clients' point of view and what clients can expect.
<i>Tenant Participation Agreement</i>	An agreement (compact) between the Council (as landlord) and the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation (on behalf of the Council's tenants and leaseholders), first signed in March 2000 and updated in 2002, 2006, 2009 and, most recently, January 2012 for a three year period. It sets out the approach the Council and the Federation will take to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are able to participate in the delivery of their housing services, receive good quality information and are consulted on housing issues. The Council has also entered into six Local Tenant Participation Agreements with individual recognised tenants associations on how tenant participation will be delivered locally (see Section 4.7).
<i>Tenant Participation Impact Statement</i>	An annual statement produced explaining the activity, outcomes and impact in relation to tenant participation and empowerment in the previous year.

Housing Directorate

Service Planning Matrix



Local Offer

A statement to all tenants, in accordance with the Tenant Services Authority's Housing Regulatory Framework, setting out the service they can expect from the Council. Following consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and all tenants (through *Housing News*), the Council published its *Local Offer* in March 2011, which will comprises the following three elements, agreed by tenants:

- Housing Service Standards
- Housing Charter
- Tenant-Agreed Action Plan

2.3 Capital Strategy 2012/16 - Housing as a Corporate Priority for Investment

The Council's Capital Strategy 2011/15, last updated in February 2012, sets out the Council's nine key strategic priorities for capital investment, in a ranked priority order. "Improving the Council's housing stock" has been ranked as one of the two highest key strategic priorities for investment since its introduction.

3. Business Plan Objectives

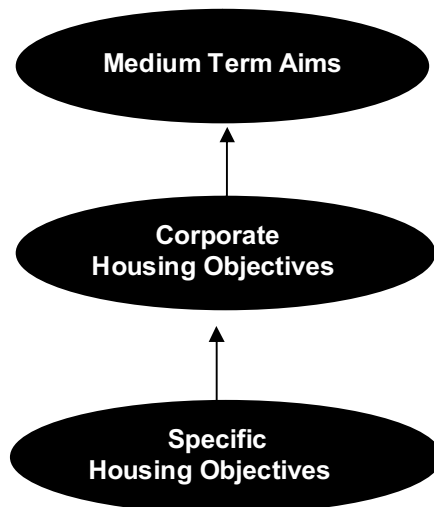
3.1 The Council's Corporate Medium Term Aims

The Council has five medium term aims and priorities, which were revised and set out in the Corporate Plan 2011-2015. They are:

- (a) Endeavour to safeguard frontline services that our local residents tell us are important against a background of diminishing resources;
- (b) Have the lowest District Council Tax in Essex and maintain that position;
- (c) Be recognised as an innovative and transparent council involving residents in our decisions;
- (d) Continuously improve efficiency by adopting new ways of working with our partners and maximising revenue from our assets; and
- (e) Provide clear community leadership and be a strong advocate, championing the interests of the people of Epping Forest and protecting the special character of the District.

3.2 Hierarchy of Objectives

In order to make the best use of its housing assets and deliver an effective housing service, in consultation with representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation where appropriate, the Council has set Business Plan Objectives at various levels within the organisation, from the high level medium term aims and priorities to individual housing objectives. The hierarchy of objectives can be summarised as follows:



3.3 Corporate Housing Objectives

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

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

3.4 Specific Housing Objectives

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

(a) *Value for Money:*

- (a) Provide consistent quality housing services
- (b) Understand the relationship between housing performance and the cost of service provision
- (c) Involve representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in consideration of housing performance and new policy development.
- (d) Seek to continuously reduce costs, whilst maintaining or improving performance

(b) *Housing Management:*

- (a) Provide a decentralised housing management service through two area housing offices based in Epping and Loughton and an shared Housing / Housing Benefits Office at the new Limes Centre, Chigwell.
- (b) Ensure that the Council's housing estates provide an attractive environment for local residents.
- (c) Review the Council's *Housing Allocations Scheme* annually to ensure it continues to be appropriate and gives choice to applicants, following consultation with registered social landlords, local councils and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.
- (d) Keep the number of empty Council properties, the period they are left empty, and the associated rental loss to a minimum.
- (e) Keep underoccupation of the Council's housing stock to a minimum.
- (f) Minimise the extent of breaches of tenancy conditions.

(g) Take firm action against anti social behaviour, through notification, mediation or legal action as necessary.

(h) Ensure that current rent arrears do not exceed 2.0% of the annual debit.

(c) *Repairs and Maintenance:*

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

(d) *Tenant Participation:*

(a) Consult individuals, groups and organisations on important matters relating to the provision of housing services, particularly on issues where clients have an element of choice or where decisions will have a major effect on them.

(b) Comply with the Council's *Housing Charter* relating to the approach and philosophy towards the provision of housing services.

(c) Comply with the commitments set out in the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.

(d) Provide information to tenants that is timely, in plain English, of good quality and tailored to both the general and individual needs of tenants.

(e) Recognise the special needs of certain tenants and respond positively to those needs.

(f) Obtain feedback from tenants, in a variety of ways, on the Council's performance in the delivery of housing services.

(g) Encourage, support and develop tenants associations within the District.

(h) Keep the Council's tenant participation structure under review.

(i) Consult tenants on major improvement schemes, housing initiatives and matters of general housing management to ensure full awareness of proposals and to obtain their views.

(j) Encourage, support, consult and develop the District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and work in partnership with the Federation to maximise the benefits that can be achieved from tenant participation to improve the delivery of housing services.

(l) Consult the Federation on the Council's housing services and policies in accordance with the District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement.

(m) Ensure that appropriate training is made available for tenants.

(f) *Housing Finance:*

(a) Manage the Council's financial housing resources effectively, efficiently and prudently.

(b) Repay the Council's large loan with the Public Works Loan Board (taken out to fund the £186m HRA self-financing settlement in March 2012).

(c) Keep under review housing management and maintenance expenditure to ensure that expenditure within the Housing Revenue Account does not exceed income.

(d) Plan to ensure that the HRA remains in surplus, each year, for a period of at least 30 years.

(e) Consider the level of fees and charges to be made for housing services on an annual basis.

(f) Ensure that working balances for the Housing Revenue Account are not forecast to fall below £3m or to exceed £4m at the end of any five-year forecast period.

3.5 Summary of Key Activities and Achievements in 2011/12

The key housing achievements and activities for the Business Plan in 2011/12 are as follows:

- Very good progress continued to be made with the Repairs Refresh Programme to further improve the Council's Housing Repairs Service, following the appointment of Mears as the Council's private Repairs Management Contractor. This included:
 - Improved repair response times, whilst maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction
 - Improved empty property repair times
 - Introduction of a new customer-focused IT system for the Housing Repairs Service
 - Introduction of an appointment system for all repairs, with ongoing text updates to tenants keeping them informed of progress with their reported repairs
 - Introduction of mobile IT working for the Housing Repairs Service's tradesmen
- Detailed analysis of the options and opportunities available under the new self-financing arrangements, leading to a robust and affordable 30-Year HRA Financial Plan
- Successful introduction of a Social Housing Fraud Initiative, which has identified a number of cases of un-authorized sub-letting, non-occupation and Right to Buy Fraud - leading to the recovery of Council properties to re-let to bona-fide housing applicants, with financial savings achieved amounting to over double the cost of the Social Housing Fraud Initiative
- Reaccreditation of the ISO 9001:2008 Quality Assurance Award for the whole of the Housing Directorate for a further 3 years
- Successful relocation of the Housing Office at the Limes Farm Estate, Chigwell to the new Limes Centre, and co-location with a decentralised housing benefits team
- Re-modelling of Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey from a scheme for frail older people staffed by Essex County Council Adult Social Care to a conventional sheltered housing scheme staffed by a Scheme Manager employed by the District Council

3.6 Key Housing Priorities and Action Plan to Meet the Objectives

The Council's Key Housing Priorities for the next year (2012/13) are set out below.

- Continue to manage and maintain our homes effectively and efficiently
- Complete the implementation of the Repairs Refresh Programme, including the introduction of 24 hour facility for tenants to report routine repairs, and a more efficient and cost effective supply chain for repair materials
- Introduce a new full and modern maintenance standard for the Council's housing stock, to replace the Council's previous (lower) Decent Homes Standard, through an average 50% p/a increase in funding made available as a result of HRA self-financing
- Appoint an experienced organisation to act as the Council's Development Agent to implement the new Council Housebuilding Programme
- Implement the agreed programme of new housing improvements and service enhancements, funded from the additional resources made available by HRA self-financing
- Undertake a major review of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme, taking advantage of the new opportunities and flexibilities provided by the Localism Act 2011
- Explore the use of fixed term tenancies for certain types of housing applicants and formulate a clear approach to when and how they should be used
- Introduce a Tenant Scrutiny Panel to undertake detailed reviews of specific housing services

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

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

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

4. Business Plan Analysis

4.1 Introduction

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

4.2 The Council's Housing Stock

The Council owned the following HRA stock as at 31st March 2011, for which the Council's Housing Directorate is responsible for management and maintenance:

- 6,491 residential properties (*)
- 941 leasehold properties
- 2,814 garages
- 1 Homeless Persons Hostel comprising 39 rooms and 10 chalets

A number of these properties were transferred to the Council from the former Greater London Council (GLC) in 1980. The housing stock continues to decline due to the effects of the Right to Buy; 6,164 properties have been sold since 1977 (See Section 4.11 below). An analysis of the Council's housing stock as at April 2011 (excluding the 49 rooms at the Council's Hostel, 6 residential scheme managers' properties and 30 properties "out of charge") is detailed below.

COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK BY TYPE AND YEAR (Excluding Homeless Persons Hostel)					
	April 2011	April 2010	April 2009	April 2008	April 2007
Houses	2,730	2,733	2,740	2,743	2,755
Flats	2,448	2,456	2,464	2,471	2,476
Maisonettes	522	521	519	520	525
Bungalows	791	792	791	791	793
TOTAL	6,491	6,502	6,514	6,525	6,549
COMPARISON OF PRE AND POST WAR COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK BY TYPE (As at 1st April 2011)					
	Pre-1944		Post 1945		TOTAL
	No.	%	No.	%	
Houses	354	5 %	2,376	37 %	2,730
Flats	12	< 1 %	2,436	38 %	2,448
Maisonettes	0	0	522	8 %	522
Bungalows	11	< 1 %	780	12 %	791
TOTAL	377	6 %	6,114	94 %	6,491

PROPERTY MIX OF COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK BY BEDROOM SIZE (As at 1st April 2011)		
	No.	%
Bedsits	316	5 %
1 Bedroom	2,318	36 %
2 Bedroom	1,813	28 %
3 Bedroom	1,885	29 %
4/5 Bedroom	159	2 %
TOTAL	6,491	

GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK (As at 1st April 2011)								
	Buckhurst Hill / Chigwell		Loughton		Waltham Abbey		Epping / Ongar / Rural Areas	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Houses	189	7 %	931	34 %	601	22 %	1,009	37 %
Flats	307	13 %	899	37 %	780	32 %	462	19 %
Maisonettes	255	49 %	190	36 %	66	12 %	11	2 %
Bungalows	15	2 %	147	19 %	145	18 %	484	61 %
TOTAL	766		2,167		1,592		1,966	
% of Total		12 %		33 %		24 %		30 %

4.3 Stock Valuation

Under CLG guidelines, the valuation of residential properties is based on Social Housing - Existing Use (SH-EH) value. In 2001, the Council first commissioned the Valuation Office to undertake a formal valuation of the Council's housing stock, as at April 2000. Desk-top revaluations have been undertaken annually since 2002, and in 2006 and 2011 the Valuation Office undertook full revaluations.

4.4 Overview of the Management of the Council's Housing Stock

(a) Introduction

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

(b) Housing Directorate

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

The permanent Staff Establishment of the Housing Directorate comprises 211 full and part-time members of staff. Of these, only 11 private sector housing staff and 5 homelessness staff are involved in non-HRA activities. Appendix 3 sets out the Staffing Structure of the senior management of Housing, together with the main responsibilities of each of the nine sections.

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

Area Housing Office (South) Based in the heart of The Broadway Shopping Centre, Loughton, the office provides a comprehensive housing and estate management service to tenants in the south of the District (See Section 4.5(a) below).

Limes Farm Office Based at the new Limes Centre, Chigwell, the Office provides a localised housing & estate management and housing benefits service to the tenants of the Estate. The office is daily during the week, managed by the Assistant Area Housing Manager.

Careline Control The Council provides an older peoples alarm network, Careline, which is managed from Careline Control based at Parsonage Court, Loughton.

The service is managed by the Housing Manager (Older People's Services), based at Careline Control (See Section 4.5(k) below).

Sheltered Housing

The Council has 12 sheltered housing schemes for older and frail older people, each managed by a Scheme Manager. In addition, 3 Area Scheme Managers provide a visiting service to older tenants on housing estates (See Section 4.5(m) below).

(c) Management Board

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

(e) Support Services

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

Accountancy

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

Audit

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

Grounds Maintenance

The Council's grounds maintenance is undertaken by the Environment and Street Scene Directorate. The arboricultural contract is undertaken by a private contractor.

Housing Benefits

Housing Benefits is administered within Finance under the management of the Asst Director of Finance & ICT (Benefits).

Information & Communication Technology (ICT)

Although the database for the integrated housing system is supported by the Housing Directorate, the network is managed by the Finance and ICT Directorate.

Legal

The Corporate Support Directorate provides a comprehensive legal service to Housing including conveyancing, litigation, advocacy, contract administration and legal advice.

Human Resources

The Corporate Support Services Directorate is responsible for strategic HR issues, industrial relations, recruitment and other HR operations.

Performance Management

The Performance Improvement Unit, within the Office of the Deputy Chief Executive, is responsible for the co-ordination of performance management data.

Public Relations & Marketing

Although the Housing Directorate has an in-house housing information service, a corporate public relations service is provided by the Public Relations and Marketing Section within the Office of the Deputy Chief Executive.

4.5 Delivery of Housing Services

(a) Estate Management

Estate management is undertaken by the two Area Housing Offices under the direction of the Area Housing Managers. The Area Housing Office (North), based at the Civic Offices, Epping, manages around 3,550 properties in the north of the District, including the towns of Epping, Waltham Abbey and Ongar. Most of the properties in the rural part of the District are also managed by the Area Housing Office (North). As outlined

above, the Area Housing Office (South) is based in The Broadway Shopping Centre, Loughton and manages around 2,940 properties in Loughton, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and the immediately surrounding areas. The office also provides a cash office facility, managed by Finance, for the payment of all Council charges, including rents.

Within the Area Housing Offices, Housing Officers (Management) manage around 700 properties each. They are responsible for dealing with breaches of tenancy conditions, including rent arrears recovery and estate management. In addition to ad-hoc estate inspections, staff in the Area Housing Offices undertake an annual programme of planned estate inspections covering the whole of the District.

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

(b) Rent Collection

The collectable rent debit in 2010/11 was £28.3m (an increase of 1.8% from 2009/10). Rent is collected through a variety of methods. Due to the rural nature of the District, Post Office Giro is extensively used to enable tenants to pay their rent at local post offices. In addition, the Council's rent collection administrator, Allpay, provides a number of rent payment points in convenient locations (e.g. supermarkets, garages etc.) throughout the District. The Council also provides three cash desks based in Epping, Waltham Abbey and Loughton. Direct debit and standing orders are also offered to tenants, as well as a facility for rent payments to be made by debit card (for a small processing fee), credit card, on line or by text.

The rent collection rate in 2010/11 was 98.14%, higher than the collection rate of 97.74% in 2009/10.

(c) Current and Former Rent Arrears

The Council's approach towards rent arrears recovery is set out in the Housing Service Strategy on Rent Arrears. The Council has a historically good record of rent arrears recovery, especially when compared to the national trend of rent arrears increases. The level of current rent arrears amounted to £415,679 as at 3 April 2011, representing 1.47% of the annual debit – a decrease on the 1.51% rent arrears in 2009/10.

Former tenant arrears amounted to £344,110 as at 3 April 2011, of which £235,987 were due to former dwellings arrears (the rest due to former garage, housing benefit, court costs and replacement tenancy arrears).

During 2010/11, £54,586 of former tenant arrears was written off. Former tenant arrears of £57,407 were collected in 2010/11, a decrease of 2% on the amount collected in 2009/10.

(d) Anti-Social Behaviour

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

- Repossession – Under the Housing Act 1996, the Council can seek to repossess a property if a tenant, resident or visitor causes (or is likely to cause) a nuisance to other residents in the locality, or if they are convicted of using their property for illegal purposes, or convicted of an arrestable offence in or near the property.
- Demoted Tenancy Orders (DTOs) – The Council can seek from the court a DTO if a tenant is causing anti-social behaviour. If granted, a DTO removes the tenant's security of tenure for a period of one year. If there are further incidences of anti-social behaviour within that period, the Council can obtain return to court and obtain a possession order without having to give any grounds. The Council has resolved to seek DTOs in appropriate cases.
- Introductory Tenancies (ITs) – The Council started to use ITs in 2006, following an extensive consultation exercise with all tenants and partners in 2005. All new tenants are now given an IT (instead of a secure tenancy) for the first year of their tenancy. If the new tenant causes anti-social behaviour, or

breaches any other tenancy conditions within that period, the Council can obtain a possession order, without having to give any grounds. If there are no breaches within that year, the tenancy automatically converts to a secure tenancy.

- Injunctions - Also under the Housing Act 1996, the Council can seek an injunction from the courts to prohibit a person from causing a nuisance to other residents in the area, or using premises for illegal purposes. However, these can only be granted if violence is used or threatened, and if there would be a significant risk of harm if an injunction was not granted.
- Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBO's) – Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, the Council or the Police, in consultation with each other, can seek an ASBO from the courts if there is ongoing criminal type behaviour. The person must be over 10 years of age and be acting anti-socially towards others, causing harassment, alarm or distress. The ASBO prohibits the person from continuing with the anti social behaviour. A breach of the order is a criminal offence, with a maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment.

(e) Empty Properties

In order to maximise rental income and effectively meet housing need, it is essential that the number of empty properties, and the associated re-let period, is kept to a minimum. There were 70 empty properties as at 1st April 2011, representing a decrease of 8 properties (10%) over the previous year's number of 78. The rental loss from empty properties in 2010/11 amounted to just 0.97% of the annual debit.

(f) Difficult to Let Properties – Low Demand

Generally, the Council does not experience any of the problems faced by many northern authorities of “low demand” and has a high demand for most of its properties. However, some difficulties are experienced in letting certain types of properties in sheltered housing and schemes for frail older people. As at 1st April 2011, there were only 9 vacant properties meeting the “difficult to let” criteria (primarily flats at the Council's scheme for frail older people at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey and bedsits in sheltered housing schemes).

(g) Choice Based Lettings (HomeOptions Scheme)

Since 2007, the Council has operated its HomeOptions Scheme, a choice based lettings scheme operated in partnership with five neighbouring councils (Brentwood, Uttlesford, Chelmsford, East Herts and Broxbourne) whereby housing applicants are able to choose the property that is let to them, rather than being “allocated” properties. Offers of accommodation are made to applicants who have expressed in specific vacant properties who are in the highest priority band, in date order. The scheme is operated by Locata, a choice based lettings agency.

(h) Review of the Housing Register

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

(i) Homeless Persons Hostel

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

(j) Leasehold Services and Service Charges

The Council had 941 properties leased under the Right to Buy as at 31 March 2011, compared to 935 properties the previous year. 6 additional properties were leased between 1st April 2010 and 1st April 2011. Leaseholders are charged two main types of service charges; annual charges are made for the provision of ongoing communal services (eg cleaning, grounds maintenance, responsive repairs etc); charges are also made for larger planned repairs and improvements following consultation in accordance with the Housing Act 1985.

(k) Careline Service

The Council operates an alarm network for older people (Careline Service) to the following categories of older people in the District (as at 1 April 2011):

Council tenants	1,086
Private occupiers	1,272
Housing association tenants	67
Total	2,425

The number of users receiving the service decreased by around 2.6% during 2010/11. The monitoring and response service is provided by Careline to private occupiers on a permanent basis, and to other residents when their Scheme Manager goes off duty. The Careline Service is available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year and is based at Parsonage Court, Loughton. Response times are monitored and, in 2010/11, 99.6% of all calls were responded to within 60 seconds. The average time to respond to calls was 6.3 seconds.

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

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

(l) Telecare

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

(m) Sheltered Housing & "Very Sheltered" Housing

In April 2011, the Council had 437 sheltered housing properties within 11 sheltered and grouped housing schemes throughout the District, with each one managed by a Scheme Manager. Since April 2003, sheltered housing tenants have paid a "support charge" that represents the costs of providing them with the sheltered housing service.

In December 2011, Jessopp Court in Waltham Abbey - the Council's former scheme for frail older people, which was previously managed by Essex Adult Social Care (ASC) under a partnership arrangement - was remodelled to a conventional sheltered housing scheme, due to ASC's decision to withdraw from the partnership arrangement.

In addition, three "Area Scheme Managers" visit 264 older people in properties situated within general needs housing estates that have been designated as especially suitable for older people. Visits are made on a "call category" basis, dependent on the assessed level of risk, as follows:

BREAKDOWN OF CALL CATEGORIES FOR PROPERTIES DESIGNATED AS SPECIALLY SUITABLE FOR THE ELDERLY (As at 1st April 2011)		
Category	Frequency of Visits	No.
A	Once every week	22
B	Once every fortnight	14
C	Once every month	227

(n) *Housing ICT*

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

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

- HomeOptions – the Council's choice based lettings system, enabling housing applicants to express interests in up to three vacant properties every fortnight
- HomeSwapper – the Council's web-based mutual exchange system, enabling tenants to provide details of their property and to both attract and seek mutual exchanges
- "A-Z of Housing Services" – providing a description of each housing service provided (eg "Abandoned Vehicles"), the ability to send an e-mail to the appropriate person dealing with that service and the ability to request any leaflets relating to the service.
- "Contact Us" - listing the main sections and offering the ability to send an e-mail by launching the users' e-mail software with a pre-addressed e-mail.
- "Housing Publications" - enabling users to download certain publications and to request any housing leaflets through the completion of an on-line form.
- "Latest News" - providing regularly updated housing-related press releases and information.
- "Feedback" – enabling tenants and other housing clients to provide feedback on housing services and the housing website.
- "Consultation" - where consultation documents and plans can be viewed and downloaded.
- "Payments" – enabling tenants to pay rent and other housing charges via the internet.

It is planned to introduce the facility for housing applicants to apply to join the Council's Housing Register on-line, early in 2012/13.

4.6 Partnership Working

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

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

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

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

<i>Essex Police</i>	The Council works closely with Essex Police on a number of issues. These are mainly in relation to dealing with anti social behaviour, crime prevention, the management of dangerous offenders, responding to “hate incidents” and the removal of abandoned vehicles. The Council and Essex Police have agreed a joint protocol for the use of anti social behaviour orders, and jointly fund a number of police community support officers.
<i>Tenants and Leaseholders Federation</i>	The Federation comprises representatives of the five recognised tenants associations within the District, the district-wide Leaseholders Association, Sheltered Forum and Rural Tenants Forum, that meets every six weeks. It is consulted on, and provides feedback on housing issues, and monitors the Council’s housing performance (see Section 4.8 below).
<i>Voluntary Action Epping Forest</i>	This is the umbrella organisation for voluntary organisations in the District. The Housing Directorate works with VAEF on a number of projects to benefit the Council’s tenants, including a scheme to assist older tenants with gardening.

4.7 Tenant and Leaseholder Participation and Consultation

The Council is committed to involving tenants with the delivery of their housing services and has made good progress with developing tenant participation. The Council has a detailed Tenant Participation Strategy (which is regularly reviewed – most recently in February 2011) and has a dedicated Tenant Participation Officer to deliver the commitments set out in the Tenant Participation Agreement (see below) and to further develop tenant participation in the District.

The Council has facilitated the formation of five recognised tenants association and one tenants panel throughout the District. In addition, the Council has established the district-wide Leaseholders Association, which represents the views of the Council’s leaseholders and with whom the Council can consult on leasehold issues, including service charges. In 2004, the Council also established the Epping Forest Sheltered Forum, comprising representatives from most of the Council’s sheltered housing schemes across the District.

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

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

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

The Council’s first District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement (Compact) between the Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation was signed in March 2000. Following regular reviews and consultation with all tenants, the Agreement has been updated and signed in 2003, 2006, 2009 and most recently in January 2012. The Agreement is a statement of commitment by both the Council and the Federation, which sets out in writing the intentions of the Council and the Federation in the approach they will take for;

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

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

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

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

- Tenant satisfaction
- “Consultation” Section of Housing Website
- This Business Plan
- Tenant Participation Agreement
- New housing policies
- Tenants & Leaseholders Federation

Each year, around July, the Council produces a *Tenant Participation Impact Assessment*, which explains the activities of the Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation over the previous year, and assesses the impact that tenant participation has had on the Housing Service. The *Impact Assessment* is scrutinised by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and the Council’s Housing Scrutiny Panel each year.

4.8 Supporting People

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

The main effects on the HRA have been as follows:

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

However, following the Government’s cuts to local government grants from April 2011, Essex County Council significantly reduced its Supporting People budget by around 30% (approximately £10m per annum) from 2011/12. This had a significant effect on supported housing provision throughout Essex. All other local authority housing providers in Essex reported reductions in Supporting People funding for their sheltered housing schemes of 40%-60%; this is due to the hourly grant rate for sheltered housing being capped at £17 per hour and the maximum no. of hours support funded by Supporting People being reduced from 1 hour per week per property to 0.5 hours per week per property from April 2011. Fortunately, due to the Council historically providing a cost effective sheltered housing, whereby most of EFDC’s sheltered scheme managers have supported more residents than all other local authority providers in Essex, the Council’s reduction in Supporting People funding from Essex County Council was only around 6% (£14,000 per annum) from 2011/12.

4.9 Fees and Charges

In addition to rents, the Council makes a number of other charges for housing services, which are reviewed annually in November by members in order to feed into the budget making process. Usually, fees and charges are increased annually in line with inflation, although each charge is considered on its own merits and variations are made to this approach for strategic reasons.

However, around 50% of all Housing-related Fees and Charges were frozen for 2012/13 due to the effects of the current economic climate on housing customers.

4.10 Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements

In addition to the Financial Plan, probably the most important elements of this Business Plan are the:

- analysis of the condition of the Council’s housing stock

- plans to ensure that all the Council's properties continue to meet the Government's "Decent Home Standard"
- plans to properly maintain the Council's housing stock to a full (modern) standard
- formulation of standards and policies for repairs, maintenance and improvements

In view of this importance, the Council has developed a Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan which, although a free standing document, forms an integral part of the overall HRA Business Plan. The Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan is attached as Appendix 1. During 2012/13, a separate Housing Service Strategy on Repairs and Maintenance will be produced, setting out the Council's general approach to repairs and maintenance.

4.11 Right to Buy and Rent to Mortgage Sales

Under the Housing Act 1985, the Council is required to sell Council properties to eligible sitting tenants at a discount. Local authorities also have discretion to sell properties on a voluntary basis outside the right to buy provisions. A number of years ago, the Council operated such a voluntary sales policy, but no longer does so. Between 1st April 1977 and 31st March 2011 (34 years), the Council has received 11,616 applications to purchase, resulting in 6,164 sales (53%), of which 4,608 were under the Right to Buy.

In 2010/11, 27 applications to purchase under the right to buy were received (7 less than in 2009/10), which resulted in 9 sales (compared to 8 sales in 2009/10 and 27 in 2008/9). The average open market valuation in 2010/11 was £144,222 per property, compared to £157,875 in 2009/10. The current maximum right to buy discount for the Council's region is £34,000, which was the actual discount provided for all sales in 2010/11. The average purchase price was £110,222 per property (compared with £123,875 per property in 2009/10).

The Government recently published its policy document "*Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*" and a subsequent Consultation Paper "*Reinvigorating the Right to Buy and one for one Replacement*", which proposes that the maximum RTB discount should be increased to a flat £50,000 throughout England. This would more than triple the cap currently applied in most of London, and would almost double the maximum discount for this Council's tenants. The Government's Housing Strategy also set out the Government's commitment to ensuring that every additional home sold under the Right to Buy is replaced by a new home for Affordable Rent and that additional receipts from sales are recycled towards the cost of replacement. The outcome of the consultation exercise is awaited.

4.12 The District's Housing Needs Relevant to the HRA Business Plan

(a) Introduction

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

(b) Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs)

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

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

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

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

Six neighbouring district councils, including Epping Forest, worked together to commission a comprehensive and integrated SHMA for the London Commuter Belt (East)/M11 SHMA Area, which was undertaken by Opinion Research Services (ORS). The other five districts in the SHMA area were Brentwood, Broxbourne, East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford. The research used secondary data from sources such as the UK Census, the former Housing Corporation, HM Land Registry and the Office for National Statistics, along with a qualitative consultation programme with a wide range of stakeholders.

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

- The key factors that characterise the SHMA area are:
 - Its proximity to London;
 - Its house prices;
 - The diversity of the area that appeals to both residents and migrant households.
- Between 2001 and 2006, the population of the area rose by 8.5% and the 2001 Census states that 5.5% of households in the SHMA area are overcrowded. It is estimated that around 7,100 households in Epping Forest are considered to be unsuitably housed
- There are 1,300 households in housing need in Epping Forest
- Epping Forest has the largest mis-match between the 2004-based household growth projections to 2026 (8,200 households) and the East of England dwelling allocation (3,500 dwellings)
- There will be a projected shortfall of 5,700 affordable homes in Epping Forest between 2007 and 2021

Due the proposed revocation of regional spatial strategies as a result on the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, the SHMA needs to be reviewed and updated, which the Council intends to do during 2012.

(c) New Affordable Housing Provision

As at March 2012, the Council’s monitoring arrangements for new affordable housing provision identify the following:

- 81 new affordable homes are expected to be completed on 3 development sites during 2011/12
- A further 147 affordable homes on 5 sites have planning permission, and are expected to be completed within the following 3 years
- Developers are giving active consideration to the development of a further 160 affordable homes on 4 sites in the District, although it is unlikely that all these proposed homes/developments will receive planning permission

(d) Housing Register Data

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

COMPARISON OF HOUSING NEED (2010 – 2011)				
	March 2011	March 2010	Difference (2010 – 2011)	
			(Nos.)	%
1 Bed	3,309	3,014	+ 295	+ 9.8 %
2 bed	1,442	1,312	+ 131	+ 9.9 %
3 bed	597	593	+ 4	+ 0.7 %
4 Bed	129	89	+ 40	+ 44.9 %
TOTAL	5,477	5,008	+ 469	+ 9.4 %

(e) *Social Housing Turnover*

Social housing turnover (in both the Council's own stock and that of registered social landlords) has also been taken into account in the preparation of this Business Plan. The following table compares turnover of Housing Register, homeless and other applicants for vacancies in the Council's housing stock over the last two years. As can be seen, turnover increased reduced by 6.5 % in 2010/11 compared to the previous year.

HRA HOUSING STOCK TURNOVER (2010/11 and 2010/11)		
	2009/10	2010/11
Housing Register (inc homeless)	395	462
Mutual exchanges	140	108
TOTAL	535	570

In addition, 108 applicants were nominated and accepted in 2010/11 for vacancies in stock owned by housing associations, a reduction of 7% compared with the 116 applicants nominated and accepted in 2010/11.

(f) *Local Housing Market*

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

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) established that the average property price in Epping Forest in 2008 (Quarter 1) was around £365,000. The average property price rose by 133% between 2000 and 2008 (Quarter 1) – the highest increase in the SHMA Area. Property prices in the District have not increased significantly since 2008.

In 2002, the average property price in Epping Forest was 9 times the median full-time earnings of someone working in the District. This rose to 11 times the median earnings by 2011 which is, by far, the highest ratio in the SHMA Area.

4.13 Workforce Development Planning

The Housing Service adopts a systematic approach towards workforce planning. Workforce planning helps an organisation to estimate its future workforce requirements and calculate the numbers, nature and sources of potential employees who might meet that demand. In other words, it's about getting the right number of people, with the right skills, in the right place and at the right time.

The breakdown of the workforce for the Housing Service as at 1st January 2012 (excluding Private Sector Housing staff, which is covered in the separate Private Sector Housing Business Plan) was as follows:

<i>Gender & Full-Time/Part-Time</i>		<i>Age</i>	
Male	50 %	16 – 24	4 %
<i>Full-time</i>	46 %	25 – 34	4 %
<i>Part-time</i>	4 %	35 – 44	22 %
Female	50%	45 – 54	36 %
<i>Full-time</i>	28 %	55 – 64	31 %
<i>Part-time</i>	22 %	65 +	2 %
<i>Turnover (Reasons and Overall)</i>		<i>Ethnicity</i>	
End of Fixed-Term Contract	54 %	White English	89.4 %
Voluntary Leavers	21 %	White Other	4.4 %
Retired	17 %	White Irish	1.3 %
Other	8 %	Black Caribbean	0.6 %
Annual Turnover	15 %	Chinese	0.6 %
		Mixed White/Asian	0.6 %
		Other/Unspecified	3.1 %

The Housing Directorate's objectives for, and approach to, Workforce Development Planning can be summarised as follows:

- Understand the characteristics of the Housing Service's workforce, in terms of sex, hours of work, age, ethnicity and turnover
- Understand the reasons for staff leaving employment and take any appropriate action as a result to reduce future turnover
- Ensure that there is an appropriate mix of full-time and part-time staff within individual sections of the Housing Directorate
- Seek to minimise any barriers to staff achieving their full potential, by taking pro-active action to maximise their potential
- Identify training and development requirements through the Performance Development Review (PDR) process (see Section 4.14 below) and meet these requirements in the most appropriate way
- Seek to ensure, within the requirements of employment legislation, that the ethnicity of the staff within the Housing Directorate is broadly representative of the wider population and the Council's tenants and housing applicants
- Identify staff who are likely to retire, or who may leave the Council's employment, within the foreseeable future, together with key/unique posts, and plan and implement the arrangements for postholders' succession

4.14 Staff Training and Development

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

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

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

4.15 Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements

As part of the Council's strategic approach to the HRA Financial Plan, the Council plans the repayment of the required loan(s) to fund the CLG's self-financing settlement over a 30-year period. This enables the Council to fund significant new/additional housing improvements and service improvements.

The additional amount available for improvements and enhancements in 2012/13 is £770,000. Current estimates for the availability of funding for improvements and enhancements in the future, based on a conservative estimate for likely Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) interest rates to fund the self-financing settlement, are as follows:

- An additional £1.5million per annum from April 2013;
- A further £250,000 per annum from April 2017;
- The bringing forward of the previously-planned £4.7million increase by one year in April 2019; and
- An additional £250,000 per annum in April 2019.

At the time of writing, following consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel has considered and recommended the following proposed list of improvements and enhancements to the Cabinet, utilising the additional funding, after taking account of the views of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation:

- Acceleration of the Programme to install mains-powered smoke detectors in every Council property within 4/5 years
- Provision of a free Handyperson Scheme for older and disabled tenants living in sheltered and other Council accommodation
- Increasing the Disabled Adaptations Budget for one year
- Conversion of existing toilet facilities in communal areas of sheltered housing schemes and community halls into disabled toilets
- Refurbishment of the Common Room and Kitchen Area at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey
- Expansion and refurbishment of the Council's Play Area on the Princesfield Estate, Waltham Abbey
- Making the existing temporary Part-Time Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud) post permanent and full time
- Creation of a new Senior Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud) Post
- Installation of Key Safes at sheltered housing schemes
- Creation of a new post of Housing Under-occupation Officer
- Increasing the existing budget for Estate Improvements and Enhancements
- Expansion of the VAEF Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Disabled Tenants
- Provision of additional dog waste bins on housing estates
- In-Year Housing Improvements and Enhancements Fund

The list comprises a mix of capital and revenue projects, requiring both one-off expenditure over 1-2 years and ongoing annual expenditure. The inclusion of one-off projects enables the funding allocated to these projects to be utilised for other one-off or ongoing projects in future years, from the overall annual budget.

At its meeting in January 2013, the Housing Scrutiny Panel will consider and recommend to the Cabinet the use of the additional funding available within the HRA Financial Plan for improvements and enhancements in future years, after consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

4.16 Council Housebuilding Programme

Since the 1980s, councils have been discouraged by successive governments from building new affordable housing themselves, and encouraged to act as "enablers", by facilitating housing associations to build new social housing. To discourage councils from building, governments have previously established financial rules that penalise many local authorities that build. However, this has now changed, and local authorities are once again encouraged to build, with the financial disincentives removed.

With the introduction of self-financing and the increased resources this brings, the Council has agreed to implement a modest Council Housebuilding Programme. The main reasons for this are that:

- The Council's HRA land can be developed for much-needed affordable housing (with almost 6,000 applicants currently on the Housing Register);
- The Council will receive the associated New Homes Bonus (NHB) – equivalent to around £6,700 per property over the six-year NHB period, to use for any Council purpose;
- the land and constructed buildings will be retained as a Council asset - rather than transferring the land to a housing association at a subsidised price, for the housing association to develop the affordable housing;
- The Council will benefit from the net rental income in the future, once the development loan has been covered;
- It may be possible for the Council itself to receive the benefit of capital grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency;
- The Council will have greater control over the future use of the affordable homes;

- The cost of construction will be less than for a housing association, since the Council can recover the cost of VAT for fees from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), which housing associations cannot; and
- It will enable the Council to increase its housing stock, instead of continuing to reduce the stock through the Right to Buy, and thereby slowly reduce the associated unit costs of managing and maintaining the Council's housing stock.

The Council has a number of difficult-to-let garage sites and other sites that may have development potential to provide an estimated 120 homes. During 2012/13, the Council will be appointing a Development Agent, through a competitive tender process, to provide all the required development and project management services, including the provision of all professional building services. It is estimated that capital funding of around £2.5 million per annum will be required for such a programme and provision has been made within the five year period of the Council's Capital Strategy for the programme to commence in 2013/14.

Development appraisals for each of the identified sites will initially be undertaken to assess whether or not development potential does exist, and where appropriate, the anticipated costs and income will then be evaluated. The Council has decided that rents charged for the new developments would be at "Affordable Rent" levels, up to 80% of market rent levels.

Grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) may be available in the future, but any shortfall in capital funding for developments will be met from financial contributions received through Section 106 Agreements, the sale of some development sites on the open market and, if allowed by the Government, capital receipts arising from the Right to Buy, to ensure that the Programme is self-funded, without any financial support from the General Fund. A Development Strategy will be adopted by the Council in due course, setting out the proposed approach to the Housebuilding Programme.

5. Provision of Quality Housing Services

5.1 Customer Service Excellence Award – Housing Directorate

In November 2010, the whole of the Council's Housing Service was awarded the Cabinet Office's prestigious Customer Service Excellence Award for a three year period. This award replaces the Government's Charter Mark Award, which the Housing Directorate first received in 2004, and again received for a further three years in 2007. The Customer Service Excellence Award is the national standard for customer service for organisations delivering public services. It is independently and rigorously evaluated and assessed. To meet the standard, organisations must demonstrate that they: listen to their customers; learn what aspects of their service are most important to them; deliver a service that is tailored to customers' needs; and continuously improve. Very few local authority housing departments nationally have achieved the new Customer Service Excellence Award for the whole of their Housing Service. Having the award gives confidence to the Council's tenants, applicants and other clients that the Housing Directorate provides a customer-focused service to them that also strives to continuously improve.

5.2 ISO 9001:2008 Quality Accreditation – Housing Directorate

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

ISO 9001:2008 (previously 9001:2000) is an internationally recognised quality assurance accreditation that confirms that, following a rigorous assessment by a licensed external assessor, the service provided is of a consistently high quality. Since 2002, the whole of the Housing Directorate has been accredited with the ISO 9001:2000/2008 Quality Award every three years. The accreditation includes the following specific areas of the Housing Directorate's work:

- Housing Repairs Service
- Housing Assets
- Housing Management

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

The external assessments of the Housing Directorate were carried out by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance, who undertook a number of visits, audits, inspections and site visits as part of their overall initial assessment. The award lasts for three years, during which time regular audits/inspections are undertaken by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance to ensure that the standards and quality are maintained. The Council was last re-accredited with the status for a further three years in May 2011.

The Housing Directorate's Quality Management System comprises:

- A **Process Manual**, that sets out the main processes carried out by the Housing Directorate
- A **Quality Manual**, that sets out the approach taken to ensure consistent quality
- A **Policy Manual** that provides a record of all the agreed Council policies relating to housing
- A **Procedures Manual**, documenting every individual task undertaken by Housing Directorate staff (totalling almost 800 tasks)
- **Regular internal audits** by Council staff, formally trained and certificated to undertake ISO 9001:2008 internal audits.

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

5.3 Tenant Satisfaction

The Council has previously been encouraged by the Government to undertake a detailed Tenants Satisfaction Survey every two years. The Council's first survey was undertaken in 2001, with the latest undertaken in 2008. Preparations were being made to undertake a further survey during in 2010. However, the Government discontinued its requirement in 2010.

Notwithstanding this decision, the Council places great importance on gauging tenant satisfaction levels and comparing with other social landlords. Therefore, it has worked with Housemark, the national housing benchmarking club, to develop a common tenant satisfaction survey called STAR (in a similar form to the Government's previous STATUS survey), in order to undertake a further tenant satisfaction survey in 2012, and to benchmark the results with other landlords subscribing to Housemark.

The findings of the Council's last survey in 2008 were analysed by the independent consultancy that undertook the survey, the National Housing Federation (NHF), who produced both a detailed report on the findings, as well as an Executive Summary. The main headline results from last survey are set out below.

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

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

Around 1,500 tenants (25% of all the Council's tenants) were randomly selected by the NHF to be surveyed. An exceptionally high response for a postal survey of 53% was received, giving a 3% margin of error at the 95% confidence level. This means that if the Council surveyed all 100% of its tenants, there is a 95% certainty that the results for all the questions would be somewhere between 3% less and 3% more than the results from the sample survey.

Based on their findings, the NHF concluded that:

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

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

At a more detailed level, 86% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service (12% above the peer group average of 74%). Impressively, the Council ranked a strong first in its peer group for all 6 aspects of the repairs and maintenance service measured.

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

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

5.4 Customer Perspective Programme

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

In continuous pursuit of customer excellence, during 2010, the Housing Directorate completed its “Customer Perspective Programme”, which looked at how the housing service is provided to customers (tenants, housing applicants and others) *from their perspective*. The Programme took over 2 years to complete.

A group was set up, and chaired, by the Director of Housing comprising staff from each of the sections in the Housing Directorate and the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The group considered and analysed all aspects of “interfaces” that individual sections of the Housing Directorate have with customers, and considered where and how the service could be improved further. This was in relation to, for example, leaflets, forms and other information given to customers, procedures that they are expected to follow and policies that the Council operates.

Each meeting of the Customer Perspective Group concentrated on a specific aspect of front line Housing Services. In advance of the meeting, the Housing Manager responsible for the function being challenged was asked to circulate to the Group copies of documents given to customers. The Housing Manager then attended the meeting and explained all the various customer interfaces in relation to the Section’s work.

The Group then discussed with the representative any suggestions for improving the experience of customers. Agreed suggestions were then incorporated within a Customer Perspective Action Plan, comprising 118 separate actions.

5.5 Project Management

All special (i.e. non routine) housing projects are detailed in the Housing Directorate’s Continuous Improvement Plan. This is a project management tool that, for each project, sets out:

- The task
- The officer responsible
- The latest anticipated completion date of the task
- The percentage of the task completed to date

Housing Managers provide information on progress with each project for which they are responsible on a quarterly basis. The Project Plan is then updated and reviewed at quarterly Continuous Improvement Meetings (see Section 5.7 below) with individual housing managers, the Director of Housing and the relevant Assistant Director.

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

5.6 Performance Indicators and 2012/13 Targets

The Housing Directorate uses a range of performance indicators to monitor its performance. There are four main types:

National Indicators	Defined by the Government, that must be collected by all local authorities - There are 3 related to the Council's HRA landlord services, which can be benchmarked against other local authorities.
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	Performance Indicators that the Council itself considers to be the most important to monitor the Council's key activities. These are reported to, and monitored by, the Council's Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel each quarter
Tenant-Selected Indicators	Selected by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation as being areas of performance considered important to tenants, they currently comprise 21 indicators. Performance against each of the Tenant-Selected Indicators is reported to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation on a quarterly basis. Annual performance is reported in the Council's Annual Report to Tenants each September.
Management Indicators	Defined and monitored by the Director of Housing, as being indicators that provide important management information on the service, that are used to identify problem areas and the need for improvement – There are over 150 management indicators related to the Council's HRA landlord services alone

Appendix 4 sets out the 21 Tenant-Selected Indicators for 2012/13, as well the associated targets and performance (up to Quarter 3) for 2011/12.

5.7 Performance Management and Continuous Improvement Meetings

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

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

In pursuit of the Housing Service's objective of seeking continuous improvement, the Housing Directorate has had in place for many years a regime of formal, individual Continuous Improvement Meetings. These are held quarterly between individual housing managers, the Director of Housing and the relevant Assistant Director.

Notes of the meetings are kept and the following standard items are reviewed and discussed at every quarterly meetings:

- Progress with Action Points from the previous meeting
- Performance in the previous Quarter and resultant actions required for the forthcoming quarter
- Benchmarking data received in the previous Quarter
- Telephone Response Times in the previous Quarter
- Review of key trends / lessons learnt from Step 1 and Step 2 Complaints in previous Quarter

- Review of staff sickness within the previous Quarter and the identification of concerns and required actions, including references to Harlow Occupational Health Service
- Identification and progress with previously identified VFM Efficiency Savings
- Continuous Improvement Plan and Annual Events Plan - Discussion of key tasks behind schedule, any actions required as a result and identification of new tasks to be added
- Quality Issues - Consideration of any required actions, and progress, resulting from recent ISO9001:2008 internal audit or external surveillance reports and recent Internal audit reports

6. Value for Money

6.1 Corporate Approach to Value for Money

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

During 2010/11, the Council's Cabinet updated its corporate Value for Money Strategy, first produced in 2006. The Strategy's Policy Statement recognises the Council's responsibilities as a custodian of public funds to strive for value for money in the delivery of services.

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

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

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

6.2 Benchmarking Housing Performance and Costs (Housemark)

The Council places great importance on benchmarking its housing performance and costs against other housing providers (both councils and registered social landlords), and has been a member of "Housemark" for a number of years.

Housemark is a national housing benchmarking organisation, which enables housing organisations to submit detailed information on their performance and costs, and then to compare these with other housing organisations nationally. It enables member organisations to compare themselves with user-defined data sets. For example, the Council can compare itself with all housing organisations nationally; all district councils; all local authorities; or all housing associations. Housemark can also define the locations (by regions) of those organisations to be included within the comparison, and can restrict the comparison to housing organisations of more or less than a defined number of properties.

Each year, Housemark produces a detailed Benchmarking Report for the Council, comparing the Council's performance with 47 other local authorities across the country. In addition to the detailed benchmarking information, Housemark also provides a Value for Money (VFM) Summary. The VFM Summary is organised in a way to illustrate how the Council's housing performance – in terms of cost and quality - compares with other local authorities, in respect of the four specific service areas of the TSA's National Standards, covering:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy (including allocations, rents and tenure)
- Neighbourhood and Community

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

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

The last Benchmarking Report, received in 2011, relates to 2009/10. The quartile performance, in respect of those cost and quality indicators for which the Council had data, is summarised below:

Summary of EFDC's Quartile Placement KPIs - Cost & Quality		
Quartile	Cost KPIs	Quality KPIs
Best	3	3
2nd Best	-	5
2nd Worst	1	-
Worst	2	1

Each year, the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel considers the HouseMark Summary Benchmarking Report and provides comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing.

6.3 Value for Money Efficiencies by the Housing Directorate

As explained in Section 5.7 above, initiatives for achieving efficiency Value for money savings are identified, monitored and calculated at quarterly Continuous Improvement Meetings.

For the 4-year period 2004/5-2007/8, the Housing Directorate made cumulative efficiency savings of around £1.15m. For the 3-year period 2009/10 – 2011/12, it is forecast that further cumulative efficiency savings of over 3m will be achieved.

7. Diversity & Equality in the Provision of Housing Services

7.1 Corporate Approach to Diversity and Equality

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

The Council promotes equality of provision in Council services, provided either directly by the Council, its contractors, partners or related agencies. Additionally, many individual services produce their own service equality statements, giving details of how their services comply with equal opportunities best practice.

The Council has therefore recently adopted a new Equality Scheme, which explains its approach to diversity and equality.

7.2 The Council's Equality Report and New Equality Scheme

The Equality Act 2010 includes a new Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which has replaced previous (separate) equality duties relating to race, disability and gender, and also covers the additional 'protected

characteristics' of age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment.

In order to meet the PSED, the Council must:

- (a) Annually publish sufficient information to demonstrate that it has complied with the general equality duty, including:
 - information on the effect that policies and practices have had on employees and people from the protected groups;
 - evidence of the analysis undertaken to establish whether policies and practices will (or have) furthered the three equality aims in the general equality duty, and details of the information used in that analysis; and
 - details of engagement undertaken;
- (b) Publish information about the engagement it has undertaken, including that used in the development of equality objectives;
- (c) Analyse and publish the effect of its policies and practices on equality, and evidence of equality analysis and details of information considered when carrying out analysis; and
- (d) Prepare and publish appropriate equality objectives by 6 April 2012, and at least every four years thereafter.

The PSED also requires local authorities to publish 'sufficient' equality information by 31 December 2012, to demonstrate compliance with the general equality duty.

A large amount of the evidence base used to inform the Council's equality work was included in a self-assessment prepared in early 2010 for an informal review of the authority's performance against the Equality Framework For Local Government (EFLG) (see [Section X.X below](#)), which has been used to produce a new 'Equality Report' to address the requirements of the PSED. The Equality Report is published on a dedicated section of the Council's website in 2011.

The Equality Act 2010 also replaced previous requirements for the publication of equality schemes under the former race, disability and gender equality duties. Although not a requirement of the Equality Act or the PSED, in March 2012, the Council adopted a new Equality Scheme 2012/13 - 2015/15 to reflect the extension of the range of protected characteristics, on the basis that this still represents the best approach to meeting the requirements of the general equality duty, and is useful for communicating the Council's equality achievements and objectives. The Council's Equality Scheme provides both a position statement of the Council's equality progress and sets out the Council's equality objectives.

The equality objectives have been designed to help the Council meet the general equality duty and to bring about positive change; each objective meets one or more of the aims of the general equality duty. The objectives have been developed from appropriate evidence and service analysis, and a range of data and information including the results of consultation exercises and surveys, the views of groups and individuals with whom the Council currently engages in respect of equality matters, impact assessment and equality analysis, and the report of the informal EFLG assessment in 2010 (see below). The Council's equality objectives are as follows :

- To develop existing customer and employee equality intelligence gathering systems and the use of intelligence in service planning;
- To ensure ownership of equality by those within the Council in a position to shape services;
- To develop engagement across all protected equality groups; and
- To ensure that the Council's culture, systems and working practices allow for the development of a management profile representative of its workforce as a whole

A range of delivery actions to work towards these objectives are currently being developed by the Council, in the form of a four-year action plan.

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

The Equality Framework for Local Government was introduced from 1 April 2009, and replaced the previous Equality Standard for Local Government, which provided a framework for delivering continuous improvement in relation to fair employment outcomes and equal access to services. The former Standard assessed local authority performance at five levels, where Level 5 was the highest. The Council's self-assessed performance against the former Equality Standard at the end of 2008/09, was Level 2.

The Equality Framework assesses local authority performance at three levels, where Level 3 is the highest:

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

There are 5 performance areas within the EFLG, all of which need to be achieved within each of the 3 levels:

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

The Council has set a target to achieve Level 2 ('Achieving') of the Equality Framework by the end of 2012/13.

While performance against Levels 1 and 2 of the Equality Framework are determined by self-assessment measure, the achievement of Level 3 is subject to external assessment through a formal Diversity Peer Challenge process. Local authorities that self-assess performance at the 'Achieving' level will, in any event, also be subject to external challenge on a three-yearly cycle.

An informal equality and diversity peer challenge was carried out in March 2010. As a result of this the authority's base-line position was established and a Regulatory Framework Action Plan developed, identifying appropriate actions to take the Council forward against the Framework. Progress against the Action Plan is monitored by the Corporate Equalities Working Group, which is chaired by the Acting Chief Executive and includes a 'Champion' from each Directorate including Housing. At the present time, not all of the actions contained in the Action Plan have been completed.

7.4 The Housing Directorate's Approach to Diversity and Equality

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

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

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

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

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

- Housing Strategy and Development
- Housing Information and Tenant Participation
- Housing Options

- Housing Management
- Housing Repairs and Maintenance
- Older People's Housing Services

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

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

7.5 Diversity Profile of the Council's Tenants

In 2008/9, the Housing Directorate undertook a full Census of all its tenants, in order to obtain data on household composition and other information. Part of the Census collected data on a variety of equality and diversity information. A total of 3,808 returns were received from the 6,552 households occupying Council properties at the time, representing a good response rate of 58%. The returns gave equalities data on 4,607 tenants and other occupants of the Council's properties.

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

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

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

Part of the Council's Policy Statement for Equal Opportunities in the Provision of Housing Services includes a requirement for an annual review of the ethnicity of applicants on the Housing Register, compared with the ethnicity of those allocated accommodation. The reason for the review is to identify whether or not there are any indications to suggest the Council may be discriminating against any one ethnic group. The annual review is undertaken by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, and was last undertaken in July 2011.

The breakdown of the ethnic origin of applicants on the Housing Register for both and 2010/11 and 2009/10 is set out below:

Ethnic Origin of Housing Applicants		
Ethnic Group	2009/10	2010/11
White British/Irish	79.0 %	77.3 %
Bangladesh/Pakistan/India	0.7 %	0.8 %
African/Caribbean	3.2 %	3.3 %
Mixed Race	1.2 %	1.2 %
Other	4.4 %	5.0 %
Not Stated	11.5 %	12.4 %

The breakdown of the ethnic origin of Housing Register applicants allocated Council accommodation in both 2010/11 and 2009/10 is set out below:

Ethnic Origin of Housing Applicants Accommodated		
Ethnic Group	2009/10	2010/11
White British/Irish	76.4 %	81.2 %
Bangladesh/Pakistan/India	0.9 %	0.0 %
African/Caribbean	2.2 %	2.2 %
Mixed Race	0.6 %	2.2 %
Other	4.6 %	3.6 %
Not Stated	15.3 %	10.6 %

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

8. Rents Strategy

8.1 Background

The Government has previously determined that rent setting by local authorities and housing associations be based on a common system based on relative property values and local earnings; rents should move towards comparable rents using an approach which could be readily and easily understood. In March 2001 the Government issued the *Guide to Social Rent Reforms* which set out how the reforms would be achieved and detailing a standard methodology (or formula) for use by both RSLs and local authorities for the calculation of rents.

The basis of the formula is as follows:

- 30% of a property's rent should be based on relative property values compared to national property values;
- 70% of a property's rent should be based on relative local earnings compared to national earnings;
- a bedroom factor so that, all other things being equal, smaller properties have lower rents.

The formula also takes account of national average Council and RSL rent levels and produces a target rent for each property, which local authorities originally had to seek to achieve by a specified date. However, this date has been changed by the Government on a number of occasions. The more recent date specified by the Government is April 2015.

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

8.2 Valuation

The relative property values are based on 'existing use value'. The valuation base was set at January 1999. The Valuation Office, on behalf of the Council, valued 198 separate "beacon properties" (many of which were used for the resource account valuation) for this rent restructuring exercise. Each beacon property is an

example of a main property type owned by the Council in each of the main towns and villages and are representative of the total housing stock. These valuations were then used for all the other similar properties sharing the same characteristics and location.

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

8.3 Implementation

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

8.4 Strategic Approach

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

8.5 Service Charges

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

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

Examples of services not covered include:

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

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

8.6 Support Charges

From April 2003, following the introduction of the Government's Supporting People programme, the Council has separated out from its rents the revenue costs of providing supported housing (e.g. sheltered housing) and made a separate support charge. Under the Supporting People arrangements, the Council receives reimbursement for these charges, for all tenants in receipt of housing benefit, from Essex County Council as the Supporting People Administering Authority. Tenants not in receipt of housing benefit must pay the charge themselves, although the Council will meet the cost of "transitional protection" in perpetuity for tenants in occupation prior to 1 March 2003, which amounts to the difference between the former "scheme manager charge" tenants were paying prior to introduction of supporting people and the new support charge.

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

8.7 Rent levels and Rent Increases

As part of the Council's formulation of its HRA Financial Plan, following the introduction of self financing, the Council gave detailed consideration of its approach to achieving and maintaining rent convergence over the life of the plan. In December 2011, following consultation with the Council's Housing and Finance &

Performance Management Scrutiny Panels and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Council's Cabinet agreed the following strategic approach to future rent increases:

- An average rent increase of 6% in April 2012;
- Average rent increases of RPI + 1.96% per annum in the four years between April 2013 and April 2016 inclusive; and
- Average rent increase of RPI + 0.5% per annum from April 2017.

The average rent increase of 6% for 2012/13 increases the average Council rent by £4.93 per week from £86.19 per week to £91.12 per week.

9. Risk Management

9.1 Introduction

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

9.2 Corporate Risk Register

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

9.3 Housing Risk Register

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

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

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

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

Risk management is applied to each of the identified risks, through exploring the best options to reduce either likelihood or impact or both. Not all risks can be reduced, but they can be managed. Any new actions than need to be taken are included within the Housing Directorate's Continuous Improvement Plan. Periodic actions are included within the Housing Annual Events Plan (See Section 5.5)

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

9.4 Key Housing Operational Risks and Housing Risk Matrix

The Housing Risk Register identifies 11 **Key Housing Operational Risks** and a further 13 other housing operational risks. For each risk, the entry in the Risk Register provides information on:

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

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

Likelihood:

- A - Very High
- B - High
- C - Significant
- D - Low
- E - Very Low
- F - Almost Impossible

Impact

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

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

Key Housing Operational Risks 2012/13		
No.	Current Risk Score	Vulnerability / Risk
1	2D	That the HRA goes into deficit.
2	2D	Lack of suitable temporary accommodation for residents of sheltered schemes and Norway House in the event of an incident.
3	2D	Some services are delivered through decentralised offices.
4	1E	All day-to-day management of the Housing Service is recorded and monitored on the OHMS database, which is provided through one supplier (Northgate) and interfaces with other Council IT systems (e.g. Academy).
5	3C	Some services are provided by contractors and consultants working on the Council's behalf using a variety of forms of contract, sometimes with non-standard conditions inserted.
6	2E	The Council has a duty of care to the health and safety and welfare of staff, tenants and contractors.
7	3E	The Careline Service is provided via the Piper Network Controller (PNC), which is provided by one supplier – Tunstall Telecom.
8	2D	Alarm systems are located in residents' homes where the Council has no control over their security and integrity.
9	2E	Rent, council tax payments etc. are made at cash desks in Broadway Housing Office and Civic Offices.
10	2C	Officers and contractors meet with the public, both in interview rooms and at service users' homes.
11	3C	Undertaking a modest Council Housebuilding Programme

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

9.5 Housing Business Continuity Plan

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

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

9.6 Housing Emergency Plan

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

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

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

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

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

10. HRA Financial Plan

10.1 Introduction

The Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business planning consultants, CIH Consult, have prepared this HRA Financial Plan, following detailed consideration by Council members and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation of the options available for the future direction of the Financial Plan and the agreement of the Council's Cabinet, at its meeting in December 2011, on the strategic approach to be taken. It has been based on the probable outcome for the HRA for 2011/12, and the proposed budgets for 2012/13 agreed by the Cabinet in January 2012, and was approved by the Council's Cabinet on 12th March 2012.

On 1st February 2012, the Government issued its final determination for the value of debt which will be attributed to the Council in relation to the reform of the HRA and the withdrawal of the Housing Subsidy System. The reform of the HRA will take place, effectively, from April 2012 and has been enabled through an element of the recently passed Localism Act 2011.

This Financial Plan differs from previous versions of the plan that have been included in the Council's HRA Business Plans in previous years, where scenarios under both the Housing Subsidy System and Self-Financing were modelled, since it is now known that the HRA reforms will take place and the effect of the settlement value can be projected with more certainty.

10.2 Executive Summary

This latest version of the Financial Plan is based on the new HRA Self-Financing Regime, the implementation of which is from April 2012, with a debt allocation to the Council of £185.456million, payable on the 28th March 2012. The HRA remains viable throughout all the years of the Plan, including an enhanced level of investment in the stock through a full and modern maintenance standard, the introduction of a new Council Housebuilding Programme, and the ability to fund significant housing improvements and service enhancements. The Plan also has the potential to repay the allocated debt within a period of 30 years, based on the assumptions contained within the Plan.

The Financial Plan will require updating later in 2012/13, following the Council's final determination of the financing options available for funding the self-financing debt settlement - which will determine final interest rates, internal borrowing arrangements and repayment schedules. In addition, the impact of any amendments made to Right to Buy discounts and the treatment of capital receipts will require updating, once the outcome of the Government's consultation exercise on these issues is known.

10.3 Underlying assumptions

A detailed HRA Financial Plan model has been produced for the Council by CIHConsult, launched from 2011/12, and based on the latest out-turn forecasts for 2011/12 and the agreed budgets for 2012/13, with the following key assumptions:

- Balanced to the out-turn HRA budgets for 2011/12 and 2012/13;
- Balanced to the forecast HRA Capital Programme for 2011/12 - 2015/16;
- Average rent increases for April 2012 based on an average flat 6% and then converging to formula rent by April 2017;
- General Inflation set at 2.5% (the exception being the rent increase for April 2012, the 2012/13 budgets and HRA Capital Programme up to 2015/16);
- Right to Buy sales of 7 properties per annum;
- An all-in interest rate payable of 4%;
- Required internal borrowing for the General Fund from the HRA, to ensure a neutral position for the General Fund prior to self-financing;
- Housing improvements and service enhancements to benefit tenants; and
- A Council Housebuilding Programme of 120 units over 6 years (averaging 20 per annum)

The most critical assumption relates to the required stock investment and needs. A full (modern) maintenance standard for the Council's housing stock has been modelled and was adopted by the Council in December 2011. This exceeds the Decent Homes Standard, introducing shorter replacement life-cycles on a more realistic basis.

10.4 The Council's Final Self-financing Settlement

After a series of consultations, the unpopular Housing Subsidy System is being replaced through reform of the HRA by self-financing.

Instead of each local authority either contributing payments to, or receiving subsidy from, the national Housing Subsidy System, a level of debt has been allocated by the Government to each stock-holding local authority - based on thirty-year discount forecasts and using uplifted allowances and an interest rate of 6.5%. Local authorities will either have to pay to the Government the net element of this settlement or receive a debt write-off, based on historic subsidy debt levels.

For this Council, instead of paying in excess of £11.3million per annum (and rising) into the Housing Subsidy System a one-off payment of £185.546million is required.

This will be financed, primarily, by borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) at historically low, and specially discounted, interest rates. However, the final portfolio of loan arrangements and the internal borrowing required by the General Fund is yet to be finalised. Furthermore, confirmation of PWLB interest rates will not be known until 26th March 2012.

10.5 Internal borrowing by the General Fund from the HRA

In December 2011, the Council made a strategic decision that internal borrowing by the General Fund from the HRA is made in such a way as to ensure that the General Fund is no worse off than prior to self-financing. Prior to April 2012, the General Fund has internally borrowed from the HRA by paying the equivalent rate of interest it earns from its balances on the HRA Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). In effect, the HRA will “over-borrow” to enable this to continue, at the same time as it funds the debt settlement. The projected costs to the HRA of over-borrowing have been included throughout the 30 years of the Financial Plan, although it should be noted that the graphs below show the actual HRA CFR net of this.

The debt cap imposed by the Government for the Council, based on the level of debt allocated, remains within the final determination.

10.6 Headline Outputs

This latest version of the Financial Plan has been modelled with the assumptions detailed above, but also with the following assumptions:

- Repayment of the debt within 30 years, whilst holding a minimum balance of £2million (inflated)
- Gradual reduction over 6 years of reserves held in the Major Repairs Reserve and the Revenue Repairs Account
- An increase in the amount available for housing improvements and service enhancements previously agreed by the Council:
 - An additional £750,000 per annum from April 2013;
 - An additional £250,000 per annum from April 2017;
 - A bringing forward of the £4.7million increase by one year in April 2019; and
 - An additional £250,000 per annum in April 2019

The additional provisions and changes to the level of funding for improvements and service enhancements are possible due to the estimated reduction in the interest rate chargeable on the loan(s), from the level of interest rate estimated in December 2011. As highlighted above, a review of the Plan will be required in the next few months - once the financing arrangements have been finalised and the actual interest rate obtained for the loan(s) – since these may well impact on the deliverability of the service enhancements.

The following charts set out:

- The in-year cashflow and balance projections for the HRA (including the above service enhancements);
- The capital investment requirements and availability; and
- The debt repayment profile

Chart 1 - HRA Projections (£'000s)

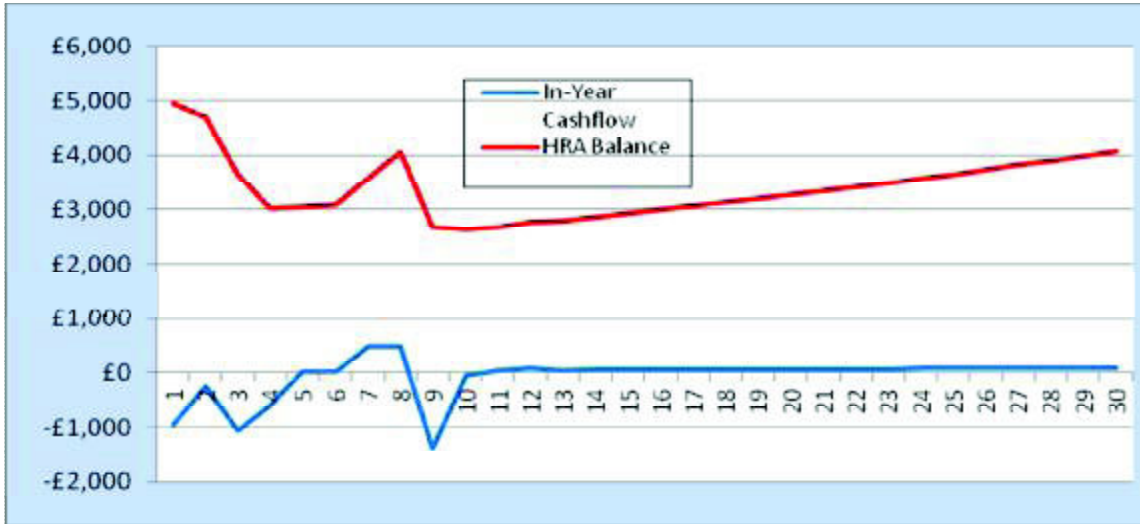


Chart 2 - Capital Expenditure Profile and Funding (£'000s)

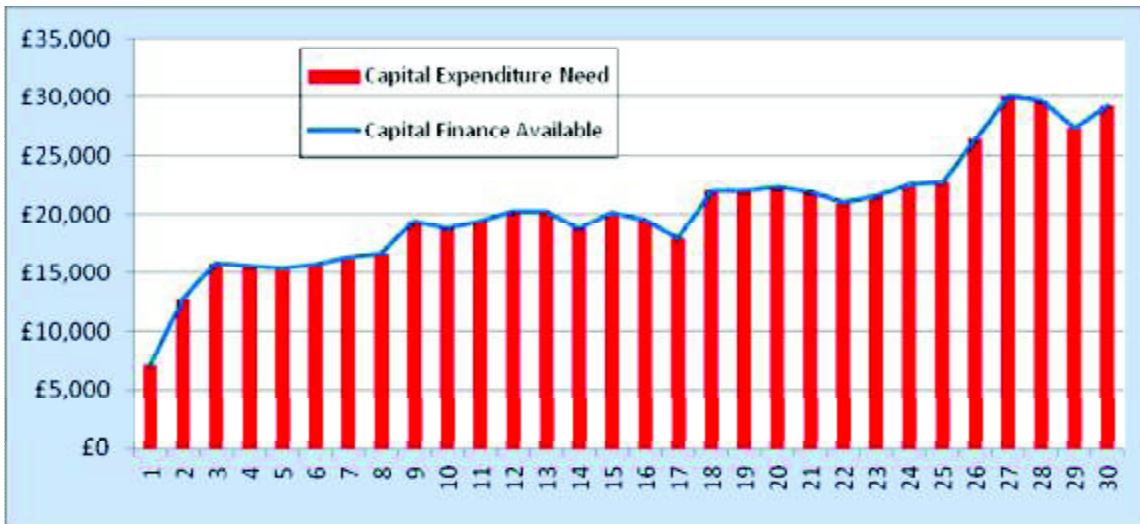


Chart 3 - Projected Debt Profile (£'000s)



The charts above firstly demonstrate that the HRA remains in positive balance throughout the 30 years of the Plan. In addition, the modern maintenance standard and the improvements and service enhancements can be fully funded in each year of the 30 years of the Plan.

The Plan, based on these assumptions, also has the potential to repay the HRA element of debt (HRA CFR) within 30 years, and includes assumptions as to interest levels, internal borrowing between the HRA and the General Fund and improvements / service enhancements, all of which will affect the viability of the Plan.

10.7 Sensitivities

Given that the Financial Plan has been specifically modelled to repay the debt settlement over a 30-year period, by increasing the levels of funding from the previously-agreed levels for service enhancements, it proves that the Plan is viable and very resilient to changes in the key assumptions. This is particularly relevant, as some significant increases in the availability of funding for improvements and service enhancements are introduced later in the life of the Plan.

It must be noted that all management, maintenance and capital expenditure are forecast to increase by base inflation only and therefore any real increases above these provisions will have to be met by efficiency savings or reductions in future service enhancement levels.

10.8 Next steps

As already indicated above, the Council needs to finalise the arrangements for the financing of the debt settlement, which will be completed prior to 26th March 2012.

There is also the potential for changes to the Government's current Right to Buy (RTB) policy to impact on the Plan, with higher numbers of sales. However, the Government's current proposals, under consultation, provide for the Council to have the first call on additional capital receipts that arise from additional RTB sales as a direct result of any Government changes to meet the equivalent level of debt held within the HRA.

CIPFA are yet to finalise the calculation of future depreciation charges under componentisation of assets and therefore the transitional arrangements have been used throughout the life of the Plan, but it is expected that there will be little or no impact from any changes made.

10.9 Risk and Reward

Moving to self-financing for the HRA significantly alters the risk profile in HRA Financial Plans and for the Council's Housing Service.

CIHConsult has classified the following risks under the following headings shown:

Description	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation and residual risk
Insufficient knowledge of current stock causes unknown liabilities	HIGH	MEDIUM	Increase surveys, full understanding of asset management database -> reduce impact to LOW
Cost inflation is higher than income inflation	HIGH	LOW	Effective budget and financial control -> reduce impact to MEDIUM or LOW
Interest rates rise	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	Flexible approach to debt funding giving opportunities to refinance -> reduce impact to LOW
Right to Buy levels increase	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	Depends on Government policy towards discounts and moves in the housing market; managing costs to the number of properties held -> reduce impact to LOW (but impact on availability of housing)

Restriction on housing benefits; introduction of Universal Credit	HIGH	HIGH	Intensive management and services to vulnerable tenants -> reduce likelihood to MEDIUM
Government revisits the settlement	HIGH	MINIMAL	No action by the Council, but investment of available resources could reduce scale of impact.
Rent increases are not implemented in accordance with Government expectations	HIGH	LOW/MINIMAL	Council policy towards raising rents to convergence are included in this Plan

10.10 Projected Cash Flows and Capital Projections

Thirty-year projected cash flows and capital projections are attached as Appendices 5(a) and 5(b) respectively.

11. Reviewing the Business Plan

11.1 Introduction

The HRA Business Plan is a dynamic, working document. Consequently, it is essential that it is reviewed and updated on an annual basis. In addition, it is very important that progress on the Action Plan and the achievement of performance targets are reviewed throughout the year.

11.2 Financial Monitoring

The HRA Financial Plan for 2012/13 will be monitored and formally reviewed by officers and the Council's HRA Business Planning Consultants, CIHConsult, on a quarterly basis throughout the year by officers. It will be formally monitored and reviewed by the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and Housing Portfolio Holder twice, in October 2012 and March 2013.

11.3 Monitoring the Business Plan's Key Action Plan

Chapter 12 of this Business Plan sets out a detailed Key Action Plan. It is important that progress with the Key Action Plan is monitored. This is done at two levels.

At officer level, the actions are incorporated within the Housing Directorate's Continuous Improvement Plan referred to in Section 5.5 above. At member level, the Housing Scrutiny Panel receives and considers a six-month progress report on the Action Plan, in October and March each year.

11.4 The HRA Business Plan Review process

The review process will commence in January 2013, which will result in the production of a draft HRA Business Plan and Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan 2013/14, on which the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and Housing Scrutiny Panel will be consulted, prior to the final version being approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder around the end of March 2013.

12. Key Action Plan

12.1 Introduction

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

Key Action Plan

[To Follow]

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Appendix 4	Tenant-Selected Performance Indicator Performance and Targets 2011/12 – Related to HRA landlord services
Appendix 5	30 Year HRA Cash Flows

Appendices



Epping Forest District Council

Director of Housing
Alan Hall FCIH MCM



Housing Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan

2012 - 2013

April 2012



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1. Purpose of the Plan

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

This Plan is therefore comprehensive in its coverage. In March 2012, the Government will be introducing a major change in the way that local authority Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs) are funded, called Self Financing, under which this Council will need to make a one-off payment to the Government, the loan for which will then need to be managed over a 30-year period. However, this gives the Council an opportunity to plan the future strategic approach to income and expenditure, particularly relating to planned improvement of the Council's housing stock. This Business Plan sets out how we intend to do this.

Once again, over the last 12 months, significant changes to the Housing Directorate have occurred, particularly in relation to the Repairs Refresh Programme, which followed the merger of the Housing Repairs Section with the Building Maintenance Works Unit, and the commencement of Mears as the Repairs Management Contractor. This is covered in more detail later in the plan.

The section of this plan, which looks specifically at our ability to meet performance targets has been updated, with actions for improvement recorded in the action plan in section 10 of this Business Plan.

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

In preparing this Plan, the Council's Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have been consulted in the same way as with the main HRA Business Plan and they have approved both Plans. In respect of matters relating to the Repairs and Maintenance Plan, the Federation particularly expressed the following views:

- *[In preparing this Plan, the Council's Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have been consulted in the same way as with the main HRA Business Plan and they have approved both Plans. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation We agree and support the Business Plan's Programme, particularly improved performance, efficiency savings, an improved structure and objectives and action plan;*
- *We are pleased that the proposed introduction of self-financing for the HRA should enable the Council to invest sufficient resources in its housing stock to keep it properly maintained for many years;*
- *We are pleased to note that, during the year, the Council met the Decent Homes Target, 7 months earlier than the Government's deadline, and has plans and resources in place to ensure that no homes become non-decent;*
- *We are impressed with the benefits already being obtained from the Repairs Refresh the introduction of a Tenant Liaison Office post; and*
- *We fully support the innovative appointment of a private repairs management contractor and feel that this will result in further improvements to the Housing Repairs Service.]*

2. Introduction to the Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan

Epping Forest District Council is a major provider of housing. As at 1st April 2011, the Council owned and managed 6491 properties, 2814 garages, 1 homeless hostel and leased 941 properties. A number of these properties were transferred to the Council from the former Greater London Council (GLC) in 1980. There has been a general rate of decline in the number of properties owned by the Council over the years due to tenants purchasing their homes under the Right to Buy scheme. Since 1977, 6163 properties have been sold. The rate at which properties have been sold has varied over the years. However, over the last five years, an average of 19.8 properties per annum have been sold, which equates to approximately 0.3% of the stock.

2.1 The Housing Directorate within the context of other Strategic Plans

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

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

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

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

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

Home Energy Conservation Act and Fuel Poverty Strategies – Strategies designed to conserve energy use particularly for those on low incomes. This has for some time been targeting energy saving measures to those on low incomes through the Warm Front Scheme or the Green Deal from April 2012.

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

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

Housing Directorate Risk Strategy – A Risk Register, which identifies the strategic and

operations risks affecting the Housing Directorate.

Housing Strategy 2009-2012 - The Housing Strategy assesses the overall housing needs of the District, and sets out the Council's objectives and plans for meeting those needs.

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

2.2 Housing Directorate

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

(a) Private Sector and Resources

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

(b) Property

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

(c) Operations

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

3. Repairs & Maintenance

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

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

In previous years, this Business Plan has set out in detail the work of the Housing Assets Team and the Housing Repairs Service, including how the work is identified, recorded, managed and monitored. Much of this detail remains the same each year, or only requires reviewing on a three-yearly basis similar to other Service Strategies. Therefore, this Business Plan has been streamlined to include a look back at what was achieved during the previous year, including the performance levels that were reached, and a look forward to our plans and targets for the next 1, 5 and 30 years in line with the HRA Business Planning regime. In order to retain the important aspects of work of the Housing Repairs Service and the Housing Assets Section, it is planned that a separate Repairs and Maintenance Service Strategy will be prepared in 2012/13.

During 2010/11, the Housing Repairs Service undertook 12,854 repairs in total. However, up to the end of the 3rd quarter of 2011/12, a total of 12,967 works instructions had been issued.

3.1 Repairs Refresh Programme

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

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

The main objectives of the Repairs Refresh Programme are:

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

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

- To relocate the Repairs Section to the Epping Depot site
- To improve overall performance in response times
- To avoid duplication in working practices
- To streamline administrative functions
- To improve tenant liaison
- To reduce risk
- To move towards a more area based Repairs Service in line with other housing management functions
- To increase supervision of repairs
- To introduce Generic Working by combining the duties of the Repairs and Voids Officers
- To achieve savings if possible, which will be reinvested in the Repairs Service

3.1.1 Repairs Advisory Group

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

Provide advice and feedback to officers and the Housing Portfolio Holder on the proposed specification for the Repairs Management Contract;

Interview short-listed companies and recommend to the Housing Portfolio Holder which company should be appointed; and

Meet quarterly to monitor the performance of the repairs management contractor and the repairs service generally.

3.1.2 Restructure of Housing Repairs Service

In November 2009, the Cabinet agreed a new structure for the Housing Repairs Service. The fundamental changes in the structure saw a separation of the works and administration functions, thus;

- a. Creating one team that concentrates on receiving and registering the requests for repairs, manages the stores, procurement, invoicing and generally supports the works functions. This team also monitor performance, budgets and acts as tenant liaison, including dealing with complaints.
- b. Splitting both the technical and trade roles into two distinct geographical areas in the same way other housing management roles are managed, giving greater control over the supervision of the works and making it easier to respond to repairs requests. Each area has a Manager and an Assistant Manager, along with Technical Officers and a number of Operatives from all trades.

All posts within the new structure were filled by January 2011, which includes the two Area Repairs Managers, Assistant Area Repairs Managers, Customer Repairs Manager and the appointment of a new Tenant Liaison Officer. However, the appointment of the Repairs Management Contractor followed in May 2011.

3.1.3 External Repairs Management Contractor (RMC)

The Cabinet agreed to appoint, for a initial period of 3-years, and then up to a maximum of 9-years, the services of Mears as their Repairs Management Contractor, to assist the Council to introduce changes that will make the Housing Repairs Service more efficient in terms of value for money and performance. The appointment of the Repairs Management Contractor was subject to EU procurement competition. The concept behind the appointment is called “Insourcing”, where the Council retains its Housing Repairs Service, but is managed via a private sector Repairs Contractor.

There are three primary aspects to the RMC contract - the day to day management of the Housing Repairs Service; the delivery of specific projects aimed at improving the service to our tenants, which are defined as “Key Deliverables”; and, the delivery of performance related targets.

There are 5 specific ‘Key Deliverables’ which formed part of the Services Specification of the contract for Mears to deliver in the first 3-years

- a. **Supply Chain Development** – To develop better supply chain arrangements with suppliers and sub-contractors to ensure that value for money is being achieved. This includes a complete overview of how the stores is operated and managed;
- b. **Development of Pricing Models** – To develop better financial models, which can then be used for benchmarking and in situations where the HRS is to be reimbursed for works undertaken, including how supply chain partners are also reimbursed for works carried out. This also includes better ways of financial reporting to the Council;
- c. **Implementation of an Effective IT system** – To introduce better IT systems for delivering an effective R&M service from the point of order through to completion and post completion actions. This will also need to integrate with OHMS for Business Continuity. The IT system put forward by Mears is its own MCM system, which has a proven track record across many of their existing contracts elsewhere.
- d. **Introduction of Mobile Working for Operatives** – To introduce mobile working for operatives, linked with an IT system that manages all repairs jobs, including workload, scheduling and appointments.
- e. **Implementation of an appointment based Repairs Service** – To implement a full appointment system whereby all repairs can be undertaken at the convenience of the tenant at a time to suit them.

Mears, as the RMC, commenced in May 2011 and have been asked to manage the change process within the Housing Repairs Service, which it is expected will lead to a stepped improvement in performance. The current performance targets and those expected as part of the contract are set out below:

Description	Current Target	Proposed Target
Emergency Repairs	24 hours	2 hours
Urgent Repairs	7 calendar days	3 working days
Routine Repairs	6 weeks (42 days)	2 weeks (10 days)
Voids (including major works)	30 days	2 weeks (10 days)
Tenant Satisfaction	98%	98%

3.2 Housing Assets

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

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

3.2.1 Legislative requirements and working practices

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

a. Legislation

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

Standard forms of contract are being developed all of the time, and it is important that these are considered to ensure the Council obtains the best value for money and minimises its risks.

b. Housing Policies

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

c. Working Practices

As a local authority, the Council is required to undertake its duties and conduct itself in a manner that is both fair and proper. Accountability in working practices is therefore important. In order to ensure this, Officers must also work in accordance with Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and CIPFA Guidelines.

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

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

Since 2002, Housing Services has been accredited the ISO 9001:2000 Quality Award for all services. Housing Assets was one of the first two sections to be awarded ISO 9001:2000 status in May 2002. Successive intensive re-assessments have been carried out since by an external auditor, the latest being in January 2012, which resulted in the ISO 9001:2008 status being renewed for a further 3 years.

3.2.2 Improvements to Council Stock – 2010/11

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

	2010-11 Actuals		2011-12 Target		2012-13 Target	
	No Properties	Cost (£,000)	No Properties	Cost (£,000)	No Properties	Cost (£,000)
Kitchen and Bathroom replacements	370	1,700	350	1,700	811	3,600
New heating installations, inc boilers or heating upgrades	176	642	250	1,025	426	1,462
Welfare heating installations	28	50	32	50	30	50
Electrical testing, electrical upgrades	353	422	690	300	871	305
Rewires	95	240	110	335	411	1,066
Re-roofing	152	490	244	522	417	1,328
Structural repairs	151	240	300	600	300	600
Disabled adaptations (Major)	100	374	140	400	140	400
Disabled adaptations (Minor)	130	50	170	50	170	50
New front entrance doors,	191	94	213	100	339	150
New uPVC double-glazing	50	101	55	125	413	893
External repairs and redecorations	859	750	875	800	866	710
Door entry Installations	1	6	20	44	263	162
Asbestos removal	42	110	50	115	50	115
Digital TV upgrades	507	70	659	35	0	0
Communal and individual cold water storage tanks	50	25	175	83	422	176
Internal re-decorations for the elderly	96	40	85	40	85	40
Energy Performance Certificates produced	275	15	500	25	500	25
Energy efficiency measures	150	60	600	200	600	200
Stock condition surveys	190	0	600	0	600	0

4. Quality Repairs and Maintenance Service

4.1 Tenant Satisfaction – NHF Status Survey

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

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

4.2 Tenant Satisfaction – Tenant Response to Repairs and Maintenance

Service	Indicator	Performance 2010/11	Target 2011/12	Perf -Q3 2011/12
Housing Repairs Service	General standard of service - good or satisfactory	99%	98%	99%
Housing Repairs Service	Total number where tenants express “poor” satisfaction	7	no target	0
Housing Repairs Service	Complaints upheld (exc. Minor)	0	No target	0 upheld
Gas Breakdowns	Overall satisfaction - South	99% good 0% poor	96%	n/a – out of contract
Gas Breakdowns	Overall satisfaction - North	100% good 0% poor	96%	100% good 0% poor
Internal redecoration	Overall satisfaction	97% good 0% poor	96%	100% good 0% poor
Kitchen & Bathroom Programme	Overall satisfaction	100% good 0%poor	96%	90% good 3%poor
Digital tv upgrade	Overall satisfaction	94% good 1%poor	96%	78% good 15% poor
Structural repairs	Overall satisfaction	92% good 0%poor	96%	n/a% good n/a%poor
Gas heating installation	Overall satisfaction	96% good 1%poor	96%	97% good 0%poor
Installation of Front Entrance Doors	Overall satisfaction	95% good 2%poor	96%	100% good 0%poor
Re-roofing	Overall satisfaction	89% good 4%poor	96%	94% good 0%poor
External Repairs & Redecorations	Overall satisfaction	86% good 4%poor	96%	86% good 2%poor

4.3 Customer Perspective Programme

In pursuit of customer excellence, in spring 2007, Housing Services initiated a “Customer Perspective Programme”, which looks at how housing services are provided to customers from a customer perspective. This includes the repairs and maintenance service. A group of Officers from

each section of the Housing Directorate, along with tenant representatives will analyse all aspects of the “interface” that Housing Services have with customers with a view to finding out how services can be improved further.

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

4.4 Housing Excellence Plan

As a result of the 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) was created, which increases the TSA’s powers over the regulation of social housing. The TSA launched a Regulatory Framework in April 2010, which set out the TSA’s mandate for the future regulation of the sector. However, after the general election later in the year, the new Coalition Government announced the abolition of a number of Government quangos, including the Audit Commission and the TSA, although the TSA will continue to regulate the social housing sector until their transfer in 2012 to the CLG is confirmed.

Until then, it is possible that the TSA could undertake inspections to assess the quality of housing services delivered by registered providers, which includes Local Authority’s that have retained their housing stock. Therefore, the Repairs and Maintenance service (along with all other aspects of the Housing Directorate) will continue to review its services, based on the former Audit Commission key lines of enquiry (KLOEs), which represent a set of questions and statements around our approach to assessing and measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of our housing services.

4.5 Avoidable Contact

The Council’s overall aim is to reduce ‘avoidable contact’ between residents and local authorities. Examples of ‘avoidable contact’ include calls from residents to chase progress on repairs requests. Since the national indicator for avoidable contact has been introduced, a review has taken place to identify ways in which the Repairs and Maintenance teams can provide clearer advice on the service it provides so that residents do not have the need to make such frequent contact. That review identified the following areas for improvement:

- The need to improve the type and quality of information provided to residents
- Since the repairs counter is no longer available at the civic offices, provide computer facilities in reception areas so that visitors can use the “Repairs On-line” service to report their repairs.
- To introduce a better appointments system for responsive repairs
- To add all planned maintenance programmed work onto OHMS against the individual property database, giving contact details, estimated installation dates etc so that the Repairs call-centre staff are able to give more efficient advice at the first point of contact.
- For less reliance on the use of telephone answering machines in the planned maintenance office so that queries can be answered straight away.
- For gas servicing contractors to provide a sticker in each property, in an obvious location so that tenants know who to call for gas servicing queries, giving contact details of who to call.
- To provide a short, but glossy leaflet for each of the planned maintenance works

categories, such as disabled adaptations, kitchen renewal, front entrance doors, uPVC windows and French doors, heating installations, rewiring and energy efficiency works. The leaflet will set out the targets, contact details, tenants choice, details of what the Council will do and also what the tenants is expected to do for themselves.

A number of improvements have been made during 2011, which has seen the introduction of a new telephone call answering system, which automatically directs people to the service area they require, as well as an appointment based repairs service with SMS text messages being used to confirm appointments and remind tenants of appointments. This has seen a drop in the number of callers that have dialled incorrectly or not actually wanted housing Repairs, or eliminated the need for many calls where tenants have in the past had to chase when their repair was likely to take place.

4.6 Repairs & Maintenance Focus Group

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

During 2011, there have been four meetings (held quarterly), which have been well attended and have come up with a number of good ideas that are currently being implemented. Some of these include:

- Standardised rechargeable costs for works undertaken on behalf of tenants where the work is the responsibility of the tenant.
- A tenant information pack for new tenants, which will contain all relevant information relating to the property, such as meter locations, stop-cock locations, Energy Performance Certificates, Gas and Electrical Safety Inspection Certificates etc.
- Pre-vacation checklist for mutual exchanges and tenancy transfers
- An out of hours self assist checklist, to help diagnose common repairs so that tenants can undertake simple remedies to faults that are the responsibility of the tenant.
- Agreed on a voids standard, with one representative attending a void from start to end to review the quality, standard and procedure.

5. Performance

The Council monitors its performance to deliver a whole range of services to its customers. These are captured and monitored as either national indicators, local indicators, management indicators or tenants indicators. The full set of indicators showing the overall performance achieved in 2009/10, the target for 2010/11 and the performance recorded at the end of quarter 3 of 2010/11.

Service	Indicator	Performance 10/11	Target 2011/12	Perf -Q3 11/12
Adaptations (Minor)	Acknowledgement time	1.2 days	7 days	1.3 avg
Adaptations (General)	Acknowledgement time	1.6 days	7 days	1.9 avg
Adaptations (Minor)	Time from decision to completion of work	21.5 days	28 days	22.9 avg
Adaptations (General)	Time from decision to completion of work	69 days	90 days	84 avg
Adaptations (General)	Time from works order to completion	33 days	56 days	51 avg
Adaptations (Minor)	No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time	1	none	8
Adaptations (General)	No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time	2	none	10
Gas servicing	Graceland and Kinetics - No. of CP12 lapsed (over 12 months)	12 Gracelands	none	1 Gracelands
		16 Kinetics	none	4 Gracelands
Gas servicing	Graceland and Kinetics - % of properties where servicing not complete within 12 months: non-access	0.38% Gracelands	0%	0.03% Gracelands
		0.57% Kinetics	0%	0.14 Gracelands
Gas servicing	Percentage of Gas Safety Certificates outstanding at the end of period	0.47%	none	0.08%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns attended within Fast Track (1 hour) - Gracelands	100%	100%	100%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns attended within Fast Track (1 hour) - Kinetics	91%	100%	100% Gracelands
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Emergency attended (within 1 hour) and left correct - Gracelands	91.3%	none	95.5%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Emergency attended (within 1 hour) and left correct - Kinetics	56.52%	none	98.9% Gracelands
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Completed within 24 hours and left correct - Gracelands	77.4%	85%	78.6%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Completed within 24 hours and left correct - Kinetics	68.27%	85%	76.5% Gracelands

Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Completed within 5 days - Gracelands	100%	95%	100%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Completed within 5 days - Kinetics	100%	95%	100% Gracelands
Internal redecoration	Average time from application to acceptance (including checking process)	3.4 days	7 cal days	4.0 avg
Internal redecoration	Average time from application to completion	3.9 weeks	6 weeks	3.8 avg
Internal redecoration	No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time	0	none	0
Decent Homes	Proportion of homes which are non decent	0%	0%	0%
Repairs	% of appointments kept	98%	95%	90.13%
Repairs	Average time to complete urgent repairs	5.0	5 w/days	4.0
Repairs	Average time to complete non-urgent repairs	18 days	42 days	15.0 days
Repairs	% of emergency repairs completed within target time (24 hours)	98%	99%	98%
Repairs	% of repairs undertaken within target time: Priority within 3 days (priority code 3)	98%	95%	92%
Repairs	% of urgent repairs completed within target time of 5 working days	69%	95%	86%
Repairs	% of routine repairs completed within target time of 6 weeks	92%	95%	96%
			%	E / U / R
Repairs	% of all repairs received emergency / urgent / routine	49/08/43	10/20/70	17/05/29
Voids	Time for Works Unit to complete repairs	18.7	15 w/days	31.48
Voids	% rent loss through voids	1.03	1.9%	0.90
Voids	Average time taken to re-let (overall void period)	63	No target	66
Voids	Average overall void period (excluding difficult to let)	31	30 days	32
Voids	No of voids with Works on 1st day of period	42	no target	19
Voids	Total number of voids	425	no target	243
Voids	Voids with Works > 6 weeks	90	no target	60

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

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

1 The main responsive repairs targets in respect of emergencies, urgent and routine repairs as well as voids are linked to the new Repairs Management Contractor incentivisation scheme. With the new IT system, including mobile working going live in January 2012, it is anticipated that these will improve significantly over the coming months.

2 The ratio between emergency, urgent and routine responsive repairs has been addressed as an interim measure in-so-much as more works are being undertaken by appointment. This de-classifies the repair priority until the schedule of rates are amended, taking away the priority coding, which is main driver to the poor performance of this indicator.

3 Overall void periods continue to be an area that the Council need to improve on. In January 2012, the Council has piloted a radical new approach to dealing with voids, whereby one contractor now has overall responsibility to assess the void against the void standard, undertake the works and then hand back the property ready to let. The target for all voids undertaken in this pilot is a maximum of 10 working days. If successful, then the Council will need to roll out this procedure for all voids.

6. Expected trends

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

6.1 Expenditure

Expected expenditure trends over the next 12 months can be summarised as follows:

HRA Self-financing – The implications of the HRA Self Financing, which amongst other things will see a 50% increase in the amount of capital expenditure available to maintain the Council's housing stock to a more modern standard, based on current stock condition and standard industry life cycles, as opposed to maintaining the stock at the current minimum Decent Homes Standard. Self financing will commence in April 2012. This will also bring about the opportunity for the Council to commence a Council house building programme for the first time since the 1980's

Decent Homes – Although the Council has managed to bring all of its properties up to the Decent Homes Standard, under HRA self-financing there is an opportunity for the Council to maintain the Council's housing stock to a more modern standard, based on current stock condition and standard industry life cycles, as opposed to maintaining the stock at the current minimum Decent Homes Standard.

The affects of affordable Housing Development on Voids – With nomination agreements linked to all windfall development sites through Section 106 agreements, the number of affordable housing developments has a direct affect on the number of voids that need to be turned around in any one year, and generally, they are received in batches, which affects the Council's ability to plan resources to address the voids. This has been a particular problem since 2009/10, with a higher than normal number of voids. This will continue for the next 3-years with around 605 affordable units in the pipeline.

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

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

It is clear that the voids service has seen a significant increase in expenditure over the last 6-years from £473,532 in 2004/5 to £1.63 million in 2010/11. As explained above, the increase mirrors the number of affordable housing developments, but it also mirrors an increase in the amount of work that has been necessary due to the poor condition that tenants have left the property when they move out. In response, the Council has introduced a pre-vacation inspection procedure, whereby a Generic Repairs Officer visits the tenant in advance of them moving out and giving the tenant advice on the what the Council expects the condition of the property to be in based on the terms of the tenancy agreement, to avoid the Council having to recharge for works at a later date when the tenant has moved out.

Continued demand for structural repairs – Expenditure on structural repairs has increased significantly in recent years. A number of Council properties were constructed using non-traditional building methods during the 1960's and now require additional levels of maintenance above traditional properties. Another contributing factor is the underlying soil type and geology, which is predominantly London Clay. Therefore, buildings located within 30m of trees are at risk of subsidence if left unchecked. Since tenants are able to plant trees in their gardens, this is presenting a problem when maintaining the structural integrity of the properties. A number of structural repairs have been completed and there are likely to be other parts of the Council's stock also requiring similar levels of investment.

The Council is not insured for subsidence, heave and landslip as estimates showed that premiums were likely to be higher than expenditure.

Increasing costs for servicing and improvement/replacement of existing central heating – All Council tenants requesting central heating now have heating installed. Likely resultant trends include: increasing servicing and repair costs; increased costs to replace existing systems when beyond repair; the need to upgrade partial central heating systems; reduction in demand for welfare heating; and the ongoing need to look at alternative renewable fuel sources for heating homes in the rural communities where there is no mains gas and the relative cost of electricity is high or the volatile pricing for bottled gas and oil makes it difficult for residents to heat their homes

A more modern standard for planned improvements – An ageing stock requires an increase in the level of repairs, although this is being offset by a planned maintenance programme. However, through the HRA self-financing, the Council has agreed to increase expenditure on planned maintenance and to maintain our housing stock to a more modern standard, but work will still need to be prioritised towards those properties in most need and only undertaken where it is required.

Repairs Refresh Programme – This is an opportunity to re-think the way in which the Council provides a repairs and maintenance service for our tenants. The appointment of an External Contract Repairs Manager is an innovative approach to injecting the benefits of the commercial private sector into our existing in-house repairs service. However, efficiency savings are helping to offset additional costs.

Need to tackle anti-social behaviour through the use of CCTV – With an increase in anti-social behaviour, which results in an increase in the amount of expenditure on repairing damage caused through vandalism, consideration needs to be given to combating this growing problem. Work is on-going between the Council and the Police Service, which has resulted in a CCTV Policy being drawn up by the Head of Environmental Services. A substantial on-going budget for the installation of CCTV surveillance systems has been included within the investment programme.

Recruitment of skilled craft workers – With the current recruitment restrictions, there is a heavier reliance on the use of sub-contractors to undertake void works as well as electrical repairs and inspections. This is resulting in slightly higher costs, albeit offset by a small saving in the salaries budget.

Economic downturn – Much has been reported about the current economic downturn, with the construction industry being hit hard. Whilst this is mainly affecting new build, general maintenance work is less affected. In order to help local businesses through these difficult financial times, all Council tenders will seek to include at least one local business on the list of tenderers.

Council House-Building – For the first time in around 20-years the Council has agreed to commence a small Council house building programme of around 20 affordable homes per year over a 5-year period on the sites of difficult to let garages across the district. Around £16 million

has been identified to fund the programme. This new programme will be managed from within the Housing Assets Section, where a Development Officer Post has been agreed. The detailed feasibility, appraisals, design, approvals, procurement and delivery will be managed via a Development Agent, who the Council will appoint during 2012 via an EU compliant tender.

6.2 Investment Needs

This section provides a summary of the main areas of investment identified by the stock condition survey. A separate section deals with needs arising from the decent homes initiative. These are broken into the same categories used in Appendix A (summary of expenditure over a 5 and 30-year period).

6.2.1 Future Planned Maintenance

There are a number of major works that can be identified from the stock condition survey, other major improvement schemes or development opportunities. These have been prioritised and taken into account, along with the programme to maintain the housing stock to a more modern standard that has been agreed as part of the HRA self-financing. Appendix A details the investment strategy over the next 5 and 30-years.

One aspect of the Repairs Refresh Programme has seen a significant shift in the allocation of work from the responsive repairs service to the planned maintenance programme to be undertaken via larger more specialized framework agreements. This includes replacement kitchens, replacement front entrance doors, rewiring, replacement mains storage tanks and flat or pitched roof repairs, which would have previously been carried out in-house by the Housing Repairs Service. Financially, this work is now falling on the capital programme rather than on the Housing Repairs Fund.

6.2.2 Housing Assets Restructure

The Council needs to have adequate staffing resources in place to deliver a full maintenance programme to a modern standard, which was agreed by the Cabinet as its strategic approach to its HRA Financial Plan. The Cabinet will be considering a report on the restructure of the Housing Assets Section, which recommends four additional fte staff as well as an additional part-time Development Officer to oversee the new council house-building programme.

6.2.3 Cyclical Maintenance

In order to prolong the useful life of components, it is necessary to carry out regular inspections, instigate repairs and undertake preventative maintenance on sub-components e.g. replacement boiler parts.

It is likely that further inspections will be required to building components not currently covered by cyclical maintenance. This is most likely to affect the inspection of all electrical systems in Council properties on an annual basis. However, until this happens the Council will continue to inspect the electrical systems as part of the void inspections and the stock condition survey.

Included in the Housing Repairs Fund around £2.35 million is spent per year on cyclical maintenance, which includes: the repair and redecoration of every property and garage every 5 years; the maintenance, service and repair of all Council owned gas appliances and the inspection and service of all Council owned hydro-mechanical lifts on an annual basis.

6.2.4 Responsive Repairs

The current ratio of maintenance to repair expenditure is 69:31 (taking account of HRF and Capital expenditure), which is broadly in line with the recommended balance of 70:30 (based on HRF expenditure only).

This is maintained by monitoring the expenditure for day-to-day repairs by types of work and then developing maintenance programmes which would obtain better value for money. This process is currently being carried out at quarterly intervals as part of the Continuous Improvement agenda.

The Housing Repairs Fund makes allowance for around £5 million per year for the next five years, taking into account a 5% increase per annum in Building Cost Indices and a reduction of 0.8% for the rate of decline in stock numbers as a result of the Right to Buy scheme. The Capital programme includes around £2.98 million over the next 5 years for small capital repairs.

6.2.5 Voids Refurbishment

This area of expenditure is also mainly funded from revenue and as such the comments regarding the split between capital and revenue apply. It is expected that the authority will spend approximately £6.19 million, made up of a combination of revenue and capital over the next five years on void refurbishment.

6.2.6 Kitchens & Bathrooms

Since the advent of the Decent Homes Standard, the Council has offered its tenants a choice on the type of units and offered a choice of layout to suit individuals' tastes and needs. The Council has invested substantially in this area in the past and continues to do so. Over the next 5-years, the Council intends to spend around £18.19 million on kitchen and bathroom replacements.

6.2.7 Miscellaneous External Works

Under this heading, the Council provides an environmental improvement scheme for improving parking provision on its estates by carrying out a jointly funded initiative between the HRA and the General Fund to provide off street parking.

The table in Appendix A makes allowances for £3.189 million over the next 5 years. This has been allocated towards improvements to estate footpaths, off street parking (excluding general fund contributions) and new and enhanced external lighting.

6.2.8 Disabled Adaptations

The Council endeavours to carry out adaptations to properties to meet the reasonable needs of disabled tenants. This is based on assessments and recommendations from Social Services Occupational Therapists.

The Council's previous commitment was to spend at least £400,000 per annum over the next 5-years on major disabled adaptations, a further £25,000 per annum on minor adaptations and £50,000 per annum on welfare heating. It is anticipated that a further £75,000 will be needed in 2012/13 to offset a number of adaptations where extensions will be required. The 5-year anticipated expenditure for disabled adaptations is £2.375 million.

6.2.9 Heating and Re-wire

An area of significant investment over previous years has been in heating and rewiring. This could be in the form of either a partial heating upgrade, boiler replacement or a complete new heating system. In terms of electrics, expenditure has been focused on electrical testing and minor upgrade works or a complete rewire. This now needs to be enhanced further with the introduction of testing and upgrade work to the communal installations and “industrial” installations, including the rising laterals and incoming mains. Over the next 5-years, around £11.322 million is to be invested in heating and electrics, which excludes the annual gas heating service and maintenance contract, which is funded from revenue.

6.2.10 Other Maintenance and Repairs

Other types of maintenance and repairs include: One-off capital schemes such as conversions of former scheme managers accommodation, decoration allowances for new tenants when they move into a home; internal decorations for elderly and disabled tenants; internal decorations to the common areas within the Council’s sheltered housing schemes; and compensation payments to tenants who undertake improvements to their homes themselves and subsequently move out leaving behind the improvements they have carried out.

6.2.11 Door and Window Replacement

The Council has installed Upvc windows in the majority of its properties. However, whilst regarded as maintenance free, they do still have a life expectancy. As a consequence, the Council is now starting to renew some of the first Upvc windows installed over 20 years ago, as these were installed with only single glazing and not double glazing. When installing front entrance doors, the Council is specifying modern composite doors, which are not only energy efficient but meet “Secure By Design” standards. Over the next 5-years the Council plans to spend around £4.797 million. replacing windows and doors

6.2.12 Council House-Building Programme

As explained earlier, the Council has identified around £16 million over a 5-year period to develop around 20 affordable homes per year commencing in 2013/14. Any funding shortages identified will be subject to cross subsidy from either S106 contributions from other ‘Windfall’ sites, via grant applications from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) or from the sale of individual units or sites. Detailed financial appraisals will be undertaken before any site is developed to agree the funding arrangements.

7. Decent Homes

7.1 Background

In July 2000, the Government established a target to:

“ensure that all social housing meets standards of decency by 2010, by reducing the number of households living in social housing that does not meet these standards by a third between 2001 and 2004 with most of the improvement taking place in the most deprived local authority areas.” Under the Government’s Decent homes initiative a decent home meets the following criteria:

- a) Any residential premises should have a safe and healthy environment for any potential occupier or visitor** (Formally the statutory minimum standard for housing)
- b) It is in a reasonable state of repair**

Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those where either:

- One or more key building components are old and because of their condition need replacing or major repairs: or
- Two or more of the other building components are old and because of their condition need replacing or major repair.

- c) It has reasonable modern facilities and services**

Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those which lack three or more of the following:

- A reasonably modern kitchen (less than 20 years old)
- A kitchen with adequate space and layout
- A reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less)
- An appropriately located bathroom and WC
- Adequate insulation against external noise (where external noise is a problem)
- Adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats.

- d) It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort**

This criterion requires dwellings to have both effective insulation and efficient heating. To deliver against the targets the Council needs to:

- quantify the level of non-decent housing both now and arising by 2010, in its stock;
- develop an investment strategy to tackle this; and
- measure progress towards its elimination.

7.2 Achieving the Standard

The Council was able to meet these targets, announcing in 2010 that all of its properties had met the Decent Homes Standard, some 8 months ahead of the Government’s target deadline and without any additional grant from the Government. The next challenge was to maintain the stock in good condition so that no homes became non-decent. However, in 2012, the Council has agreed to exceed the Decent Homes Standard and to look at the components of each home and base the future planned maintenance programme on a more modern standard whereby components will be assessed against average life cycles rather than extended life cycles.

7.3 Component Life Cycles

In the past, the Council has assessed each property against a life cycle of 32 years for a kitchen and 40 years for a bathroom. The new 5 and 30-year capital programmes have been based on a 16 year and 24 year life cycle respectively. The table below illustrates the life cycles for other individual components based on the previous extended life-cycles compared to the new average life-cycles.

Component	Extended Elemental Life-Cycle	Average Elemental Life-Cycle
Boiler replacement	24	16
Electric Heating	24	16
Rewire	40	32
Front Entrance Door replacement	32	24
PVCu double-glazing replacement	32	24
Tiles pitched roof	48	40
Flat roof	20	20
Water tank renewal	40	28
Door Entry Systems	40	16
Kitchen replacement	32	16
Bathroom replacement	40	24

7.4 Investment Strategy

The stock condition database can be interrogated in such a way that lists of all the properties that fail or potentially fail the criteria can be produced. Using this information a programme of work has been developed without having to undertake additional survey work. The database has been updated with the average life-cycles in the table above, and the 5 & 30 year forecasts updated accordingly. These can be found at appendix A & B of this Business Plan, where it can be seen that the Council has around £48 million included in the first 5-years for planned improvements to Council properties.

The key strategy in previous years since the introduction of the Decent Homes Standard has been around developing a program of work where properties are failing and then only undertake work which will ensure that they are not caught by the criteria. However, under the new HRA Self-financing arrangements, the Council is able to go beyond this and undertake more works in each property to achieve a more modern standard, using average life-cycles as opposed to extended life-cycles. However, it would not be a good use of resources if components were changed purely because they have reached a specified age. Therefore, the Council intends to only undertake improvements if the components are at the end of their useful life and by replacing, it provides good value for money. In time, this strategy will see a reduction in revenue expenditure as fewer

repairs will be necessary.

7.5 Measuring progress

The on-going stock condition surveys are updated on the Council stock attribute database. This data is also amended to include work already undertaken to the Council's stock as and when contracts are completed. This informs the Council on the funding needed to maintain the housing stock at the Decent Homes Standard, and is the basis of the 5 and 30-year profiles at appendix A.

8. Resources & Expenditure Proposals

8.1 Financial

The Council has sought expert advice over the future financing of the Housing Revenue Account as a result of the new HRA Self-Financing regime. CIHConsult have reported to the Council's Cabinet, who have agreed the amount of finance available to fund repairs and maintenance over the 30-years based on forecasts by CIHConsult.

The following table indicates an assessment of the use of capital resources, which are forecast to become available over the next five years. The Capital programme is updated annually in June.

FUNDING SOURCE	2011/12 £000's	2012/13 £000's	2013/14 £000's	2014/15 £000's	2015/16 £000's
Housing Ass Growth Area Funding	70	0	90	0	0
HRA - RCCO	2,050	5,200	5,900	6,600	7,300
HRA - MRR	4,906	7,606	9,027	8,209	7,224
Total	7,026	12,806	15,017	14,809	14,524

8.1.1 Overall Investment Strategy – 5 Year

Based on the income projections shown in the above table, a detailed programme of expenditure has been prepared which can be found at Appendix A demonstrating how the Council currently intends to spend the resources available for repairs and maintenance. This is based on two main priorities:

- a) Maintaining the condition of the Council's housing stock to a higher standard than the Decent Homes Standard, and continuing to prevent homes from becoming non-decent; and
- b) The need to invest in the stock to improve its condition as determined by the on-going stock condition survey. Appendix A adds together all anticipated capital expenditure for a 5-year period up to and including 2015/16.

SUMMARY OF THE HOUSING CAPITAL FIVE YEAR PROGRAMME – AS AGREED

Detail	FORECAST SPENDING				
	2011/12 £000's	2012/13 £000's	2013/14 £000's	2014/15 £000's	2015/16 £000's
Heating & Rewire	1,567	2,741	2,448	2,503	2,336
Doors & Windows	194	1,048	1,238	1,282	1,134
Roofing	471	1,661	1,338	1,293	1,106
Asbestos Removal	71	115	115	100	100
Other Planned Maintenance	387	412	405	432	396
Structural Works	471	600	600	600	300
Voids & Small Capital Repairs	896	438	438	438	438
Kitchens & Bathrooms	1,837	3,750	4,544	4,178	4,188
Environmental Works	470	1,397	613	640	564
Disabled Adaptations	423	450	450	450	450
Others, including contingencies	239	250	2,879	2,944	3,562
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	7,026	12,862	15,068	14,860	14,574
TOTAL FUNDING, including M.R.R and Capital Receipts (excluding carry forwards)	7,026	12,862	15,068	14,860	14,574

The above table reflects a programme of planned maintenance works that is affordable based on an agreed Capital Programme. Funding for the new Council house-building is included in the above table under 'Other'.

Revenue expenditure covering repairs, voids, cyclical maintenance and disabled adaptations is estimated at £5.2 million per annum. HRA contributions to the HRF will be able to support this expenditure.

8.1.2 Overall Investment Strategy – 30 years

The Council's financial advisors CIHConsult have used the data held by the Council in its stock condition survey database to calculate the amount of funding that will be available through HRA self-financing over the next 30-years; this was reported to the Council's Cabinet in December 2011. This has seen around a 50% increase on what the Council previously had available through the previous Housing Subsidy scheme, which has enabled the Council to plan a programme of works that will mean replacing the major components of Council owned properties based on average life cycles rather than extended life-cycles. In order to plan for and deliver such an enhanced capital programme, it will be necessary to recruit additional resources within the Housing Assets Section. Therefore, the capital programme only sees a modest increase in capital in the first year.

Appendix A provides an analysis of capital, or investment expenditure, over a 5 and 30-year period.

8.1.3 Maximising Value

Whilst the Council will see a 50% increase in capital available to invest in its housing stock over the next 30-years, it is essential that the Council adopts a value for money approach so that

resources can be used to maximum efficiency. To this end a strategy has been adopted which seeks to consider the replacement of building components at the end of their expected life-cycle. The Council will not consider a replacement unless it can be judged to be necessary. This approach replaces the 'just in time' strategy previously adopted. This will result in a small reduction in the amount of revenue the Council will need to spend on responsive repairs.

Another issue is the use of option appraisals for all redevelopment and refurbishment schemes. This approach has already been used for the redevelopment of a sheltered scheme, major refurbishment at Springfields, Waltham Abbey and has been applied to assess the best option for the future of the Council's homeless hostel. This approach is clearly not appropriate for every maintenance project but where significant expenditure is required for a contained number of properties it can be a useful guide to the most cost effective route.

8.1.4 Efficiency Savings

Following Sir Peter Gershon's review of public sector efficiency, which identified the need to achieve value for money savings through better procurement in order to release resources to support the key policy objectives of the Government, an annual efficiency statement is completed by the Council as a whole. As a result all areas of the service are being examined to identify ways in which the way in which repairs and maintenance can become more efficient.

Significant savings have been identified as a result of the use of framework agreements or partnering contracts, undertaking work in-house through training that was previously undertaken by specialist contractors, generating income by using a sole utility provider as part of the void process, negotiating with contractors over price increases below DTI indices wherever possible and investing in alternative technology to reduce long-term costs.

The 3-year actual and assumed savings for 2009/10 to 2011/12 for the Housing Directorate is £2,984,241, of which £2,301,708 is generated from Repairs and Maintenance.

8.2 Partnering – The Egan Approach

Full project partnering has been applied to embrace contractors and suppliers for a range of planned improvement contracts including the kitchen and bathroom programme, new heating installations, rewiring external repair and redecoration work and Gas Servicing. Framework agreements are also widely used for specialist areas of work where the frequency cannot be predicted with any accuracy. This has resulted in significant efficiency savings, which are included in the Council's annual efficiency statement.

8.3 SME & Use of Local Contractors

The Council's Contract Standing Order states that local contractors should be included on all tender lists wherever possible. This has been the practice for a number of years, with many local contractors and small or medium enterprises (SME's) successfully winning contracts to undertake planned maintenance works. Around 70% of all contractors currently in contract with the Council fall into one or more of these categories, which helps to add financial stimulus in the district.

8.4 Value for Money

8.4.1 Essex Hub – Essex wide procurement

In October 2006, the Council joined the "Essex Procurement Hub", which brings new opportunities to deliver greater value for money for the procurement of goods and services. The Hub works in two ways, one by combining the buying power of many Local Authorities across Essex to get lower

costs through the economies of scale, and another by utilizing the expert knowledge and skills of the procurement team who prepare contracts, mainly as framework agreements and tender the works on behalf of the Council. This is a corporate initiative, which is now integrated into the Council's Contract Standing Orders. Housing Services consults the Procurement Hub whenever future contracts are to be let.

8.4.2 Use of new and innovative Contract types

The Council is required to obtain value for money, and one area of achieving this is to search out alternative new and innovative forms of contract when undertaking works. This has always been the practice when considering future planned maintenance contracts, which can be demonstrated through the use of partnering contracts and framework agreements. However, for larger contracts, the Council has explored the use of Management Contracts, whereby the Council acts as the Main Contractor and employs and co-ordinates sub-contractors directly.

The first example of this was when there was a major fire at Limes Farm, whereby Consultants acted on the Council's behalf, and was recognised by the Council's Insurance Company as a exemplar method of contracting in order to obtain value for money. This has since been adopted as the method of procuring and administrating schemes such as flat to house conversions and the recent Careline Conversion.

The latest innovative approach to contracting is the "In-sourcing" model currently being explored for the appointment of the Repairs Management Contractor, which was discussed earlier in the Business Plan.

8.4.3 Benchmarking

The last benchmarking exercise that took place was in January 2007, which compared at the schedule of rates used by the Housing Repairs Service against a range of 20 comparison organizations within the Home Counties and to look at organization overheads in comparison to private repairs contractors.

It was clear that of the 20 Local Authorities that were compared, only 2 undertake the majority of their responsive repairs through a Housing Repairs Service, whereas 5 operate their own DLO's alongside external contractors. There were 8 Local Authorities that outsourced their whole contracting element of the repairs service

Based on the Schedule of Rates comparison, it was suggested that on average, the Housing Repairs Service were securing keen material prices. However, on average the Schedule of rates were 1.64% higher than average. It was suggested that this was due to the relatively small scale of the Housing Repairs Service in comparison to the other organisations included in the study.

When comparing wage rates, it was suggested that in general, the salary rates were in line with national averages with the exception of carpenters, which are slightly higher than average.

There were some areas of concern expressed as part of the benchmarking exercise. The existing salary system should be more performance based, taking account of output or targets, quality, completion of jobs on time, fix first time and tenant satisfaction. However, this works against the principles of the recent Job Evaluation exercise implemented in 2005/6.

Further benchmarking exercise of the whole of the Housing Service was undertaken using "Housemark", which is a national housing benchmarking organisation in 2006, and again in November 2008. These benchmarking exercises enabled us to compare our service based on detailed performance and cost data. In the main, the comparison organisations were housing

associations rather than Local Authorities. However the results give a good indication of the level of performance and cost by comparison to others. A further benchmark exercise is due to take place once the Council has fully implemented the Mears MCM IT system. This will enable a more commercial look at the costs compared to the profit and loss accounts used in the commercial sector.

9. Risk Management

9.1 Introduction

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

9.2 Corporate Risk Register

A Corporate Risk Management & Assurance Group has been established, made up of Officers from each Council Service, to produce and regularly review a Corporate Risk Register, and to collate service based risk assessments. The Asst. Director (Private Sector & Resources) is the representative of the Housing Directorate.

9.3 Housing Risk Register

In early 2005, the former Housing Services produced its own Housing Risk Register, which identified the strategic and operations risks affecting Housing Services. Strategic risks are those that have an effect on the Council as a whole, where individuals, sections or even Housing Services has a whole have no total control over the outcome of risk management. Operational risks are those that affect individuals or sections of Housing Services, or the Housing Service as a whole, and will have little or no impact on the Council. The Risk Register is updated 6-monthly, and an action plan created and monitored for those risks that are above the “critical line”. All risks associated with the Housing Repairs Service and Housing Assets are included within the Housing Risk Register.

The Housing Risk Register has been developed by applying a risk analysis, whereby each of the identified risks are assessed in terms of likelihood and impact. “Likelihood” ranges from “very high” to “almost impossible” and “Impact” ranges from “catastrophic” to “negligible”. Risk management is applied to each of the identified risks, through exploring the best options to reduce either likelihood or impact or both. Not all risks can be reduced, but they can be managed. The action plan for “critical” risks relating to Repairs and Maintenance are included in Section 9 of this Business Plan.

9.4 Key Housing Operational Risks – Repairs and Maintenance

The following have been identified as the Key Housing Repairs and Maintenance Operational Risks within the Housing Risk Register:

- The HRA falling into deficit
- Some services are delivered through decentralised offices
- Major failure of the integrated housing IT system
- Major failure of the Council’s telephony service
- Loss or insolvency of, or poor performance by, a major contractor/supplier
- Major incident, involving death or serious injury, due to poor health and safety procedures, or breach of health and safety legislation
- Significant overspend on a major housing maintenance contract
- Fraud, corruption and theft
- Loss of important paper records
- Failure to comply with Government or legislative requirements

- Welfare of staff, including physical or verbal attacks.
- Uninsured losses, especially through subsidence, heave or landslip
- Catastrophic budget overspends
- Severe adverse weather conditions

10. Strategies

This section of the document lists the main strategies, which flow from firstly, the objectives, strategies and policies previously agreed by the authority and secondly, the issues discussed in this plan. Where these have clear links with corporate objectives or Best Value/Business Plan Guidance this is identified. There may not be current funding available to achieve all targets, but the effect of these strategies will be to focus available resources.

	Strategy	Link with Corporate Objective/Guidance
A	Maintenance and Repair Programmes	
1	<p>To develop ongoing programmes of maintenance and repairs expenditure for a period, of five and 30 years based on:</p> <p>Projections of the amount of funding likely to be available for repairs and maintenance;</p> <p>The findings of the stock condition survey;</p> <p>The number of homes that could potentially become non-decent and reasons for them becoming non decent;</p> <p>Patterns of demand for responsive repairs;</p> <p>Likely number of voids linked to the number of affordable units developed in the district;</p> <p>Key targets (see below);</p>	<p>ODPM Guidance on Business Plans</p> <p>EFDC Council Plan</p> <p>EFDC Performance Plan</p> <p>EFDC HECA Strategy</p> <p>EFDC Fuel Poverty Strategy</p> <p>Decent Homes Guidance</p> <p>Housing Services Risk Strategy</p> <p>Equalities Impact Assessments</p> <p>Housing Strategy</p> <p>HRA Self Financing (Capital Strategy)</p>
2.	<p>To achieve the following key targets:</p> <p>To replace all boilers with concealed vertical flues (for H&S reasons)</p> <p>Average SAP rating of 70 by end of 2012/13</p> <p>Continue to explore alternative fuel sources for properties in the rural communities where properties are harder to insulate and affordably heat, including the use of new air source heat pumps.</p>	<p>EFDC Council Plan</p> <p>EFDC Performance Plan</p> <p>Housing Services Strategy on Energy Efficiency</p> <p>HECA Strategy</p> <p>EFDC Fuel Poverty Strategy</p>
3.	<p>To ensure maximum value for money from maintenance expenditure by:</p> <p>Renewing major components based on average life cycles. However, only renewing the components when needed.</p> <p>Using criteria for the replacement of sub components to extend the lifetime of heating</p>	<p>ODPM Guidance on Business Plans</p> <p>Value for Money Strategy</p>

	<p>systems, door entry systems, window units and other building components.</p> <p>Employing option appraisals where significant maintenance expenditure is required on a limited number of properties.</p>	
B.	Responsive Repairs and Voids Work	
1.	To continue to reduce expenditure on voids in line with the recommendations of the Voids and Lettings Study by ensuring as much work takes place as possible through planned maintenance contracts.	Voids and Lettings Study
2.	To aim to spend the HRF allocation from the HRA each year whilst acknowledging the fluctuating nature of repairs and maintenance programmes.	EFDC Housing Strategy Housing Services Risk Strategy
3.	<p>To improve the all-round performance of the Repairs Service for our tenants and leaseholders.</p> <p>To reduce the number of craft workers, but retaining a core to undertake a proportion of the day to day ad hoc repairs to the Council's Housing Stock, and/or those to void properties</p> <p>The balance of the work not undertaken directly by the Council being externalised via new or existing framework agreements.</p>	Repairs Refresh Programme Continuous Improvement Plan
C.	Resources	
1.	<p>To maximise funding on maintenance expenditure by:</p> <p>Making use of available capital receipts where possible.</p> <p>Transferring approximately £5 million from the HRA into the HRF each year for a further 4-years.</p>	Housing Services Risk Strategy Capital Strategy
2.	To review the level of staffing resources annually against the planned level of expenditure.	Repairs Refresh Programme Value for Money Strategy
3.	Monitor repairs and voids expenditure every six months to identify patterns in expenditure, which could be incorporated into a planned maintenance programme through the use of new or existing framework agreements.	
D.	Tenant Consultation and Participation	
1.	To discuss expenditure plans and programmes of work with the Tenants and	EFDC Tenant Participation Agreement

	Leaseholders Federation at least annually.	
2.	To involve representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in discussions on new policies relating to the Repairs and Maintenance Services.	EFDC Tenant Participation Agreement Housing Services Risk Strategy
3.	To consult tenants affected by major improvement schemes over the proposals.	
4.	To consult leaseholders on all planned improvements in line with Leasehold legislation	
5.	To undertake a "Customer Perspective" review of the Repairs Service	Customer Perspective Programme
6.	To consult the Repairs and Maintenance Focus Group on the future of the R&M service.	Continuous Improvement Plan
7.	To invite a Tenant's representative to jointly inspect voids to ensure the standard for re-letting is to an acceptable standard.	
E.	Contract Strategy	
1.	To explore new and innovative forms of contract to ensure value for money and minimise risks to the Council. To continue to use either framework agreements or Partnering contracts for new areas of work as our default form of contract.	Value for Money Strategy Housing Services Risk Strategy
2.	To utilize the Essex Hub wherever possible to enter into framework agreements with (sub) contractors or suppliers.	Value for Money Strategy Contract Standing Orders Procurement Strategy
3.	To undertake, where appropriate, capital works using Contract Management methods in conjunction with our existing framework agreement sub-contractors so as to save paying overheads and profits to construction companies.	Value for Money Strategy Contract Standing Orders
4.	To invite local contractors an SME's to tender for all planned maintenance contracts wherever possible	Contract Standing Orders Procurement Strategy

11. Action plan

11.1 List of main actions flowing from the plan

This table lists the main areas of action required within the Housing Repairs Service and the Housing Assets Sections to achieve the strategies detailed in the previous sections.

Action	Officer responsible	Target date	Progress
1. Implement programme for repairs and maintenance expenditure over 5 and 30 years.	HAM ADoH(P)	Ongoing	Included in this plan
2. To publish clear service standards for planned maintenance, Decent Homes, repairs, Right to Repairs and Leaseholder responsibilities, which are available in printed leaflet form and on the web site (Also relates to NI14 – Avoidable Contact Action Plan).	HAM	July 2011	To follow the outcome of the Customer Perspective programme.
3. To install mains operated smoke detectors in all Council owned properties over the next 5-years	HAM	2012-2017	Subject to agreement as part of the Service Enhancements.
4. Timetable at least one meeting each year with the Tenants Federation to discuss the repairs and maintenance expenditure programme.	ADoH(P) HAM	Ongoing	Tenants Federation meet in March each year to consider the repairs and maintenance expenditure.
5. Introduce Asbestos record cards in all properties, and maintain the records for contactors and tenants use.	CRM	Apr 2012	Item previously deferred due to the restructure. To be undertaken in conjunction with the Repairs Refresh Programme.
6. Closer partnership working with ECC Social Care Occupational Therapists to better forward plan the budget required to meet the ongoing and future demand for disabled adaptations.	HAM	April 2013	
7. Explore options whereby emphasis is put on "fix first time" for responsive repairs.	CRM	Dec 2012	(a) To be undertaken in conjunction with the Repairs Refresh Programme.
Seek, through the Essex Hub, a framework agreement with specialist contractors for, Gas Servicing and Maintenance (South), electrical testing and rewiring, Digital TV maintenance, bathroom adaptations, Energy Efficiency as well as ad-hoc repairs where necessary	HAM	Various throughout 2012/13	(b) Identified through Repairs Refresh Programme, and planned maintenance programmes.

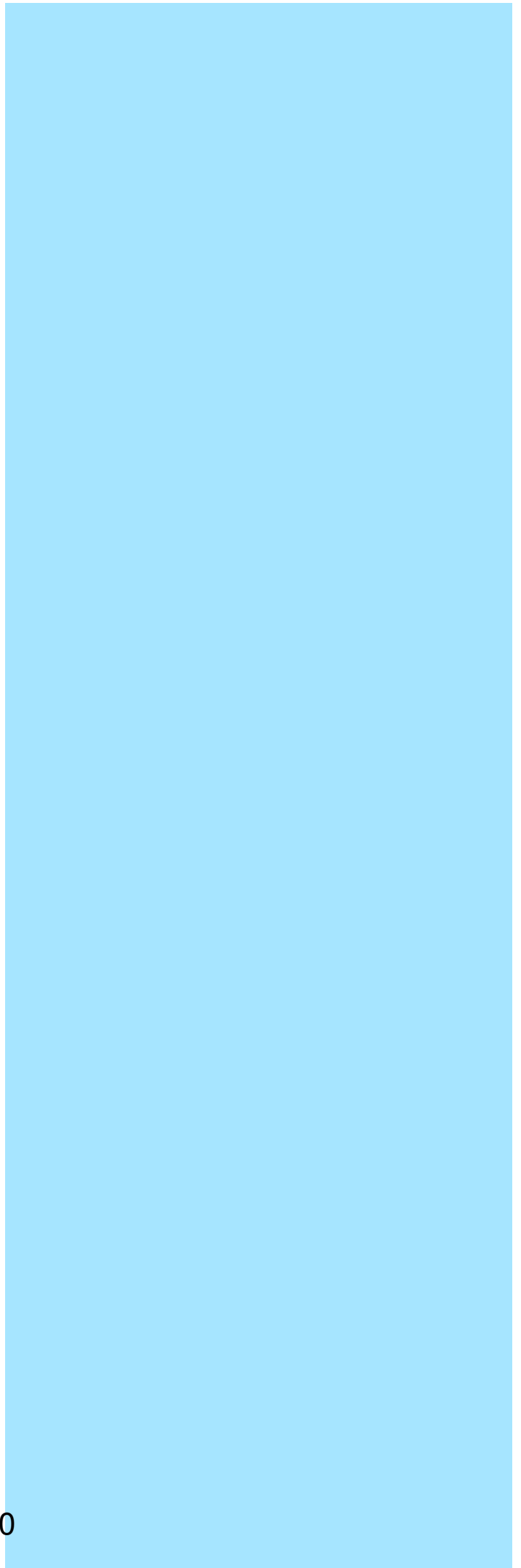
		ADoH (Prop)	Quarterly	On-going
8.	To continue with the Repairs Focus Group once set up, and create an action plan for inclusion in the Repairs Refresh Programme		Quarterly	On-going
9.	Continue feasibility studies into alternative fuel sources for properties in rural communities where mains gas is not available. To commence the installation of external wall insulation for solid wall constructed properties, and to seek grant funding to support future programmes	HAM HAM	On-going April 2012	Installing air source heat pumps. Report on the benefits to be incorporated in the Energy Efficiency Strategy. Awaiting Green Deal funding notification
10.	To review all projects with a contract value in excess of £1m on completion to identify any lessons learnt.	HAM HRM	On-going	On-going
11.	Seek to reduce the target response times for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • routine repairs from 6-weeks to 2-weeks • Urgent repairs from 5-days to 3-days • Emergency repairs from 24 hrs to 4 hours • Void turnaround times from 6-weeks to 2-weeks 	RMC	April 2012	Identified through Repairs Refresh Programme, and incorporated in the RMC Contract
12.	To undertake small jobs on behalf of older people free of charge, which are currently specified a the tenants' responsibility. This will be via directly employed tradesmen for residents at Sheltered Accommodation and through a direct grant to the Voluntary Action Epping Forest for those qualifying tenants' in other general needs housing.	HRM	2012/13	Subject to agreement as part of the Service Enhancements.
13.	To implement "key deliverables" as defined in the Repairs Refresh Programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop better supply chain arrangements with suppliers to ensure value for money. 	RMC	2011-2014	As part of the Repairs Refresh Programme.
14.	To develop a separate Repairs and Maintenance Service Strategy	ADoH (P)	July 2012	
15.	To seek to include at least one local business on the list of tenderers for all future contracts.	HAM / HRM	On-going	

Appendix A – 5 & 30-Year Capital Programme

Stock Expenditure Profile

Planned Capital Works

Component	5-Year Capital Expenditure (per Year)											Years 25-30
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Years 1-5	Years 6-10	Years 11-15	Years 16-20	Years 21-25	Years 26-30	
Heating & Fire	Gas Heating	649,000	1,480,168	1,523,630	1,524,500	1,464,916	6,642,214	7,215,960	7,500,906	5,905,856	7,667,796	7,111,775
	Electric Heating	279,000	101,500	154,000	133,000	192,758	860,258	574,000	92,879	16,017	28,000	819,258
	MVHR Installations	8,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	168,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
	Re-Wiring	621,000	942,987	608,750	641,250	505,750	3,319,737	2,473,554	3,376,597	2,820,000	2,499,864	3,514,037
	Water Tank	10,000	176,600	121,400	164,200	132,200	604,400	620,340	496,800	617,438	376,332	357,283
Doors & Windows	Front Doors	194,000	154,515	150,300	144,445	152,100	795,360	744,690	698,572	497,900	418,524	679,210
	Windows (Double-Glazed)	0	893,796	1,088,000	1,138,000	981,890	4,101,687	4,796,013	4,818,456	2,995,248	859,234	5,152,687
Roofing	Tiled Roof Covering	466,000	1,465,900	1,162,500	1,141,759	1,011,000	5,247,159	6,789,138	4,392,500	3,995,016	288,220	20,000
	Flat Roof Covering	0	170,000	150,000	126,000	70,000	516,000	363,231	565,826	743,060	347,668	458,563
	Balcony Resurfacing	5,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	105,000	125,000	125,000	125,000	125,000	125,000
	Asbestos Removal	71,000	115,000	115,000	100,000	100,000	501,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000
Other Planned Works	Nonway House Improvements	36,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	236,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000
	Communal TV Upgrade	180,000	0	0	0	0	180,000	75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000
	Door Entry	11,000	162,000	154,725	181,613	145,838	655,175	601,275	368,183	512,888	660,113	430,545
	Energy Efficiency Works	160,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	960,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
	Structural Works	471,000	600,000	600,000	600,000	300,000	2,571,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000
Kitchens & Bedrooms	Void General Capital Works	896,000	438,000	438,000	438,000	438,000	2,648,000	2,190,000	2,190,000	2,190,000	2,190,000	2,190,000
	Kitchen	1,837,000	2,394,900	2,626,338	2,180,497	2,415,000	11,453,735	11,613,624	9,136,744	10,474,720	11,851,519	8,916,670
Environmental Improvements	Bathroom	0	1,355,012	1,917,300	1,997,338	1,772,769	7,042,419	8,460,270	5,448,282	3,965,439	1,455,037	8,876,538
	Fencing	5,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	65,000	75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000
	Environmental Improvements	128,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	328,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000
	Garage Roofs and Doors	0	42,000	242,050	268,800	193,350	746,200	140,350	748,100	607,300	291,700	746,950
	Off Street Parking	174,000	1,023,000	41,000	41,000	41,000	1,320,000	205,000	205,000	205,000	205,000	205,000
	Estate Enhancements	128,000	102,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	530,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000
	Struct. Watercourse Improvements	0	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	40,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
	CCTV	25,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	225,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000
	External Lighting Schemes	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
	Drainage Works	5,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	405,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000
Disabled	Disabled Adaptations (Heating)	42,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	242,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000
	Disabled Adaptations	381,000	400,000	400,000	400,000	400,000	1,981,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000
	Feasibilities	16,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	76,000	75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000
	Contingency Sum / Other	223,000	235,000	2,864,000	2,929,000	3,547,000	9,798,000	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000
Total Capital Expenditure	7,026,000	12,862,378	15,066,993	14,859,402	14,573,570	64,388,344	57,412,445	50,663,843	46,170,881	39,764,006	50,103,515	



Affordable housing	Subsidised housing for rent or shared ownership, for people who cannot afford to purchase a property on the open market.
Arms length management organisations	Companies (or other legal bodies) set up and owned by the Council - but operating separately from it and governed by its own board or committee - to manage services on behalf of the Council.
Asset Management Plan	A plan the Council produces every year, explaining how it manages its non residential land and buildings.
Benchmarking	The process of comparing an organisation's costs and performance with other similar organisations.
Best Value	The process of ensuring the continuous improvement of public services, through service reviews, <i>benchmarking</i> , consultation and inspection.
Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups	Groups of people within local communities whose race is either black, or another race, that is in the minority within the UK.
Cabinet	An important Council committee, comprising ten senior councillors, each responsible for a <i>portfolio</i> , that makes corporate Council decisions.
Capital expenditure	Money spent to buy or improve assets (e.g. land or buildings)
Capital receipt	Money received for the sale of a capital asset (eg land or buildings)
Catch-up repairs	Repairs that should have been undertaken earlier, and now need to be undertaken within the next 5 years.
Choice-based lettings	A scheme whereby people in need of <i>affordable housing</i> can ask to be considered for specific vacant Council or <i>RSL</i> accommodation. This is instead of such accommodation being allocated to applicants on waiting lists on the basis of housing need, with only a very limited choice being given.
CIPFA	The Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants. The body that sets the guidelines for Council financial accounts.
Comprehensive Spending Review	A review by the Government on how much money should be spent on all the different types of public services (e.g. housing) over a set period (usually three years).
Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership	Representatives of local statutory and voluntary organisations with an interest in, or responsibility for, reducing crime within the District, including the Council, Essex Police, Probation Service, Epping Forest CVS, Social Services.
Direct Service Organisation (DSO)	A Council department that provides the same service as a private contractor, and operates in the same way as a private contractor.
East of England Region	The region of England in which the Epping Forest District is situated, covering the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.
Floating support	Practical support provided to those in need by a support worker for a temporary period, until such time as the support is no longer required, when the support is discontinued and provided to others who have a need.
Fuel poverty	When a household needs to spend more than 10% of their household income to achieve a satisfactory standard of heating.

General Fund	The Council's financial account that deals with income and expenditure relating to all the Council's services, part of which is the ring fenced <i>HRA</i> .
Halifax House Price Index	A source of information, operated by the HBOS Bank, that provides details of average house prices and house price trends in local areas, based on information providing by mortgage applicants.
Housing association	See <i>Registered Social Landlord</i> .
Homes and Communities Agency	The Government agency that funds <i>registered social landlords (RSLs)</i> .
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	The Council's financial account, within the <i>General Fund</i> that deals with income and expenditure relating to the management and maintenance of the Council's housing stock.
Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan	An annual plan produced by the Council that analyses issues relating to the Council's own housing stock and sets out the objectives, targets, plans, income and expenditure for the management and maintenance of its housing stock over the next 5-30 years.
HRA subsidy	An annual revenue subsidy provided to local authorities by the Government to assist with the management and maintenance of their housing stock.
ISO 9001:2008	An internationally recognised system of ensuring the provision of quality services, that is checked by external assessors.
Major repairs allowance (MRA)	An annual Government subsidy given to local authorities to assist with the maintenance of their housing stock, calculated by a formula based on the type and age of the housing stock.
Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG)	The Government department that replaced the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and has responsibility for formulating and implementing the Government's housing policy at a national level and allocates resources for different national housing programmes.
Out of charge properties	Properties for which the Council cannot use for a long time, and for which no rent is being received.
Portfolio Holder	A senior councillor, who is a member of the <i>Cabinet</i> , responsible for specific areas of Council work (eg housing, finance etc). The Council has a number of portfolio holders, with the number reviewed each year.
Private Finance Initiative (PFI)	A way of enabling private companies to provide large amounts of money to construct or purchase public buildings, and then manage them over a long period, in return for a management fee paid by the public organisation responsible for providing the service.
Prudential borrowing	A new system being proposed by the Government, that would not restrict how much councils could borrow to fund capital expenditure. However, councils would only be able borrow money that they know they could pay back over the years of the loan, from their day-to-day income.
Public Works Loan Board (PWLB)	An agency of HM Treasury that lends money to public organisations at preferential rates. The PWLB has provided the loans to the Council to fund the HRA self-financing payment to the Government
Registered Social Landlord (RSL)	A non-profit making organisation (usually a housing association) that is registered with, and regulated by, the <i>Housing Corporation</i> . They are run by a voluntary Board of Management, and employ professional housing officers to manage the organisation.

Revenue contributions to capital outlay (RCCO)	Rental or other income used to pay for capital expenditure.
Right to Buy	A Government scheme that allows Council tenants, who have held tenancies for more than two years, to buy their own home from the Council. Discounts are currently given of up to £34,000, depending on how many years they have held tenancies.
Self-financing (HRA)	A method of operating the HRA, whereby all the expenditure and costs relating to the HRA are completely funded from the Council's rental income, without the need for any Government subsidy.
Sheltered housing	Independent accommodation provided to elderly people, with support from a Scheme Manager and an emergency call facility, usually having a communal lounge facility.
Social exclusion	The situation where individuals, or groups of individuals, within the community do not have the means, material or otherwise to participate in social, economic, political or cultural life.
Social Housing – Existing Use Value	A way of valuing Council or housing association properties, taking into account the fact that the rents charged are much lower than for private properties.
Social Housing Grant (SHG)	Capital funding provided to <i>RSLs</i> by the <i>Housing Corporation</i> to enable them to build or acquire <i>affordable housing</i> .
Social inclusion	The process whereby people do not experience <i>social exclusion</i> .
Social landlords	Generally, <i>RSLs</i> and local authorities.
Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP)	A measure of how energy efficient a property is, between a score of 0 –120 (previously 0 –100). A score of 120 is the most energy efficient.
Stock condition survey	A survey of the inside and the outside of some of a council's properties, that gives an indication of the condition of all the properties
Stock Options Appraisal	A process to determine the most appropriate future ownership and management of the Council's housing stock.
Supported housing	Housing where the tenants need help – e.g. sheltered housing for the elderly or housing for people with physically disabled people.
Supporting People	A Government initiative introduced in April 2003, which brings together sources of funding for supported housing into county-wide “pots” for distribution to supported housing providers within the County, based on locally determined priorities, through agreed contracts. County-wide “commissioning bodies” produce Supporting People Strategies explaining how the funding will be distributed.
Supporting People Commissioning Team	The team of County Council officers responsible for managing and administering <i>Supporting People</i> at the county level.
Target rent	The individual rents for properties that councils and housing associations should aim to charge by 2012, based on a Government formula.
Tenant Services Authority	The Government Agency that regulates council and housing association landlords
Tenants participation compact / agreement (TPA)	Written agreements between <i>social landlords</i> and groups of tenants, at both district and estate level, setting out the agreed approach to tenant participation.

Housing Directorate Senior Staff Structure

[To Follow]

Appendix 4

Tenant-Selected Performance Indicators Performance (2011/12 - Quarter 3) and Targets (2012/13)				
Service	Definition	Target (2011/12)	Actual (2011/12 – Q3)	Target (2012/13)
Careline	% of Careline calls responded to within 1 min (excl. routine calls managers & test calls)	99 %	99.6 %	99 %
Careline	Average (seconds) to respond to alarm calls	10 seconds	6.5 seconds	10 seconds
Rent Arrears	Rent collected as a proportion of rent owed	98.8 %	Unable to calculate until end of year	98.8 %
Estate Management	No. of estate inspections completed	82	39	82
Repairs	% of appointments kept	95 %	93 %	95 %
Repairs	Average time to complete urgent repairs	5 working days	4 working days	5 working days
Repairs	Average time to complete non-urgent repairs	42 days (6 weeks)	15 days	42 days (6 weeks)
Repairs	% Emergency repairs completed within target time of 24 hours	99 %	98 %	99 %
Repairs	% Priority repairs completed within target time of 3 working days	95 %	92 %	95 %
Repairs	% Urgent repairs completed within target time of 5 working days	95 %	86 %	95 %
Repairs	% Routine repairs completed within target time of 6 weeks	95 %	96 %	95 %
Repairs	% Satisfaction (good or satisfactory) with general standard of repairs	98 %	99 %	98 %
Repairs	Expressions of dissatisfaction:			
	(a) Total no.	(a) 0	(a) 0	(a) 0
	(b) % of total repair requests	(b) 0 %	(b) 0 %	(b) 0 %
	(c) Poor satisfaction upheld	(c) 0	(c) 0	(c) 0

Voids	Average overall void period (excluding difficult to let properties)	30 calendar days	32 days	30 calendar days
Adaptations (Minor)	Time taken from decision to completion of work	28 calendar days	23 days	28 calendar days
Adaptations (General)	Time taken from decision to completion of work	90 calendar days	84 days	90 calendar days
Gas Servicing	Tenant satisfaction: (a) % "Excellent" or "Good": (b) % "Poor":	(a) 96 % (b) < 5 %	(a) 99 % (b) 0 %	(a) 96 % (b) < 5 %
Gas Servicing	No. of CP12 (annual safety certificates) lapsed	0	5	0
Kitchen & Bathroom Programme	Overall satisfaction	96 %	90 %	96 %
Decent Homes	No. of homes that are non-decent (of total housing stock)	0	0	0

HRA Cash Flows: 2011/12 – 2040/41

Year	2011.12	2012.13	2013.14	2014.15	2015.16	2016.17	2017.18	2018.19	2019.20	2020.21	2021.22	2022.23	2023.24	2024.25	2025.26	
£'000	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT PROJECTIONS																
Epping Forest District Council																
INCOME:																
Rental Income	27,829	29,455	30,738	32,230	33,831	35,496	37,227	38,521	39,811	40,955	42,132	43,343	44,588	45,869	47,187	
Void Losses	-285	-307	-307	-322	-338	-354	-372	-385	-397	-409	-421	-433	-445	-458	-471	
Service Charges	1,615	1,621	1,661	1,703	1,745	1,789	1,834	1,879	1,926	1,975	2,024	2,074	2,126	2,179	2,234	
Non-Dwelling Income	890	890	913	936	959	983	1,007	1,033	1,058	1,085	1,112	1,140	1,168	1,198	1,227	
Grants & Other Income	309	322	330	338	347	355	364	373	383	392	402	412	422	433	444	
Total Income	30,359	31,981	33,335	34,885	36,544	38,269	40,061	41,422	42,781	43,998	45,250	46,537	47,860	49,222	50,622	
EXPENDITURE:																
General Management	-3,906	-3,877	-3,974	-4,076	-4,180	-4,287	-4,396	-4,508	-4,623	-4,739	-4,857	-4,979	-5,103	-5,231	-5,361	
Special Management	-3,384	-3,470	-3,557	-3,646	-3,737	-3,830	-3,926	-4,024	-4,125	-4,228	-4,334	-4,442	-4,553	-4,667	-4,783	
Other Management	-11,758	-1,208	-1,238	-1,269	-1,301	-1,333	-1,367	-1,401	-1,436	-1,472	-1,509	-1,546	-1,585	-1,625	-1,665	
Rent Rebates	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Bad Debt Provision	-114	-114	-153	-161	-169	-177	-185	-191	-197	-203	-209	-215	-221	-227	-233	
Responsive & Cyclical Repairs	-5,200	-5,200	-5,200	-5,300	-5,300	-5,300	-5,799	-6,558	-6,736	-6,920	-7,108	-7,301	-7,500	-7,687	-7,880	
Total Revenue Expenditure	-24,362	-13,869	-14,123	-14,451	-14,686	-14,927	-15,673	-16,682	-17,117	-17,561	-18,016	-18,483	-18,962	-19,436	-19,923	
Interest Paid	0	-6,287	-7,418	-7,418	-7,418	-7,418	-7,418	-7,418	-7,418	-7,418	-7,418	-7,418	-7,402	-7,320	-7,196	
Finance Administration	-84	-44	-44	-45	-46	-47	-49	-50	-51	-52	-54	-55	-56	-58	-59	
Interest Received	590	553	494	445	417	410	414	421	414	404	404	404	405	406	407	
Depreciation	-4,978	-6,932	-6,943	-6,953	-6,962	-7,791	-7,998	-8,211	-8,407	-8,608	-8,813	-9,024	-9,240	-9,460	-9,686	
Net Operating Income	1,525	5,402	5,301	6,462	7,849	8,495	9,337	9,482	10,202	10,763	11,352	11,961	12,606	13,353	14,164	
APPROPRIATIONS:																
FRS 17/Other HRA Reserve Adj	-424	-448	-459	-471	-482	-495	-507	-520	-533	-546	-559	-573	-588	-603	-618	
Revenue Provision (HRACFR)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-814	-3,268	-2,949	
Revenue Contribution to Capital	-2,050	-5,200	-5,900	-6,600	-7,338	-7,970	-8,341	-8,477	-11,044	-10,267	-10,740	-11,308	-11,169	-9,420	-10,535	
Total Appropriations	-2,474	-5,648	-6,359	-7,071	-7,820	-8,465	-8,848	-8,997	-11,576	-10,813	-11,300	-11,882	-12,571	-13,291	-14,102	
ANNUAL CASHFLOW	-949	-246	-1,058	-609	29	30	490	485	-1,374	-50	52	80	35	62	62	
Opening Balance	5,887	4,938	4,692	3,634	3,025	3,053	3,084	3,573	4,058	2,684	2,634	2,686	2,766	2,801	2,863	
Closing Balance	4,938	4,692	3,634	3,025	3,053	3,084	3,573	4,058	2,684	2,634	2,686	2,766	2,801	2,863	2,925	

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT PROJECTIONS
Epping Forest District
Council

Year	2026.27	2027.28	2028.29	2029.30	2030.31	2031.32	2032.33	2033.34	2034.35	2035.36	2036.37	2037.38	2038.39	2039.40	2040.41
£'000	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
INCOME:															
Total Income	52,062	53,542	55,065	56,632	58,243	59,900	61,603	63,356	65,158	67,012	68,918	70,879	72,895	74,969	77,101
EXPENDITURE:															
General Management	-5,495	-5,633	-5,774	-5,918	-6,066	-6,218	-6,373	-6,532	-6,696	-6,863	-7,035	-7,211	-7,391	-7,576	-7,765
Special Management	-4,903	-5,026	-5,151	-5,280	-5,412	-5,547	-5,686	-5,828	-5,974	-6,123	-6,276	-6,433	-6,594	-6,759	-6,928
Other Management	-1,707	-1,750	-1,793	-1,838	-1,884	-1,931	-1,979	-2,029	-2,080	-2,132	-2,185	-2,240	-2,296	-2,353	-2,412
Rent Rebates	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bad Debt Provision	-240	-246	-253	-261	-268	-275	-283	-291	-300	-308	-317	-326	-335	-344	-354
Responsive & Cyclical Repairs	-8,077	-8,279	-8,486	-8,698	-8,915	-9,138	-9,366	-9,601	-9,841	-10,087	-10,339	-10,597	-10,862	-11,134	-11,412
Total Revenue Expenditure	-20,422	-20,933	-21,457	-21,994	-22,545	-23,110	-23,688	-24,281	-24,889	-25,513	-26,151	-26,806	-27,478	-28,166	-28,871
Interest Paid	-7,045	-6,807	-6,568	-6,361	-6,111	-5,803	-5,413	-4,955	-4,463	-3,926	-3,397	-2,944	-2,485	-1,900	-1,226
Finance Administration	-61	-62	-64	-65	-67	-69	-70	-72	-74	-76	-78	-80	-82	-84	-86
Interest Received	408	409	410	411	412	413	414	415	416	418	419	420	421	423	424
Depreciation	-9,918	-10,155	-10,397	-10,646	-10,900	-11,161	-11,427	-11,700	-11,979	-12,266	-12,558	-12,858	-13,165	-13,480	-13,802
Net Operating Income	15,024	15,995	16,989	17,976	19,032	20,171	21,419	22,763	24,169	25,649	27,153	28,611	30,107	31,762	33,541
APPROPRIATIONS:															
FRS 17 / Other HRA Reserve Adj	-633	-649	-665	-682	-699	-716	-734	-752	-771	-791	-810	-831	-851	-873	-894
Revenue Provision (HRACFR)	-4,580	-7,357	-4,579	-5,752	-6,778	-8,599	-10,926	-11,973	-12,621	-14,211	-12,273	-10,363	-12,574	-16,685	-17,008
Revenue Contribution to Capital	-9,746	-7,922	-11,679	-11,473	-11,484	-10,782	-9,684	-9,961	-10,699	-10,567	-13,988	-17,334	-16,594	-14,115	-15,548
Total Appropriations	-14,959	-15,928	-16,923	-17,906	-18,961	-20,097	-21,344	-22,686	-24,091	-25,569	-27,072	-28,527	-30,020	-31,672	-33,450
ANNUAL CASHFLOW	65	67	66	69	71	73	75	76	78	81	81	83	87	90	91
Opening Balance	2,925	2,990	3,057	3,123	3,192	3,263	3,336	3,412	3,488	3,566	3,647	3,728	3,811	3,898	3,988
Closing Balance	2,990	3,057	3,123	3,192	3,263	3,336	3,412	3,488	3,566	3,647	3,728	3,811	3,898	3,988	4,079

HRA Capital Projections: 2011/12 – 2040/41

HOUSING CAPITAL PROJECTIONS
Epping Forest District Council

Year £'000	2011.12 1	2012.13 2	2013.14 3	2014.15 4	2015.16 5	2016.17 6	2017.18 7	2018.19 8	2019.20 9	2020.21 10	2021.22 11	2022.23 12	2023.24 13	2024.25 14	2025.26 15
EXPENDITURE:															
Planned Variable Expenditure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-7	-15	-22	-31	-39	-54	-61	-68
Planned Fixed Expenditure	-7,026	-12,806	-13,140	-12,867	-12,514	-12,851	-13,335	-13,581	-19,304	-18,717	-19,385	-20,151	-20,210	-18,671	-20,001
Disabled Adaptations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Capital Expenditure	0	-57	-50	-50	-50	-51	-53	-54	-55	-57	-58	-59	-61	-62	-64
New Build Expenditure	0	0	-2,627	-2,692	-2,760	-2,829	-2,899	-2,972	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Procurement Fees	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Previous Year's B/F Shortfall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Capital Expenditure	-7,026	-12,863	-15,817	-15,609	-15,324	-15,731	-16,287	-16,613	-19,374	-18,796	-19,473	-20,250	-20,324	-18,794	-20,133
FUNDING:															
Major Repairs Reserve	4,906	7,613	9,777	8,959	7,935	7,709	7,894	8,082	8,275	8,473	8,675	8,882	9,094	9,312	9,534
Right to Buy Receipts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HRA CFR Borrowing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Receipts/Grants	70	50	140	50	50	51	53	54	55	57	58	59	61	62	64
HRA Reserves	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Revenue Contributions	2,050	5,200	5,900	6,600	7,338	7,970	8,341	8,477	11,044	10,267	10,740	11,308	11,169	9,420	10,535
Total Capital Funding	7,026	12,863	15,817	15,609	15,323	15,731	16,287	16,613	19,374	18,796	19,473	20,250	20,324	18,794	20,133
In-Year Net Cashflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumulative Position	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MRR Account:															
Opening Balance	6,540	6,612	5,931	3,078	1,033	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Net Contribution (Depr)	4,978	6,932	6,924	6,914	6,902	7,709	7,894	8,082	8,275	8,473	8,675	8,882	9,094	9,312	9,534
Use of Reserve to Capital	-4,906	-7,613	-9,777	-8,959	-7,935	-7,709	-7,894	-8,082	-8,275	-8,473	-8,675	-8,882	-9,094	-9,312	-9,534
Contribution to HRACFR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Closing Balance	£6,612	£5,931	£3,078	£1,033	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0

HOUSING CAPITAL PROJECTIONS
Epping Forest District
Council

Year	2026.27	2027.28	2028.29	2029.30	2030.31	2031.32	2032.33	2033.34	2034.35	2035.36	2036.37	2037.38	2038.39	2039.40	2040.41	
£'000	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
EXPENDITURE:																
Planned Variable Expenditure	-75	-83	-94	-100	-106	-111	-118	-131	-141	-152	-163	-175	-187	-192	-196	
Planned Fixed Expenditure	-19,432	-17,834	-21,818	-21,850	-22,106	-21,654	-20,812	-21,344	-22,347	-22,486	-26,183	-29,812	-29,362	-27,188	-28,932	
Disabled Adaptations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Other Capital Expenditure	-66	-67	-69	-71	-72	-74	-76	-78	-80	-82	-84	-86	-88	-90	-93	
New Build Expenditure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Procurement Fees	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Previous Year's B/F Shortfall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total Capital Expenditure	-19,573	-17,984	-21,981	-22,021	-22,284	-21,840	-21,006	-21,553	-22,568	-22,720	-26,430	-30,073	-29,638	-27,470	-29,222	
FUNDING:																
Major Repairs Reserve	9,762	9,995	10,233	10,477	10,728	10,984	11,246	11,514	11,789	12,070	12,358	12,653	12,955	13,264	13,581	
Right to Buy Receipts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
HRA CFR Borrowing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Other Receipts/Grants	66	67	69	71	72	74	76	78	80	82	84	86	88	90	93	
HRA Reserves	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Revenue Contributions	9,746	7,922	11,679	11,473	11,484	10,782	9,684	9,961	10,699	10,567	13,988	17,394	16,594	14,115	15,548	
Total Capital Funding	19,573	17,984	21,981	22,021	22,284	21,840	21,006	21,553	22,568	22,720	26,430	30,073	29,638	27,470	29,222	

In-Year Net Cashflow 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Cumulative Position 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

MRR Account:																
	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Opening Balance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Net Contribution (Dep)	9,762	9,995	10,233	10,477	10,728	10,984	11,246	11,514	11,789	12,070	12,358	12,653	12,955	13,264	13,581	
Use of Reserve to Capital	-9,762	-9,995	-10,233	-10,477	-10,728	-10,984	-11,246	-11,514	-11,789	-12,070	-12,358	-12,653	-12,955	-13,264	-13,581	
Contribution to HRACFR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Closing Balance	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0



**Epping Forest
District Council**

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Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 13 March 2012

Portfolio: Housing – Councillor Mrs M McEwen

Subject: Housing Directorate's Service Strategies on Empty Council Properties, Older Peoples Services & Housing and Neighbourhood Management



Officer to contact for further information: Roger Wilson ext 4419

Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins ext 4607

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers and endorses the Housing Directorate's Service Strategies on Empty Council Properties, Older Peoples Services and Housing and Neighbourhood Management, 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 15 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	Older Peoples' Housing Services
Housing Allocations	Housing Advice
Empty Council Properties	Energy Efficiency
Anti-Social Behaviour	Harassment
Housing and Neighbourhood Management	

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 9001:2008 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 Empty Council Properties, Older Peoples Services and Housing and Neighbourhood Management 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 9001:2008 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 Service Strategies on Empty Council Properties, Older Peoples Services and Housing and Neighbourhood Management.

Consultation undertaken:

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation were consulted on the Strategies at their meeting on 1 March 2012 and any comments will be reported orally.

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: As set out in the Strategies

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Housing Directorate Service Strategy relates to the Council's approach to the provision of Housing Services for Older People. The Strategy sets out how this element of the service is delivered by the Housing Directorate, including links with other services both internally and externally.
- 1.2 Housing Services for Older People is delivered by the Older Peoples Services Section and is an important front-line service which covers a wide-range of activities. It includes services delivered by Scheme Managers, sheltered housing, the Council's twenty-four hour emergency alarm Careline Service, and the Housing Directorate's involvement with the Sheltered Housing Forum.
- 1.3 Comprehensive systems are in place and are detailed later in the Strategy. The efficiency of these systems are confirmed by Housing being accredited with both the international quality standard of ISO 9001:2008 and the Customer Service Excellence award, for all of its services including Older People's Services.
- 1.4 Following a rigorous audit process undertaken by an external Assessor, in July 2011, Careline was awarded the coveted Telecare Services Association's Accreditation, being a Quality Award for services provided in the emergency alarm industry.
- 1.5 This Older People's Service Strategy has been formulated in consultation with representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Sheltered Forum and includes information contained in the Housing Directorate's policies and procedures. The Strategy was considered by the Housing Scrutiny Panel and approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder in April 2012.

2. Background to Housing Services for Older People

- 2.1 Housing Services for Older People are managed from the Careline Centre in Loughton, which is not open to the general public. The Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services) who is responsible for the service is based in offices above the Centre. The Assistant Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services) deputises for the Housing Manager in all aspects of the Section. In addition, the Senior Scheme Manager is responsible for overseeing and supervising the work of all Scheme Managers.
- 2.2 To ensure communication on policy, procedural and performance matters, quarterly meetings with Scheme Managers take place, chaired by the Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services). In addition, meetings are held for Careline staff. The Director of Housing and the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) attend periodically.

3. Coverage

- 3.1 This Housing Service Strategy covers the Council's;
- a) Older People's Housing Related Support Services;
 - b) Sheltered housing;
 - c) Designated dwellings for older people on housing estates;
 - d) The Careline Service including;
 - (i) grouped schemes;
 - (ii) dispersed alarms; and
 - (iii) Telecare
 - (iv) Lone Work
 - e) Assessments of sheltered housing applicants;
 - f) Supporting People
 - g) Care in the Community; and
 - h) Ordering and distribution of cleaning supplies.

4. Relationships with Other Documents

- 4.1 Housing Services for Older People forms part of the Council's overall landlord function which is set out in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.
- 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 Housing Directorate has detailed policies and procedures for most of its functions, including Housing Services for Older People that give important guidance to staff.
- 4.4 Housing related support services provided by the Older Peoples Services Section are funded by Supporting People. There is a contract in place between Essex County Council as the Administering Authority and the Council for the provision of these services. The Council continues to meet the standards required to retain funding.
- 4.5 Important statistical performance information is collected and is monitored at quarterly Customer Improvement Meetings chaired by the Director of Housing.
- 4.6 Information on Housing Services for Older People is contained within the Tenants Handbook. Certain Conditions of Tenancy relating solely to tenants in sheltered accommodation are contained within the latest Tenancy Agreement, which came into effect in January 2002.
- 4.7 Leaflets on Services to Older People and sheltered accommodation have been distributed to around 1,100 tenants living in both sheltered accommodation and designated dwellings for the older people on housing estates who receive the Service. These are also available for those who are considering moving to sheltered accommodation. Incorporated within these leaflets is a clear explanation of the Scheme Manager's role. These have been distributed to staff from outside agencies to enable them to understand the responsibilities of the Scheme Manager. All new tenants are given a "Welcome Pack" when they sign up for their new sheltered housing tenancy. In addition, tenants in sheltered accommodation have been given a leaflet on health and safety advice.

4.8 Information packs on the Careline Service are sent to all residents within the District, who are considering applying for a dispersed alarm. These are also sent to the Social Care Department, Hospitals, Day Centres etc. in order to further promote the service.

5. Aims and Objectives

5.1 The aim of the Council's Housing Service Strategy on Older People's Housing Services is:

"To ensure that the well-being of all older tenants living in sheltered accommodation and designated dwellings for older people is carefully monitored, and that all users of the Careline Service receive an efficient and effective response to their calls giving them an increased sense of security and peace of mind".

5.2 The following Section explains how the aim will be met, under four headings:

5.3 Sheltered Accommodation

a) Scheme Managers in sheltered accommodation will visit, or account for all tenants, on every duty day, completing the visit declaration form;

b) When Scheme Managers at sheltered accommodation are absent for less than a week the Careline Centre will call, each day, all those tenants previously nominated by the Scheme Manager as being "at risk";

c) If any Scheme Manager at sheltered accommodation is absent for one week or more, the Housing Assistant (Older Peoples Services) or a Careline Operator will visit the scheme three times each week and undertake a full round, accounting for all residents;

d) Scheme Managers will assist residents to live independently, offering housing related support and encouraging communal social activities;

e) Scheme Managers will liaise with outside agencies on behalf of residents;

f) Scheme Managers will contact the tenant's relatives in the event of illness or accident; and

g) Tenants living in sheltered accommodation will be encouraged to use the Careline alarm service in emergency situations. The equipment will be tested by the Scheme Manager on a regular basis, with all tests being recorded.

5.4 Area Schemes for Older People

a) Through the call category system (set out in Paragraph 8.2.3) Scheme Managers who cover designated dwellings for older people will ensure that all older tenants are visited in accordance with their need;

b) Those living on area schemes will be provided with housing related support, assisted to live independently, with their health and general well-being monitored;

c) Scheme Managers will contact the tenant's relatives in the event of their illness or accident;

d) All Tenants will be encouraged to use the Careline alarm service in emergency situations, which will be tested and recorded by Scheme Managers on a regular basis; and

e) Scheme Managers will encourage all their tenants to support one another, act as a community, and promote social activities.

5.5 Epping Forest Careline

a) Careline staff will endeavour to ensure that all calls received by the Careline Centre are responded to within target times, and that all urgent dispersed alarms are installed within two-days of the application being received. These targets are monitored under the Housing Directorate's quarterly Customer Improvement Meetings regime;

b) All calls received over the alarm system, and telephone conversations, will be tape recorded as a safeguard to both service users and the Council; and

c) Careline will promote the service and manage the installation of dispersed alarms and Telecare products which are referred to later in this strategy.

5.6 Other Housing Services for Older People

a) The Older Peoples' Services Section will visit potential tenants who have applied for sheltered accommodation and have been referred by the Housing Options Section for assessment;

b) The Housing Manager (Older Peoples' Services) will contact Adult Social Care to initiate an assessment and possibly attend a case conference, when the Council is concerned that a greater level of care is required for one of its older tenants; and

c) The Older Peoples' Services Section will work closely with the Sheltered Forum which is a consultative group of tenant representatives for each sheltered scheme. Their views will be sought and taken into account when shaping services to older people.

6. Statutory Requirements

6.1 The relevant key statutory requirements for older people's services are a follows:

- a) Housing Act 1985;
- b) Health and Safety at Work Act 1974;
- c) Environmental Protection Act 1974;
- d) Human Rights Act 1998;
- e) Crime and Disorder Act 1998;
- f) Noise Act 1996;
- g) Public Health Act 1936;
- h) Equality Act 2010 and
- i) Data Protection Act

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

7.1 The way in which tenants will be consulted, informed and involved with regard to the Council's policy on housing services for older people is as follows:

a) Consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;

- b) Consultation with the Sheltered Forum
- c) Consultation with Residents Associations;
- d) Encourage the setting up of Tenants Associations in sheltered housing schemes;
- e) Information to tenants in publications e.g. Housing News, Annual Report;
- f) Posters on the Careline Service displayed throughout the District;
- g) Distribution of leaflets on Older Peoples Services and Careline;
- h) Providing a Welcome Pack to all sheltered housing tenants
- i) Liaison with the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- j) One to one consultation with tenants;
- k) Consultation with tenants at various meetings at the schemes; and
- l) Changes in policy;

8. General Principles

8.1 Section 5 of this Housing Service Strategy sets out the aims and objectives of Older People's Housing Services. This Section details the general approach taken on the delivery of the service under the following headings:

8.2 Services Provided by Scheme Managers

8.2.1 The Council currently employs 11 full time Scheme Managers at sheltered and grouped schemes for older people and 3 Scheme Managers who visit older tenants living in designated dwellings for older people on general needs housing estates (e.g. Ninefields, Waltham Abbey; Oakwood Hill, Loughton etc.).

8.2.2 In March 2004, the Cabinet agreed that due to many difficulties associated with Scheme Managers living on-site, in the future, newly appointed Scheme Managers will be non-resident. In addition, all existing staff have been given the opportunity to move off site into secure Council accommodation. As a result, the Council now has only 2 resident Scheme Managers.

8.2.3 The service assists older tenants to live as independently as possible. Tenants living in sheltered housing are visited by the Scheme Manager on every duty day. When they are absent the Careline Service monitors calls from tenants and calls each day those who are designated by the Scheme Manager as being "at risk". Tenants living in designated properties for older people on estates are monitored by a Scheme Manager who visits in accordance with the documented call category system. In accordance with this procedure the Scheme Manager undertakes a risk assessment of tenants to assess if they are either "high" "medium" or "low" risk. "High" risk tenants are visited approximately twice weekly, "medium" risk tenants visited once each fortnight, with "low" risk tenants being visited once every four weeks. All area scheme properties are linked to the Careline Service.

8.2.4 Records of residents are maintained detailing those who are absent. All Scheme Managers complete a visit declaration form on a monthly basis detailing all visits made to residents during the period. This is submitted to the Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services) who undertakes "spot checks." To ensure visits were actually carried out

8.2.5 Scheme Managers do all that is possible to encourage tenants to support each other, act as a community, and promote social activities.

8.2.6 The Council has 11 sheltered housing schemes which are for people who are over the age of 60 years, capable of living on their own, but feel more secure with support from the Scheme Manager. The level of support depends upon the needs of the residents; advice is offered when needed and communal activities encouraged. All sheltered housing properties are linked to the Careline Service.

8.2.7 One-bedroom flats are the most common type of accommodation, although there are some studio flats. All sheltered housing schemes have door entry systems installed and reception areas are covered by CCTV. Communal facilities generally include a laundry room, guest room for visiting friends or relatives, communal lounge and kitchen for social activities and special events.

8.2.8 Scheme Managers are normally on duty during normal working hours between Monday and Friday. When off duty the scheme is linked into the Careline Centre.

8.3 Designated Dwellings for Older People on Housing Estates

8.3.1 Around 525 properties on general needs estates are designated as suitable for occupation by an older person. Three Scheme Managers are dedicated to visiting 265 of these properties on a full-time basis. Scheme Managers in sheltered accommodation visit the remaining 260 designated properties which are located near to their schemes with the residents often being invited to social activities in the complex.

8.3.2 All properties covered by the Scheme Manager are linked directly into the Careline Service. All staff are provided with mobile phones, personal attack alarms for their own safety and have access to the Council's Precautionary Visit list.

8.4 Supporting People Scheme Reviews

8.4.1 "Supporting People" is a major Government initiative, which introduced a new policy, and funding framework for supported housing and ancillary welfare services from April 2003. These services include housing related support delivered by Scheme Managers and the Careline Service.

8.4.2 A "Block" contract is in place between the Council and Essex County Council for the provision of its support services.

8.4.3 Scheme reviews are undertaken periodically, although the Quality Assessment Framework, which is a detailed service analysis, must be submitted on a regular basis and currently assesses five core objectives as follows:

- Assessment and support planning
- Security, Health and Safety
- Safeguarding and Protection from abuse
- Fair access diversity and inclusion
- Client Involvement and Empowerment

8.4.4 The Council's support services continually meet at least the minimum requirements under each core objective to ensure continued funding.

8.5 Tenants and Leaseholder's Federation and the Sheltered Forum

- 8.5.1 The way in which the Housing Directorate involves, consults and provides information to tenants is set out in the Housing Service Strategy on Information under Client Consultation, Information and Involvement. The District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement explains the Council's commitment to tenant participation and how it will enable its tenants to participate in the delivery of their housing service.
- 8.5.2 The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation comprises two members of each recognised tenants associations in the District, and the Leaseholders Association. Regular meetings are held with the Federation to consult on housing policy matters and to seek their views. The outcomes are reported back to the local associations and Members take them into account when making decisions.
- 8.5.3 The Council is committed to consulting with tenants on housing issues that are important to them. Over recent years, attempts were made to set up tenants associations within the sheltered schemes, but there were only a few residents at each scheme who were willing to become involved.
- 8.5.4 It was therefore decided to set up a Sheltered Forum comprising of a small number of residents from each scheme who could put forward their views on behalf of all residents on housing services offered to older people. The Forum was established in 2004; meetings take place on a bi-monthly basis and are well attended.

8.6 Epping Forest Careline

- 8.6.1 The Careline Centre based at Parsonage Court, Loughton was set up in June 1984 and had around 2,400 properties linked into the service as at 1 March 2012. Connections include all the Council's sheltered housing schemes and designated dwellings for older people. Around 1,200 dispersed alarms are also included, which are one-off installations for those living in the private sector for which they pay an annual rental, which is agreed annually by the Council. In addition, a monitoring service is provided to housing associations. Careline also monitor fire alarms in sheltered housing schemes.
- 8.6.2 Careline is a twenty-four hour, 365-day service dealing with around 60,000 calls each year and offers valuable support to Scheme Managers. The Centre is equipped with PNC 5 technology, with the latest "Communicall" two-way speech system installed in sheltered and grouped housing schemes. In addition, there is a Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plan which covers the Centre, should it not be able to function for any reason. In these rare circumstances all call handling will be undertaken by the alarm system manufacturer at their own control centre in Doncaster.

8.7 Review of the Careline Service

- 8.7.1 At its meeting on 1 September 2008, the Cabinet undertook a Review of the Careline Service. It was agreed that the Careline premises be extended into the vacant adjacent former Scheme Manager's three bedroom house. This project has now been successfully completed and the new re-furbished centre was opened in September 2011.

8.7.2 The Council will also, when the opportunity arises, submit tenders to monitor alarms for other authorities and/or housing associations. Consideration is also being given to extending the routine repairs reporting service for tenants from 5pm to 8pm on each working day from the Careline Centre, although other options for this service are also being explored. The Careline Centre will in the near future, periodically monitor existing Council-owned CCTV systems at sheltered housing schemes through website access. In addition, a pilot scheme has been introduced to monitor the whereabouts of the Council's lone workers on a 24-hour basis, which is currently being rolled out to all staff in the Housing Directorate with a view to being extended Corporately.

8.8 Telecare in the Community

8.8.1 The range of equipment available to Careline service users is increasing due to developments in technology. Although those linked to the service are able to summon help in an emergency via a pendant radio-trigger by using a pull cord, services users can now benefit from smoke detectors, bogus caller buttons, fall detectors and inactivity detectors etc. A leaflet is available setting out details of all the additional equipment.

8.8.2 Sensors are installed at the property, which meet with the particular user's need, giving extra protection. Users activate the alarm system in any emergency, placing a call to Careline where help will be summoned.

8.8.3 Careline staff work in partnership with Adult Social Care, Health, Police and Fire Services to promote the service. A number of staff are trained assessors who survey each property ensuring users receive the correct equipment.

8.9 Assessment of Applicants for Sheltered Accommodation

8.9.1 All applicants who apply to live in sheltered accommodation are visited and assessed by the Older Peoples Services Section prior to an offer being made. A copy of the assessment is included in the new tenant's Tenant Support Plan, which is a detailed record of the housing related support provided.

8.10 Care in the Community

8.10.1 The Council works in partnership with other agencies in order to achieve a multi agency approach to Care in the Community. The Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services) attends the Older Peoples Joint Management Team which consists of a representative from all agencies meeting on a quarterly basis in order to work with service users, carers, to ensure that services for older people are accessible and meet most people's needs.

8.11 Ordering and Distribution of Cleaning Materials

8.11.1 The Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services) manages the ordering and distribution of cleaning supplies for the Council's sheltered housing schemes. These supplies are stored in a garage at Parsonage Court, Loughton. An audit of the supplies is undertaken annually.

9. Action Plan

9.1 The actions in the table below will be undertaken in the future by the Housing Directorate in order to enhance Older People's Housing Services.

Action	Lead Officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Encourage the setting up of Tenants' Associations at sheltered housing schemes in accordance with the Tenant Participation Strategy and District Tenant Participation Agreement to promote and implement Tenant Participation	Tenant Participation Officer	On-going	Within existing resources
Update the Customer Impact Assessment for Sheltered Housing	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	September 2013	Within existing Resources
Update the Customer Impact Assessment for Epping Forest Careline	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	September 2013	Within existing Resources
Continue to maintain Telecare Services Association (TSA) Accreditation	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	On-going	Within existing Resources
Consider Introducing repairs reporting service out of hours at the Careline Centre, if other options are not viable	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	January 2013	Within existing resources
Introduce periodic CCTV monitoring of all older peoples premises from the Careline Centre	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	January 2013	Within existing resources
Monitor all of the Council's lone workers through Careline	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	January 2013	Within existing resources

Action	Lead Officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Introduce Computers for Scheme Managers	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	January 2013	Within existing resources
Installation of Key Safes at Sheltered Housing Schemes	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	January 2013	Within existing resources
Continually improve Supporting People performance scores	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	On-going	Within existing resources
Promote the provision of Careline monitoring to other providers	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	On-going	Within existing resources
Promote Sheltered Housing to older people under-occupying Council Housing	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	On-going	Possibility of appointing an Under-Occupation Officer under the list of Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements

10. Future Developments

10.1 The “SWOT” analysis on the next page identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the areas covered by the Service Strategy.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSA Accreditation • Knowledgeable and committed staff • Robust policies and procedures • Integrated housing system • Customer Service Excellence accreditation • ISO 9001:2008 accreditation • Good relationships with tenants • Good tenant consultation framework • Comprehensive performance monitoring • Council-owned Careline Centre • Multi-agency approach • Healthy Housing Revenue Account • Comprehensive disaster recovery plan for the Careline service 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proportion of Careline funding being provided by Supporting People, who may review alarm services County-wide reducing the number of centres, which could lead to Careline’s closure
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved repairs reporting service to customers out-of-hours through the Careline Centre • Increased security for older residents through periodic monitoring of CCTV systems by Careline • Additional income from dispersed alarm peripherals • More older people remaining in their own home and therefore privately renting dispersed alarms • Working towards Improving Supporting People Scheme Review Scores • Converting sheltered housing bedsits into flats when appropriate • Greater Corporate use of Careline by monitoring of lone workers • Provision of Careline service to other providers • Possibility of Supporting People reviewing alarm services County-wide thereby reducing the numbers of centres which would create an opportunity to monitor for other providers • Improved business continuity 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of demand for properties set aside for occupation by older people which as a result are being de-designated • More older people being cared for at home and therefore not requiring sheltered accommodation • Costs of Careline exceed income • Possible loss of Supporting People funding

11. Resourcing the Strategy

11.1 Staff delivering this Strategy in 2010/11 was 26 FTE. This includes the Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services), Assistant Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services), Senior Scheme Manager, Quality and Performance Co-ordinator, 11 sheltered Scheme Managers 3 estate based Scheme Managers 2.5 FTE Housing Assistants (Older Peoples Services) and 5.5 FTE Careline Operators and a proportion of other Manager's time.

11.2 The projection for the number of staff required to deliver the Strategy for 2012/13 and the following three years is detailed in the following table:

Staff Resource Projections			
Posts	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Older Peoples Services Staff	26.25	26.25	26.25

11.3 The following table details the estimated proportion of staff time within the Housing Directorate spent on Older Peoples Housing Services for 2010/2011:

Posts	FTE
Director of Housing	0.05
Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)	0.2
Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	1.0
Assistant Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	1.0
Senior Scheme Manager	1.0
Quality and Performance Co-ordinator	1.0
Scheme Managers (Estate Based)	3.0
Scheme Managers (Sheltered Housing)	11.0
Careline Operators	5.5

Posts	FTE
Housing Assistant (Older Peoples Services)	2.5
Total	26.25

12. Key Targets & Performance Monitoring

12.1 The Council will monitor performance and compliance with this Strategy through quarterly Customer Improvement Meetings chaired by the Director of Housing with the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) and the Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services) ensuring the following target times are met:

Task	Actual 2010/11	Target
% of calls responded to within 30 seconds (including routine calls from Scheme Managers and test calls)	99.8%	97%
Average (seconds) to respond to calls	6.4 seconds	10 Seconds
Installation of dispersed alarms	100%	Within 5 Working Days
Installation of Telecare Sensors including client assessment	100%	20 days
Number of dispersed alarms installed	417	360 per annum

Task	Actual 2010/11	Target
Contractors repairs response in accordance with service agreement targets	93.9%	90%

13. Reviewing the Strategy

- 13.1 The Strategy for Older Peoples Services will be reviewed by the Housing Scrutiny Panel and agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Tenants' and Leaseholders Federation before April 2015.

Epping Forest District Council

**HOUSING SERVICE STRATEGY ON
HOUSING & NEIGHBOURHOOD
MANAGEMENT**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Housing Directorate Service Strategy relates to the Council's approach to the provision of Housing & Neighbourhood Management Services. The Strategy sets out how this element of the service is delivered by the Housing Directorate and includes links with other services both internally and externally.
- 1.2 Housing & Neighbourhood Management is an important front-line service which covers a wide range of activities and is delivered through the Area Housing Offices. It ensures, perhaps more than any other part of the service that good landlord and tenant relationships exist so that tenants' rights and responsibilities in respect of their Conditions of Tenancy are clearly communicated and understood.
- 1.3 The recovery of rent arrears and dealing with anti-social behaviour is undertaken by the Area Housing Offices. These areas of work are not covered by this Strategy as it is covered in two separate Housing Services Strategies approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder.
- 1.4 This Housing & Neighbourhood Service Strategy together with the anti-social behaviour Strategy complies with the Tenant Services Authority's Regulatory Framework's Neighbourhood and Community Standard.
- 1.5 This Strategy has been formulated in consultation with representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and includes information contained in the Housing Directorate's Policy & Procedures. The Strategy was considered by the Housing Scrutiny Member Panel and approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder in April 2012.

2. Background to Housing Management

- 2.1 The Housing Management Service is delivered through two Area Housing Offices (north and south), and the Limes Centre, Chigwell which is a sub office of the Area Housing Office (South).
- 2.2 At each of the Area Housing Offices the Area Housing Managers have Section meetings at least every two months to ensure staff communication on policy, procedural, and performance matters etc. The Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) is a member of the Housing Management Team, also comprising the Director of Housing, Assistant Director of Housing (Property) and the Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector and Resources).

2.3 Comprehensive systems are in place and are detailed later in the Strategy. The efficiency of these systems are confirmed by the Housing Directorate being accredited with both the international quality standard of ISO 9001:2008 and the Customer Service Excellence Award for all of its services including Housing and Neighbourhood Management.

3. Coverage

3.1 This Housing Service Strategy covers the Council's approach to;

- a) Changes in tenancy, including succession, mutual exchanges, and other assignments;
- b) Breaches of tenancy conditions relating to the Strategy;
- c) The Social Housing Fraud initiative;
- d) Operation of an Introductory Tenancy Scheme
- e) Unauthorised occupation;
- f) Transfers and estate inspections;
- g) Older and disabled people's garden maintenance scheme;
- h) Boundary disputes;
- i) Compensation for Tenants' Improvement Scheme and alterations and improvement to dwellings by tenants or others;
- j) Estate enhancements/ Grounds maintenance;
- k) Abandoned vehicles;
- l) Cleansing of communal areas;
- m) Right to buy, land sales applications and release of restrictive covenants;
- n) Priority Moves;
- o) Vehicular crossovers; and
- p) The review of the Strategy;

4. Relationships with other Documents

4.1 The Housing Management Service forms part of the Council's overall Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

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 Standard Tenancy Agreement forms the contractual agreement between the Council and its tenants and was last reviewed during 2001/2.

4.4 The Housing Directorate has detailed policies & procedures for most of its functions and the work of the housing management service is included within the Procedures Manual which gives important guidance to staff.

4.5 Literature on rents, benefits, vehicular crossovers, succession, service standards and other leaflets are on display at both Area Housing Offices and the Limes Farm Office, and featured from time to time in relevant publications including the tenants' magazine Housing News. All tenants have received a copy of the Tenants Handbook which explains about all matters relating to their tenancy.

4.6 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan gives detailed information on the objectives, plans and financial forecast for the HRA as a whole.

4.7 Important statistical performance information is available and monitored at quarterly Customer Improvement Meetings chaired by the Director of Housing.

5. Aims and Objectives

5.1 The aim of the Council's Housing Service Strategy on Housing and Neighbourhood Management is:

"To ensure that tenants are advised in all matters relating to their tenancies whilst actively seeking to maximise the use of the Council's housing stock, improve housing estates and deal with breaches in tenancy conditions through good landlord & tenant relationships."

5.2 This aim will be met by:

(a) Ensuring that all tenants are advised of their and the Council's responsibilities under the Tenancy Agreement at its commencement and throughout the period of the tenancy;

(b) Keeping close links between tenants and their Housing Management Officer to reduce the likelihood of breaches of the Tenancy Agreement;

(c) Acting in accordance with Part IV of the Housing Act 1985 (Section 87-89) and the Council's discretionary policy on under-occupation and succession.

(d) Consulting with tenants on issues regarding their home or local community which may affect them;

(e) Encouraging tenants to set up their own Residents Association;

(f) Taking appropriate actions to deal with breaches of tenancy conditions;

(g) Ensuring the Council's housing estates are properly maintained; and

(h) Dealing with breaches of covenants by people occupying former Council homes;

6. Statutory Requirements

6.1 The relevant key statutory requirements for housing management are as follows:

a) Housing Act 1985

- Notice of proceedings for possession or termination (Section 83)
- Grounds and orders for possession (Section 84)
- Extended discretion of Court in certain possession proceedings (Section 85)
- Succession (Sections 87, 88, & 89)
- Assignment, lodgers, and subletting (Sections 91, 92, 93, 94, & 95)
- Repairs and improvements (Sections 96 to 101)
- Variation of terms of tenancy (Sections 102 & 103)
- Variation of rent (Section 102b)
- Provision of information and consultation (Section 104)
- Consultation on matters of housing management (Section 105)

b) Housing and Regeneration Act 2008

- Family Intervention Tenancies

- Changes relating to tolerated trespassers
- c) Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- d) Environmental Protection Act 1990
- e) Wild Animals Act 1976
- f) Data Protection Act

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

7.1 The way in which tenants will be consulted, informed and involved with regard to the Council's policy on housing and neighbourhood management is as follows;

- a) Consultation with the Tenants' and Leaseholders Federation;
- b) Consultation with recognised tenants' associations;
- c) Information to tenants in publications e.g. Housing News, Annual Report;
- d) Posters on services displayed throughout the District;
- e) Liaison with the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- f) One-to-one consultation with tenants;
- g) Changes in policy;
- h) Changes under Part IV, Section 102/3 of the Housing Act 1985 to amend the Standard Tenancy Agreement; and
- i) Consultation on matters of housing management under Part IV, Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985.

8. General Principles

8.1 Section 5 of the Strategy sets out the aims and objectives of housing and neighbourhood management. This Section details the general approach taken on the delivery of the service under the following headings:

8.2 Changes in Tenancy

Changes in tenancy will be managed in accordance with legislation and the Council's discretionary policies. The main types of changes are as follows:

a) Succession

The law of succession is found within the Housing Act 1985 Part IV Sections 87-89. Succession can occur following the death of the secure tenant. One succession to a secure tenancy is allowed under the legislation with the spouse being preferred. Should there be no surviving spouse, then a family member can succeed to the tenancy, who may be required to move to suitable alternative accommodation should they be under-occupying. Where there is more than one surviving family member, as there can be no joint succession, each of the family members will be asked to choose who is to succeed. Where agreement cannot be reached, the Council will choose. Generally in these circumstances, the eldest would succeed. The Council's policy on under occupation is applied, which allows a family member to remain at the property provided they are only under-occupying by one bedroom if; they have been living in the property as their only or principal home for more than ten years continuously immediately prior to the tenants death, if they are over the age of 60, or if following an assessment it is found that significant financial or other support was given by the successor tenant to the previous tenant. In addition, the Council's policy on

discretionary succession is applied, which in simple terms allows all succession cases to be treated as if there had not already been one succession.

b) Assignment

Under the Housing Act 1985, tenants have the right to assign their tenancy to anyone who would be eligible to succeed to their tenancy upon their death. When a formal request is received a Deed of Assignment will be signed by both parties concerned.

c) Mutual Exchanges

All secure tenants have the Right to Exchange, with tenants being able to register free of charge with HomeSwapper, which matches property swaps electronically. All mutual exchanges are administered by way of assignment, thereby protecting the rights of the tenant and the Council. The Housing Directorate's staff will visit all Council tenants seeking an exchange to give advice and assistance, inspect the condition of the properties, ensure there is a clear rent account and note any other relevant information prior to giving permission in accordance with current legislation.

d) Any Other Changes in Tenancy

Any other changes in tenancy such as name or marital status will be administered by Housing Management, with the Housing Options Section being notified. Following an investigation into the validity of the changes the tenant will be formally notified of any changes.

9. Joint Tenancies

- 9.1 When an existing tenant requests the creation of a joint tenancy, an analysis of the tenancy history will be undertaken. A joint tenancy will not be granted if there has been a previous succession to the tenancy, due to the new joint tenancy removing the succession which has already taken place. Generally, requests for joint tenancies with relatives will not be granted. In some circumstances, joint tenancies with carers may be granted, provided the carer has themselves given up accommodation to care for the secure tenant. Housing Management will observe Council policy and Government Circulars when taking decisions.

10. Introductory Tenancies

- 10.1 Under the Housing Act 1996, local authorities are given discretionary powers to operate a scheme of "introductory tenancies", whereby all new tenancies allocated are not secure until after a twelve month "trial" period. At the time of the scheme being permitted under the Act, the Council decided that it would not operate such a scheme. However, as part of the last Best Value Service Review, it was agreed that the use of these discretionary powers be reviewed and "challenged" as this could be a useful tool in tackling anti-social behaviour and other breaches of tenancy conditions. Following consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Anti-Social Behaviour Group and the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Council's Cabinet agreed the introduction of a new Introductory Tenancy Scheme, which was brought in on 1 April 2005. The scheme has proved to be very successful and has assisted in reducing both incidents of anti-social behaviour on estates and rent arrears.

11. Family Intervention Tenancies

- 11.1 Family Intervention Tenancies were introduced under the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, and are designed to provide non-secure tenancies, in an alternative property, to applicants who have previously been the subject of a Possession Order made on the grounds of nuisance or annoyance and where a lower security of tenure should be provided for the purposes of providing behavioural support. Should any applicants offered a Family Intervention Tenancy re-offend then re-possession of the property through the Courts will be more easily achievable than if they were secure tenants.

12. Demoted Tenancies

- 12.1 Demoted tenancies allow the Council to apply to the County Court for a “Demotion Order” to reduce the security of tenure of an existing tenant on their own home on the grounds of anti social behaviour or unlawful conduct, following the service of the prescribed notice. A Demotion Order ends a secure tenancy. If the tenant remains in occupation of the property after the date that the secure tenancy is ended, it 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, their right to succession, which does not apply during any demoted tenancy period and security of tenure. Demoted tenants are automatically promoted back to a higher form of security (i.e. secure tenant) after twelve months, unless a Notice of Proceedings for Possession have been served during that period. The Court may then make an Order for possession if the demoted 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. Seeking possession of a Demoted Tenancy is more straightforward, as the Court cannot refuse a landlord’s application for possession unless it thinks that the procedure has not been properly followed. Prior to the serving of any Notice, officers would have undertaken home visits and written letters to the tenant taking every possible action to try and resolve matters.

13. Priority Transfers

- 13.1 If in exceptional circumstances a tenant needs to be transferred to alternative accommodation for housing management reasons e.g. due to personal risk, (which must be confirmed by appropriate sources), the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) and the Housing Options Manager will authorise Priority Transfers in appropriate cases in accordance with the Council’s Housing allocations Scheme.

14. Vehicle Crossovers

- 14.1 For all current and former Council properties, Housing Management will assess all applications for vehicular crossovers ensuring that the Council’s existing policy is applied. Residents of neighbouring properties will be consulted with their views being taken into account before permission is granted. In addition, Ward Members will be consulted on any crossover which removes over 12 metres in length of grassed amenity land.

15. Breaches of Tenancy Conditions

15.1 Prevention

Housing Management will work proactively through home visits and estate inspections to ensure against breaches of tenancy conditions. This will attempt to identify neglect of gardens, rubbish dumping, vandalism and the general external condition of properties.

15.2 Action Taken in Response to Breaches of Tenancy Conditions

When an alleged breach is reported, the Housing Management Officer will investigate the case and, in the first instance, undertake a home visit. If an actual breach is identified, the tenant will be notified formally of the breach and given a deadline by which to resolve it. The implications of their action under the terms of their tenancy will also be explained. Should Housing Management serve Notice or proceed to Court, appropriate evidence will be gathered as necessary.

15.3 Boundary Disputes

When Housing Management receives written confirmation of a boundary dispute, a Housing Management Officer will visit. If appropriate, a joint visit will be made with a Surveyor. In difficult cases the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) may arrange for a Consultant Chartered Surveyor to be employed in order to resolve the matter. All parties will be told of the decision in writing. Should any of the parties dispute the decision, they will be advised that it shall stand unless they provide documentary evidence to the contrary.

15.4 Breaches of Covenants

When Housing Management receive a complaint of a potential breach of a covenant on a former Council dwelling the matter will be investigated. If appropriate, the freeholder/leaseholder will be notified of the breach and, if it persists, Legal Services will be asked to take Court action.

15.5 Unauthorised Occupation

In the case of unauthorised occupation, Legal Services will be asked to apply to the County Court for possession within 5 days. A Notice will be fixed to the door of the property.

15.6 Social Housing Fraud Initiative

In May 2011, the Council appointed a new part-time Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud) on a temporary part-time basis (22.5 hours per week) for a Social Housing Fraud Pilot Scheme for a 12-month period. The post was partly funded by the CLG as part of the Government's national initiative to tackle social housing fraud. Following an evaluation of the scheme, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered that the amount of progress made with the Scheme, which had only been operating for 8 months from a standing start, is a major achievement and will be recommending to the Cabinet that the part-time post of Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud) be made both permanent and full-time, with an increase in hours from 22.5 hours to 36 hours per week. It was also agreed that further consideration be given to the appointment of a further Senior Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud) under the list of housing improvements and service enhancements.

15.7 Estate Inspections

Housing Management Officers will inspect the areas they are responsible for on a regular basis and will generally identify problems whilst they are visiting tenants on other matters. More formally, Area Housing Managers will inspect a sample of estates with each of their Housing Management Officers and record requested actions to ensure that estates are kept to a high standard. Representatives from local Residents Associations will be invited to attend the annual estate inspections. In addition, Ward Members will be asked in advance if they have any concerns and will receive a report on the outcome of the inspection.

16. Older and Disabled People's Garden Maintenance Scheme

- 16.1 Housing Management will monitor the Older and Disabled People's Garden Maintenance Scheme, which is managed by Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF). Provided applicants have no-one living at the property who is under 70 years of age and have a clear rent account they will be added to the list and dealt with in date order. The Council funds VAEF's part-time Co-ordinator; around fifty vulnerable tenants' gardens are maintained four times each year between April and October.

17. Compensation for Tenants Improvements Scheme

- 17.1 Requests from tenants to undertake improvements will be received by Housing Management and passed on to the Housing Repairs Section to deal with the technical aspects. Providing the improvements qualify under the Scheme, the Housing Management Officer will ensure the rent account is clear, and, if agreed, write to the tenant giving consent and details of how to claim their compensation on vacation of the property. When the improvement has been completed, the Housing Repairs Officer will visit to ensure the improvement has been carried out satisfactorily. When a claim has been made, the Housing Repairs Officer will visit again to inspect, and if satisfied, the Housing Management Officer will calculate and arrange payment of the compensation.

18. Alterations and Improvements (Not Qualifying for the Tenants Improvement Scheme)

- 18.1 The Tenancy Agreement requires tenants to seek permission before undertaking any improvements to their properties. The Housing Assets Section considers each application from any tenant, checking that the improvement does not qualify for the Compensation Scheme (see 16.1). If the improvement is straightforward e.g. shed, greenhouse, no structural works etc, permission will be granted. If the request is more complicated then the Housing Assets Section will arrange for an inspection to be undertaken. If appropriate, neighbours will be consulted and their views taken into account. Housing Management will be consulted and the tenant will be notified of the decision in writing.

19. Estate Enhancements & Grounds Maintenance

- 19.1 The Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) and the Area Housing Managers (North and South) attend twice yearly meetings with Leisure Services in order to monitor the Grounds Maintenance Contract for the Housing Directorate. Housing Management also become involved in various improvement schemes.

20. Abandoned Vehicles

- 20.1 When vehicles appear to be abandoned and are identified on Housing Act land, if they are untaxed the Housing Management Officer will contact the Environment and Street Scene Directorate who will determine ownership via the DVLA computer link. For those which are clearly abandoned, Environment and Street Scene will be notified to arrange for a Notice to be attached to the vehicle warning the owner of its removal within seven days and, if appropriate, to remove the vehicle. If the vehicle is in such a poor condition that it is likely to cause a danger it will be removed immediately.

21. Caretaking Service & Cleansing of Communal Areas

- 21.1 Housing Management will undertake and monitor the cleaning service, which includes all sheltered housing scheme cleaners, mobile cleaners, and cleaners at some designated blocks across the District. In addition, there are three Caretakers, two at the Limes Farm Estate, Chigwell and one at the Oakwood Hill Estate, Loughton. Notice Boards have been installed in all designated blocks on housing estates to advise residents when cleaning will be undertaken and inviting their comments on the standard of the service.

22. Right to Buy

- 22.1 Housing Management will respond to enquiries from the Home Ownership Team concerning the tenancies of tenants who have applied to buy their home.

23. Land Sales

- 23.1 When a request is received to purchase a piece of Housing land, the Housing Management Officer will inspect the site and seek the advice and agreement of their Area Housing Manager. If the land is less than 50 square metres, in accordance with delegated authority, the Director of Housing in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder and local Ward Members will decide if the land can be sold. If all are in agreement, the proposed purchaser will be advised of the valuation and the land will be sold. If the request is refused, then they will have the right to Appeal against the decision. Requests to purchase land in excess of 50 square metres will be referred to the Housing Portfolio Holder for decision.

24. Covenant Approval

- 24.1 Housing Management will deal with requests from the owners of former Council properties who are seeking permission to carry out improvements. In addition to receiving requests, any improvement works to former Council properties that have not been notified will be identified on estate inspections and through checking the list of planning applications. If any request is refused, the owners will have the right to appeal against the decision.

25. Family Mosaic Housing-Related Support Services

- 25.1 Under the Supporting People Programme, Essex County Council provides housing related support to vulnerable tenants through its appointed contractor, Family Mosaic. This additional support is of great assistance to Housing Management Officers when dealing with tenants who are in need of additional housing welfare support. Cases are referred to the Family Mosaic “Gateway” for assessment. The Family Mosaic Support Worker will visit tenants, offer counselling, advice and support, assist with tenancy set-up, benefit and employment advice or provide any other help they may need to in order to sustain their tenancy. Regular meetings are held with Family Mosaic to monitor progress and performance.

26. Action Plan

- 26.1 The actions in the table below will be undertaken in the future by the Housing Directorate in order to enhance the Housing Management Service.

Action	Lead Officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Complete required changes in policies and procedures to comply with decisions made under the new Localism Act including Flexible tenancies, Succession etc.	Area Housing Managers	April 2013	Within existing resources
Subject to the approval of Cabinet expand the Social Housing Fraud Initiative	Area Housing Managers	April 2013	Potential addition 1.4 Housing Officer/Senior Officer (Social Housing Fraud) posts
Update the Equalities Impact Assessment for Housing and Neighbourhood Management	Area Housing Managers	September 2013	Within Existing Resources
Explore greater use of CCTV on estates to combat anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping	Area Housing Managers	On-going	Within Existing resources

Action	Lead Officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Complete the annual environmental improvements on estates in liaison with Housing Assets.	Area Housing Managers	April 2013	Existing Resources
Continue to support all Resident Associations and attend meetings when appropriate.	Area Housing Managers	On-going	Existing resources

27. Future Developments

27.1 The “SWOT” analysis on the next page identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the areas covered by the Service Strategy.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable and committed staff • Improved recovery of former tenant arrears through external debt recovery service • Provision of additional support to assist vulnerable tenants through Family Mosaic • Robust policies and documented procedures • Comprehensive use of different tenancy types • Integrated housing computer system • Customer Service Excellence accreditation • ISO 9001:2008 accreditation • Good tenant consultation framework • Comprehensive performance monitoring • Healthy Housing Revenue Account • Housing Appeals and Reviews Panel • De-centralised housing offices 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor response from tenants when attempting to set up Resident Associations • Low staffing levels compared to other local authorities and housing associations • Low numbers of professionally qualified housing management staff
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal to increase CCTV coverage • Increasing the number of Residents Associations in the District • Potential service improvements under the housing improvements and service enhancements proposals 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment restrictions

28. Resourcing the Strategy

- 28.1 For housing management purposes, the 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.
- 28.2 Area Housing Managers are based at each of the Area Housing Offices; each has an Assistant Area Housing Manager, which includes the Limes Centre, Chigwell.

28.3 Housing Management staff delivering this Strategy in 2011/2012 is approximately 11 FTE which includes the staffing levels detailed in paragraph 28.4, and other officers time spent on the Housing Management Service. The projection for the number of staff required to deliver the Strategy over these and the following two years is detailed in the following table. The reason for the projected increase in future years is due to the potential expansion of the Housing Fraud Initiative which is subject to Cabinet approval:

Staff Resource Projections				
Posts	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Housing Management Staff (FTE)	11	12.4	12.4	12.4

28.4 The following table details the estimated proportion of Housing Management, and other officers' time spent on the Housing Management Service for 2010/2011:

Staff Resources Breakdown	
Posts	FTE
Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)	0.3
Area Housing Managers x 2	1.4
Assistant Area Housing Managers x 3	1.5
Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud)	0.6
Housing Management Officers x 8 FTE	4.0
Housing Assistants x 3	2.7
Clerical Assistant x 0.5 FTE	0.5
Total	11 FTE

29. Key Targets and Performance Monitoring

- 29.1 The Council will monitor performance and compliance with this Strategy through quarterly customer Improvement meetings chaired by the Director of Housing with the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) and Area Housing Managers, to ensure that a number of targets, which include the following, are met:

Key Targets & Performance					
Performance Indicator	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
	(Actual)	(Target)	(Target)	(Target)	(Target)
Frequency of formal estate inspections between Area Housing Managers and Housing Management Officers	Annually	Annually	Annually	Annually	Annually
Rent collection rate	98.14%	98.80%	98.80%	98.80%	98.80%
Rent arrears as a percentage of the rent roll	1.55%	1.60%	1.60%	1.60%	1.60%
Former tenant arrears collection rate	£57,408	£60,000	£60,000	£60,000	£60,000

30. Reviewing the Strategy

- 30.1 The Strategy for Housing and Neighbourhood Management will be reviewed by the Housing Scrutiny Panel in consultation with the Tenants' and Leaseholders Federation before April 2015.

<p>Epping Forest District Council</p> <p>HOUSING DIRECTORATE SERVICE STRATEGY</p> <p>EMPTY COUNCIL PROPERTIES</p>
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1. Introduction

1.1. This Housing Directorate Strategy relates to the Council’s approach to ensure that the amount of time Council dwellings are empty between tenancies is kept to a minimum. This will result in properties being made available to housing applicants as soon as possible, thereby maximising the Council’s rental and Council Tax income, and minimising void times. It will also reduce the possibility of squatting and vandalism and the associated expenditure on empty Council dwellings.

1.2 It should be noted that this Strategy only relates to empty Council properties. The Council has produced a separate Empty Property Strategy that deals with the Council’s strategic approach to minimising the number of empty properties in the private sector.

2. Background to the Service

2.1 In May 2011, the Council appointed its new Repairs Management Contractor “Mears” to oversee a range of improvements to the Housing Repairs Service. One of their “key deliverables” and one of the categories for them to achieve an incentive payment is to meet with tough targets on empty property turnaround times. This requires the Service to complete works to all void properties, including major works, within 10 working days.

2.2 The following table sets out the number of properties let to either homeseekers or tenants transferring by the Council in the last four years:

	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
EFDC	502	400	390	376
Housing Association	88	61	116	108
Total	590	461	506	484

2.3 Generally, ensuring vacant Council dwellings are in a habitable standard for letting and are then allocated as soon as possible is the responsibility of both the Housing Repairs Service and the Housing Options Sections of the Housing Directorate.

2.4 The Director of Housing chairs quarterly Customer Improvement Meetings with the appropriate Assistant Director of Housing and Managers to monitor performance on a number of areas, including the management of empty Council properties, and to discuss policy and initiatives in order to maximise performance.

2.5 Comprehensive systems are in place and are detailed later in the Strategy. The efficiency of these systems are confirmed by the Housing Directorate being accredited with both the international quality standard of ISO 9001:2008 and the Customer Service Excellence Award for all of its services including empty property management.

2.6 This Empty Council Properties Strategy has been formulated in consultation with representatives of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The Strategy was considered and endorsed by the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel on 13 March 2012 and was approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder in April 2012.

3. Coverage

3.1 This Strategy sets out the Council's:

- Aims and objectives for managing empty Council properties;
- The statutory requirements;
- Consultation and involvement;
- General Principles;
- The Council's Empty Property Standard;
- Performance Output Specifications;
- Action Plan;
- Future Developments;
- Resourcing the Strategy;
- Key Targets and Performance Monitoring;
- Resourcing the Strategy; and
- Reviewing the Strategy

4. Relationship to other documents

4.1 Empty Council property management forms part of the Council's overall Housing Strategy and the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

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. In addition, there are a number of agreed service standards which are publicised setting out our aims in all aspects of our dealings with customers.

4.3 The Council's Housing Allocations Scheme sets out the priorities and eligibility criteria for the allocation of accommodation which is reviewed and agreed by the Cabinet on a regular basis. The Scheme is available upon request free of charge. A summary of the scheme is available in a leaflet entitled "Moving Home with the Council".

4.4 The Council has a Property Standard which sets out the condition of a property when it is first allocated to an applicant and has been agreed by the Tenants and Leaseholders Association and the Repairs Focus Group.

4.5. The Council follows the guide set out in the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice in Rented Housing.

4.6. The Housing Directorate produces its Housing Allocations Scheme and a summary leaflet, which sets out the Council's policies on these matters.

4.7 An application pack for the Housing Register is provided including: a summary of the Housing Allocations Scheme, entitled "Moving Home with the Council" which includes advice on mutual exchanges, the formal application including guidance notes, and an information booklet.

4.8 The Strategy should be considered in conjunction with the Housing Directorate Service Strategy on Allocations Homelessness and Housing Advice.

4.9 Information about Housing Services is available on the Council's website at, www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing

5. Aims and Objectives

5.1 The aim of the Council's Strategy on Empty Council Properties is:

"To ensure empty Council properties are in a suitable condition for letting and are allocated to applicants as soon as possible in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme minimising any loss of rental income and maximising the Council's performance on void turnaround times."

5.2 This aim will be met by:

- a) Ensuring that the Housing Directorate meets all of its empty property targets;
- b) Continually monitoring all stages of the Council's performance on empty properties;
- c) Continually reviewing and updating the Council's procedures;
- d) Considering any initiatives to reduce the numbers of difficult-to-let properties, such as the conversion of bedsit dwellings to one bed flats; and
- e) Compliance with the Council's Empty Property Standard

6. Statutory Requirements

6.1 The relevant statutory requirements for the management of empty properties are as follows:

- a) Landlord and Tenant Act
 - Fitness for human habitation (Section 10)
- b) Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regulations 1996
- c) Housing Act 1996 (as amended)
 - Allocation of Housing Accommodation (Part VI)
 - Homelessness (Part VII)
- d) Race Relations Act 1976
 - Code of Practice in Rented Housing

7. Client Consultation, Information & Involvement

7.1 In 2010, the Council set up a Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group which is an officer and tenant group. The Group have been consulted on the new Void Standard, the new Homes Information Pack provided to new tenants when they take up their tenancies. In addition, one representative of the group will be shadowing a Housing Officer (Voids) on a small number of empty properties throughout the void management process and will be given the opportunity to comment.

7.2 This Empty Properties Strategy has been formulated in consultation with representatives of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

7.3 The Council operates a choice based lettings scheme which provides information to all homeseekers on available properties. Homeseekers can then express an interest in properties.

8. General Principles

8.1 Section 5 of this Strategy sets out the aims and objectives on the management of empty Council properties. This Section details the general approach taken and procedures, which are in place.

8.2 The voids and lettings process starts with existing tenants giving 4 weeks notice of vacation. The notice is acted upon immediately by the Housing Options Section, with the tenancy termination being accepted and recorded.

8.3 This enables Housing Options staff to advertise the property under the choice based lettings scheme selecting the applicant with the highest priority under the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme within each short-list for each property.

8.4 At the expiry of the notice, Housing Options staff receive the keys from the outgoing tenant and pass them to Housing Repairs Service who arrange, in all vacant Council properties, for the following essential works:

- Replacement door locks
- Gas safety check
- Electrical safety check
- Rubbish removal
- General clean of kitchen cupboards, worktops and bathroom sanitary ware

8.5 Whilst this is taking place, the Housing Options Section contacts the selected housing applicant to advise them of the vacancy and arrange for them to view the property.

9. Empty Property Standard

9.1 Appropriate works to every empty property will be undertaken to ensure that it meets with the Council's agreed Void Standard, prior to the new tenant taking up occupation which is as follows:

Cleaning and property clearance

- All cobwebs will be removed and the property swept out.
- Kitchen units, all worktop surfaces and sinks will be thoroughly cleaned and all cleaning residue to be rinsed away.
- All bathroom fittings, such as toilet, sink and bath will be cleaned.
- Toilets will be thoroughly cleaned.
- Internal windows and frames will be cleaned and washed down.
- All storage cupboards will be swept and mopped.
- All stairways and steps will be swept

Decoration

- The acceptable standard for decoration is that the walls and ceilings shall be in a good state of repair, to allow the incoming tenant to decorate.
- Minor indentations and cracks will be considered acceptable.
- Minor damage and chipped paintwork is considered as acceptable.

- An appropriate decorations allowance will be awarded (based upon the decorative state of the property and the size of the rooms that need decorating) in the form of a Homebase voucher. This approach assists in keeping void times to a minimum. If the property is designated for occupation for a person over 60 years of age, where a decoration allowance has been provided, the new tenant can request that instead of receiving the allowance, the Council decorates two rooms of their choice.

Electrical safety

- There will be a minimum of 1 light fitting in each room and all staircases will have lighting.
- Light bulbs are the responsibility of the incoming tenant; however the Council will provide bulbs for the hallway and landing.
- All switches, sockets and fuse boxes will be free from cracking and will be properly secured.
- On occupation the new tenant will be provided with an electrical safety test certificate to confirm that the electric installation is safe to use.

Gas Safety

- There will be no gas leaks at the property
- Any old gas fires will be removed if the property has full gas central heating (without a back boiler), the tiled fire place surround will be removed and any opening will be blocked up, re-plastered and a vent provided.
- The gas cooker point will be capped off for safety.
- Upon occupation the new tenant will be provided with a Landlords Gas Safety Certificate, where a gas supply exists. The tenant will need to contact the Council's gas contractor for the area in which they live to re-commission the heating system.

General

- All handrails and balustrades where fitted will be safe and secure.
- All floor surfaces will be safe and secure
- The property will be free from dampness and any mould growth from condensation will be fungicidally washed to reduce risk of re-occurrence.
- The loft (where there is one) will be clear and empty.

- We will provide new tenants with a copy of the Energy Performance Certificate, which gives an indication on the energy consumption for the property.

Kitchen

- All work surfaces will be secure and free from cracks or burns and safe for the preparation of food.
- The kitchen will be clean with all units washed down and disinfected
- Kitchen units will be sound and serviceable with all drawers and doors operating without binding or catching. Damaged or missing drawers will be replaced.
- Non-standard units in good condition will be left in place and where partial replacements are required; these will be completed using the Council's standard white melamine range or doors and drawers.
- All plinths to be fitted where required.
- Where there is a live electric and or gas supply, the hot water supplies will be checked and left working, However, where there is no active electric or gas supply, the hot water will be checked when the property is let.
- There will be a space for a cooker and a cooker connection point supplied (gas and electric if gas is available to the property).
- There will be two double electrical sockets (where space permits)
- If space allows, we will provide space for a fridge and a washing machine.
- Where possible, a cold water washing machine isolation connection, waste and fused spur will be provided.
- Water isolation valves will be clearly labeled.
- There will be a sink base unit and 1000mm floor unit & 1000mm wall unit (or equivalent) in studio/one bed units
- There will be a sink base unit and 2000 mm floor unit & 2000mm wall unit in 2, 3 or 4 bed units, where space allows.

Bathroom

- Sanitary ware will be cleaned and be free from chips, cracks and leaks.
- The WC will be fitted with a toilet seat.
- All sanitary ware will have working taps, plugs and chains.
- There will be at least one row of wall tiles as a splash back around wash hand basins and baths.
- Where there is a shower the walls will be tiled in that immediate area only.

Windows and Doors

- All broken, cracked or “misted” glass will be replaced.
- All rooms will be fitted with a door where all latches, locks, hinges and handles will operate correctly and safely.
- Before the new tenant takes up occupation, the main front entrance door lock will be changed. Any additional lock changes will be the responsibility of the incoming tenant.
- Any windows with locks or restriction devices will be checked and be fully operational prior to the new tenant moving in.
- A key for the meter cupboard will be provided where required.

External areas

- The roof will be water tight
- All down pipes will be safely secured and free from leaks
- Any permanent outbuildings will be cleared prior to occupation and any broken or damaged glazing removed. Any replacement glass in sheds or greenhouses will be the responsibility of the tenant to repair.
- The access path leading to the front door of the property will be safe and not restricted. Any additional paved or concrete areas will be the responsibility of the new tenant to maintain and repair.
- The garden will be cleared of any rubbish, and any large trees checked to ensure safety, but is otherwise will be the responsibility of the incoming tenant

10. Performance Output Specifications

10.1 In order to minimise the time it takes to undertake repairs to empty properties, in December 2011, the Council has entered into an agreement with a Repairs Contractor to undertake the works under a Performance Output Specification. Under this arrangement, the Contractor will, in accordance with the Council’s Void Standard, undertake an inspection of the property, carry out the works and returning the keys to the Council within a maximum period (which will apply for major works as well) of 10 days. The Council will undertake the post inspection to confirm the value and quality of the works. This is expected to substantially reduce the period of time it takes to complete works to empty properties as well as reduce the administrative burden.

11. Completion of Works

11.1 In order to reduce the period that properties remain empty as much work as possible will be undertaken whilst the tenant is in occupation. Any works that need to be undertaken due to the negligence of the outgoing tenant will be recharged.

11.2 On completion of repairs that need to be undertaken prior to occupation, the Housing Options Team issues a formal offer of tenancy and makes arrangements for the prospective tenant to attend the Civic Offices and sign them up to the tenancy.

11.3 Generally, for properties becoming ready for letting on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the tenancy start date will be the following Monday. For properties becoming ready for letting on Thursdays or Fridays the tenancy start date will be the second Monday following.

11.4 One type of property that is consistently difficult-to-let is bedsit accommodation in sheltered housing schemes. This is because older applicants are looking to move from larger, self-contained, accommodation and, understandably, are not prepared to move to significantly smaller accommodation. As a result, the Council has undertaken a number of major improvement/conversion schemes at sheltered housing schemes to convert bedsits into self-contained flats. The last two such schemes have been facilitated through a stock transfer of the building and tenants to a housing association, following financial appraisals that established that such an approach would be more cost effective to the Council than undertaking the conversion itself. In addition, when the opportunity arises, the Council has converted three adjacent vacant bedsits in sheltered housing schemes into two self contained flats.

12. Action Plan

12.1 The following actions will be undertaken in the future by the Housing Directorate in order to improve performance in the management of empty Council properties:

Action	Lead Officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Consider the introduction of property enhancements and incentives for difficult-to-let properties	Voids Working Party	December 2012	Within existing resources
Arrange for a tenant representative from the Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group to shadow Housing Officers throughout the void process	Voids Working Party	April 2012	Within existing resources
Monitor the success of the Performance Output arrangements in respect of voids work	Voids Working Party	December 2012	Within existing resources
Consider the use of multiple accompanied viewings for difficult-to-let properties	Voids Working Party	December 2012	Within existing resources
Advertise difficult-to-let studios in private sector advertisements section of local press	Voids Working Party	December 2012	Within existing resources
Explore the benefits of moving to a weekly choice based lettings property list	Voids Working Party	December 2012	Within existing resources

Action	Lead Officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Cabinet to consider the appointment of an Under-Occupation Officer under the list of housing improvements and service enhancements	Voids Working Party	December 2012	Within existing resources

13. Future Developments

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

<p>Strengths</p> <p>Knowledgeable and committed staff Policy and Procedures manual Integrated housing system Compliance with the ISO 9001:2008 Accreditation Customer Service Excellence Award Good relationships with tenants Good tenant consultation framework Repair and Maintenance Focus Group Officer Voids Working Party Comprehensive performance monitoring Customer Improvement meetings Void Standard</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>All new council tenancies start on Monday, which creates peaks and troughs in workload</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Success of Performance Output specifications</p> <p>Additional supply chain contractors engaged in the re-servicing work to void properties</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>Economic climate The Council’s staff recruitment restrictions</p> <p>Keys need to be passed to HRS on a daily basis to reduce risk of 8 keys in one day, which impacts on HRS delivery of 10 working day target (see Weaknesses above)</p>

14. Resourcing the Strategy

14.1 All staff are included in the Performance Development Review process, whereby they have an annual interview to assess their own performance including a six-monthly update on progress. All new staff receives induction training and has access to a mentor. Recent training received by staff, which relates to this Strategy, is as follows:

- Training as part of the two-monthly Section Meetings
- IT Training
- Staff briefings on various matters
- Data Protection training
- Recruitment and Selection training for Managers
- Performance Development Review training for Managers
- Managing Sickness Absence training for Managers
- Health and Safety training

14.2 The projection for the number of staff required to deliver the strategy over this year and the following 3 years is detailed in the following table:

Staff Resource Projections				
Posts	2011/2012	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Total FTE	4.125	4.025	3.025	3.025

14.3 It is anticipated that the level of resources required to manage the voids process on a day-to-day basis will reduce over the next 2-years for two reasons. Firstly, the storekeeper role will be undertaken by a new materials supplier following an EU compliant tender in 2012/13. Secondly, the amount of generic Repairs Officers' time will reduce as the procedure is streamlined (as set out in Section 10 above).

14.4 The following table sets out the estimated proportion of void management, and other officer's time, spent on empty properties, but excluding the in-house tradesmen or Contractors who may undertake the works:

Staff Resources Breakdown	
Posts	FTE
Director of Housing	0.025
Assistant Director of Housing (Property)	0.05
Housing Repairs Manager	0.1
Area Repairs Manager (North)	0.2
Area Repairs Manager (South)	0.2
Assistant Area Repairs Manager (North)	0.25
Assistant Area Repairs Manager (South)	0.25
Generic Repairs Officers	2
Customer Repairs Assistant	0.2
Store Keeper	0.1
Housing Options staff	0.75
Total	4.125

15 Key Targets & Performance Monitoring

15.1 The performance for 2010/2011 together with the proposed key targets for the following three years is detailed in the table below:

Key Targets & Performance				
Performance Indicator	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
	(Actual)	(Actual)	(Target)	(Target)
Average time to re-let vacant properties (excluding difficult-to-let, from tenancy termination to tenancy commencement)	33 (calendar days)	31 (calendar days)	30 (calendar days)	25 (calendar days)
% rent loss from empty properties (<u>including difficult-to-lets</u>)	0.85%	1.03%	1.0%	0.9%
Average time for Housing Repairs Service to complete repairs	12.45 (calendar days)	18.7 (calendar days)	15 (calendar days)	10 (calendar days)
Average re-let time after becoming available to let (excluding difficult-to-let)	20 (calendar days)	12 (calendar days)	15 (calendar days)	15 (calendar days)
% <u>of all</u> properties vacant as a % of total housing stock	1.62%	1%	1%	0.95%

16. Reviewing the Strategy

16.1 The Strategy for empty Council properties will be reviewed by the Housing Scrutiny Panel and agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in April 2015.

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Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 13th March 2012

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr M. McEwen

Subject: Solar PV to Council Housing

Officer contact for further information:

Paul Pledger, Assistant Director of Housing (Property) (01992 564281)

Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins



Recommendations:

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel suspend the proposed further feasibility study into the installation of Solar PV on Council-owned buildings, following the Government's recent decision to significantly reduce the level of Feed In Tariff, which makes the project unviable over a 25-year life cycle without significant additional funding from the Council.

Executive Summary:

The Housing Scrutiny Panel considered and supported a feasibility report into the installation of Solar Photovoltaic panels on Council-owned properties throughout the District. However, shortly after that decision was made, the Government announced a significant cut in the amount of grant known as the "Feed-In Tariff" (FIT), which was to help offset the high one-off capital cost of installing Solar PV to generate electricity. The Government's decision is currently subject to a legal challenge. However, the outcome is unlikely to revert back to the original level of funding, and therefore any scheme the Council may introduce would no longer generate a rate of return significant enough to be cost-neutral over the 25-year life of the FIT grant.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Since the new FIT will no longer offset the costs of installing the Solar Photovoltaic panels within their 25-year life cycle, there are no financial benefits to the Council, even though residents would continue to benefit from the free electricity.

Other Options for Action:

To continue to explore the installation of Solar PV to the Council's housing stock, making use of the additional capital available through HRA Self-Financing .

Introduction and Background

1. Since the Housing Scrutiny Panel's meeting in October 2011, when it considered a report on a future programme of installing Solar PV on Council-owned properties across the District, the Government has announced a significant reduction in the level of grant available through the Feed-In Tariffs, over and above the original sliding scale published at the outset

of its introduction.

2. To give an indication of the scale of the reduction, in 2012/13, the original FIT was 39.6p per KW/hr. However, under the Government's new proposals, the equivalent FIT would be 21p per KW/hr, which is almost a 50% reduction.

3. The scale of the change has caused some turmoil in the industry, with many installers either ceasing to trade or writing-off significant investment and start-up costs. This means that the number of installers available to tender would be far more limited than before, which may lead to higher costs. In addition, this reduction has virtually wiped out the opportunity for a "Rent a Roof" scheme, as the investment costs and rate of return make the scheme unviable at the current time.

4. According to the Council's consultant, the rate of return on investment on houses will reduce from 8.74% internal rate of return (based on the original FIT rate) to 0.15% (based on the new proposed FIT rate), which establishes that this programme is no longer financially viable. It is therefore recommended that the proposed feasibility study into the installation of Solar PV on Council-owned buildings previously suggested by the Housing Scrutiny Panel is suspended.

Resource Implications:

Capital: Nil

Revenue: Nil

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Climate Change Act 2008
Housing Act 1985

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Generation of renewable energy

Consultation Undertaken:

None

Background Papers:

Initial feasibility study prepared by Climate Consulting Ltd on behalf of the Council & the follow up report, taking account of the Governments announcement to reduce the FIT.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

(1) None

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, No. has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?

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

None

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?

N/A

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