

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel **Date:** Monday, 5 March 2012

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 5.30 - 8.55 pm

Members Present: A Mitchell MBE (Vice-Chairman, acting as Chairman), Ms R Brookes, Ms J Hart, D Stallan, H Ulkun, Mrs J H Whitehouse and Hyde (Tenants and Leaseholders Federation)

Other Councillors: J Knapman and Mrs M McEwen

Apologies: S Murray, Mrs A Grigg and Mrs S Jones

Officers Present: A Hall (Director of Housing), L Swan (Assistant Director (Private Sector & Resources)) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

Also in attendance: A Chowns (CPC Project Services LLP) and P Wilson (Wilson Associates)

47. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

It was noted that Councillor Mrs J Lea was substituting for Councillor Mrs A Grigg.

48. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman took over the Chairmanship and proposed that Councillor D Stallan serve as Vice-Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor D Stallan serve as Vice-Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

49. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

50. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 31 January 2012 be agreed.

51. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Terms of Reference

The Panel's Terms of Reference were noted.

(b) Work Programme

The following was noted:

(i) The following items were being deferred to the July 2012 meeting of the Panel:

- Item 17 Housing Service Strategy on Repairs and Maintenance
- Item 18 Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency
- Item 19 Housing Service Strategy on Home Ownership
- Item 21 Housing Service Strategy on Rent Administration

(ii) Item 25 The Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme would be discussed in October 2012, it was advised that there was likely to be a fundamental change in the scheme.

(iii) Item 29 Licences for Park Home Sites. Officers were awaiting more information from Essex Fire and Rescue Service. It was hoped that an extra-ordinary meeting of the Panel would be scheduled some time in April 2012, otherwise it would be arranged for June 2012. The Panel were advised that it had been proposed by the Council's management Board that one representative of the Park Home Site owners and one representative of park homes resident's associations should be invited to speak at the meeting. However, both groups had asked that all site owners and representatives of all residents associations should be able to speak at the meeting. Officers therefore asked the Scrutiny Panel to determine the number of speakers that should be invited from each group.

RESOLVED:

That at the extra-ordinary meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel convened to discuss licences for park homes sites, the following public speaking arrangements be made:

(1) That two representatives from the Park Home Site Owners in the District be permitted to speak regarding licence conditions for park homes; and

(2) That two representatives from park home residents associations in the District be permitted to speak regarding licence conditions for park homes.

It was noted that the meeting would be webcast.

(iv) Item 32 Homelessness Strategy. This item was being held over to July 2012.

52. OUTCOME OF PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSE CONDITION SURVEY AND PROPOSED NEW PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL STRATEGY

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector and Resources) regarding Private Sector Housing Strategy 2012 – 15.

The report sought the Panel's endorsement of the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy (PSHS) covering the period 2012 – 2015. The draft strategy implemented changes to the policies set out in the previous PSHS 2007 – 2011 for financial assistance to promote the repair and improvement of sub-standard private sector

housing and the adaptation of properties where there was a person with a disability. It also implemented changes to policies in the previous PSHS dealing with the enforcement of private sector housing standards and for giving advice, assistance and specialist support.

The District Council has a responsibility for keeping housing conditions within its borders under review, enforcing statutory standards to ensure satisfactory conditions in the private housing sector and offering financial assistance to repair and/or improve sub standard dwellings. Alongside these, a mandatory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) also existed.

By invitation, Mr A Chowns gave a presentation on the Private Sector House Condition Survey on behalf of CPC Project Services LLP and Mr P Wilson gave a presentation on the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy on behalf of Wilson Associates. The presentation slides used are attached to these notes.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That the Panel recommends the Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2012 – 15 for further consultation with key partners and stakeholders, with appropriate comments being incorporated in the final version of the Strategy;
- (2) That the final version of the Strategy be submitted to the Cabinet with recommendation that it be formally adopted; and
- (3) That the Panel monitors progress with the Action Plan on an annual basis.

53. CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSED LIST OF HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS AND SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements – HRA Financial Plan.

At its meeting on 5 December 2011, the Cabinet approved the strategic approach to the new 30-Year HRA Financial Plan. The agreed approach was to plan the repayment of the required loans to fund the CLG's debt settlement over a 30 year period. This enabled the Council to maintain the housing stock to a modern standard, implement a new Council Housebuilding Programme and allow a lower rent increase in April 2012 than assumed by the Government. It also allowed for an additional £770,000 per annum to fund housing and service improvements. The Cabinet had asked the Panel to consider and recommend a proposal list of housing improvements and service enhancements, utilising the additional funding. A proposed list of 14 housing improvements and service enhancements were submitted to the Panel, they were as follows:

- (a) Acceleration of the Programme to install mains-powered smoke detectors in every Council property within 4/5 years
- (b) Provision of a free Handyperson Scheme for older and disabled tenants living in sheltered and other Council accommodation
- (c) Increasing the Disabled Adaptations Budget for one year
- (d) Conversion of existing toilet facilities in communal areas of sheltered housing schemes and community halls into disabled toilets

- (e) Refurbishment of the Common Room and Kitchen Area at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey
- (f) Expansion and refurbishment of the Council's Play Area on the Princesfield Estate, Waltham Abbey
- (g) Making the existing temporary Part time Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud) post permanent and full time (already recommended to the Cabinet)
- (h) Creation of a Senior Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud) Post
- (i) Installation of Key Safes at Sheltered Housing Schemes
- (j) Creation of a new Post of Housing Under-Occupation Officer
- (k) Increasing the existing budget for Estate Improvements and Enhancements
- (l) Expansion of the VAEF Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Disabled Tenants
- (m) Provision of additional dog waste bins on housing estates
- (n) In-Year Housing Improvements and Enhancements Fund

At the meeting, it was suggested an additional proposal of providing a one-off grant of £10,000 to the Furniture Recycling Scheme Project that was trying to establish itself within the District, which the Panel agreed to include within the list recommended to the Cabinet.

It was estimated that the following additional funding could be made available within the Financial Plan for further housing improvements and service enhancements in future years:

- (i) An additional £750,000 per annum from April 2013;
- (ii) A further £250,000 per annum from April 2017;
- (iii) The bringing forward of the previously planned £4.7 million increase by one year in April 2019; and
- (iv) An additional £250,000 per annum in April 2019.

It was proposed that a further recommendation be made to the Cabinet that, at its meeting in January 2013, the Panel consider and recommend to the Cabinet the use of both the remaining and any additional funding available within the HRA Financial Plan for housing improvements and service enhancements in 2013/14 and future years.

The Tenants and leaseholders Federation had considered the proposals in advance of the Panel meeting and had supported all the proposals put forward by officers.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That, the Panel reports to the Cabinet and recommend the list of Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements funded from the

£770,000 per annum budget included within the 30-Year HRA Financial Plan as a result of the HRA self-financing arrangements;

(2) That, the Cabinet be asked to record the detailed recommendations emboldened in the Cabinet minutes;

(3) That a recommendation be made to the Cabinet that, at its meeting in January 2013, the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel consider and recommend to the Cabinet the use of both the remaining and any additional funding available within the HRA Financial Plan for housing improvements and service enhancements in 2013/14 and future years, after consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;

(4) That the Panel's report to the Cabinet be based on the content and approach of the report by officers to the Panel; and

(5) That the Panel Chairman present this report to the Cabinet on the 23 April 2012.

54. HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN - 6 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding the Housing Strategy - Six Month Progress Report on Key Action Plan 2011/12 and production of a new Housing Strategy.

At its meeting in September 2009, the Cabinet adopted the Housing Strategy 2009-2012. The Housing Strategy assessed the District's current and future housing needs and set out the Council's approach to meeting those needs. The strategy also included a Key Action Plan which set out the proposed actions that would be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives over the first year of the Housing Strategy. The Cabinet also agreed that the Key Action Plans should be produced and updated on an annual basis for approval by the Cabinet and that progress with the Key Action Plans should be monitored on a 6 monthly basis by this Panel.

It was originally anticipated that the Housing Strategy would cover the three year period 2009-2012 and would be updated during 2012 to cover the following three years. However, there were a number of important issues that were expected to be concluded by the Council over the next year which would have a significant impact on the strategy. These included:

- A refresh of the Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment;
- The production of the Council's Strategic Housing Land Assessment through the "Call for Sites" exercise;
- The production of the Council's Draft Local Plan, which would set out the Council's proposed plans on the number and proposed location of new homes in the District; and
- The Council's decisions on housing issues relating to the Localism Act, including a revised eligibility criteria for the Council's Housing Register and the possibility of the introduction of fixed term flexible tenancies by the Council, instead of "lifetime" secure tenancies.

Under these circumstances, it was not considered yet possible to formulate a robust and sustainable Housing Strategy for the next three years.

Therefore, it was suggested that consideration should be given to advising the Housing Portfolio Holder that the production of the next Housing Strategy be deferred for one year, and produced in 2013/14. In the meantime, it was further suggested that an updated Housing Strategy Key Action Plan for 2012/13 be considered by the Panel in July 2012, and that progress with the Action Plan be then monitored on a six monthly basis by the Panel in the normal way.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That the 6 Month progress Report on the Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2011/12 be noted;
- (2) That a recommendation be made to the Housing Portfolio Holder that:
 - (a) The production of the next Housing Strategy be deferred for one year, and be produced in 2013./14, due to the number of issues that are expected to be concluded over the next year; and
 - (b) That, in the meantime, a further Housing Strategy Key Action Plan for 2012/13 be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel in July 2012 for recommendation to the Cabinet, with progress monitored on a six-monthly basis by the Panel.

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

There were no reports being submitted to the forthcoming meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

56. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Panel was scheduled for Tuesday 13 March 2012 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1.

CHAIRMAN

going beyond: project management business consulting construction and property services



Presentation to: Epping Forest District Council

Private Sector House Condition Survey 2011

House Condition Surveying (background)



- Councils are obliged by the Housing Act 2004 to keep housing conditions in their area under review
- The survey forms part of the evidence base for the development of new private sector sub-strategies (**For example** Private Sector Housing Renewal / Empty Homes)
- Age and relevance of HCS report forms part of audit (currently under the Audit Commission which is to be replaced in December 2012)

House Condition Surveying (method)



- **This was a stratified random sample survey of 1,000 dwellings.**
- **Each dwelling was surveyed internally and externally, and for energy efficiency, health and safety hazards, amenity provision and socio-economic characteristics.**
- **Each individual survey was given a weight.**
- **Results are based on these weights in order to represent the whole of the dwelling stock.**

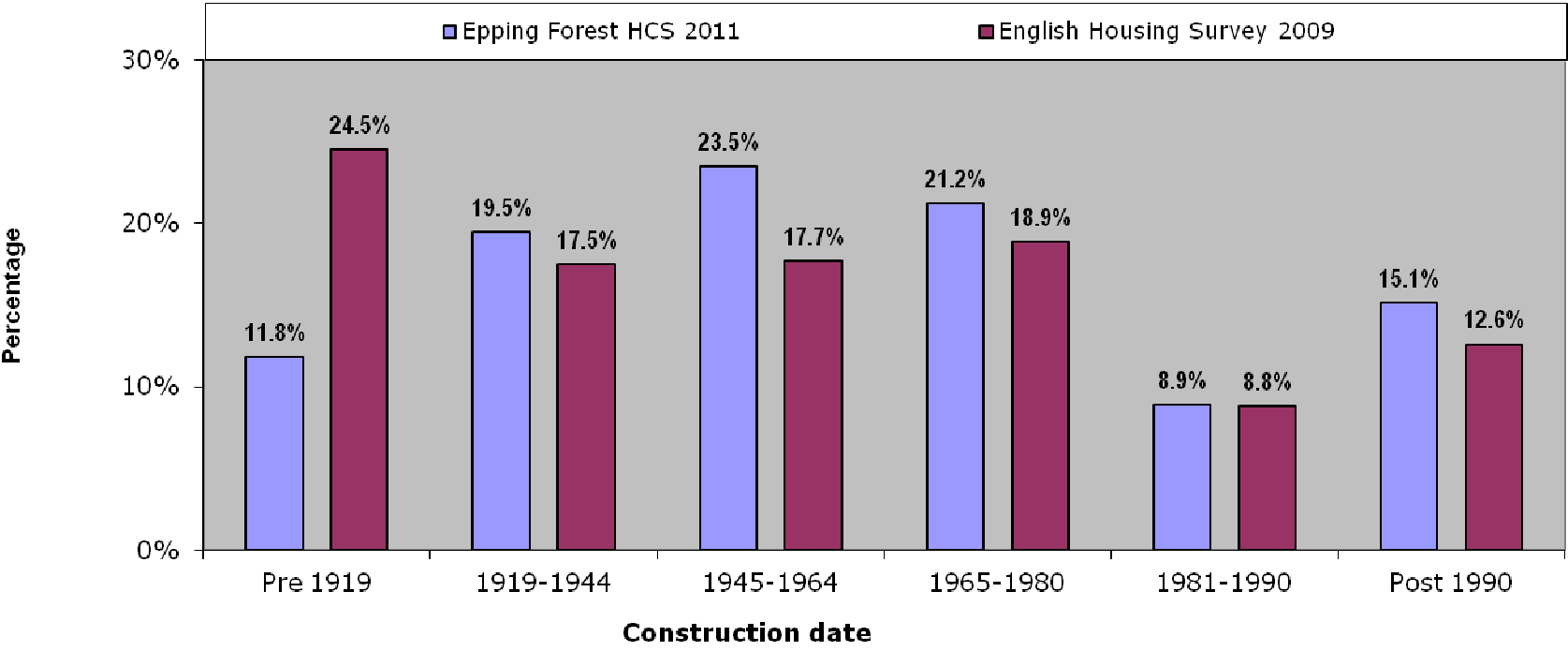
EFDC: predominant features

All England comparisons from English House Condition Survey (EHCS) 2009



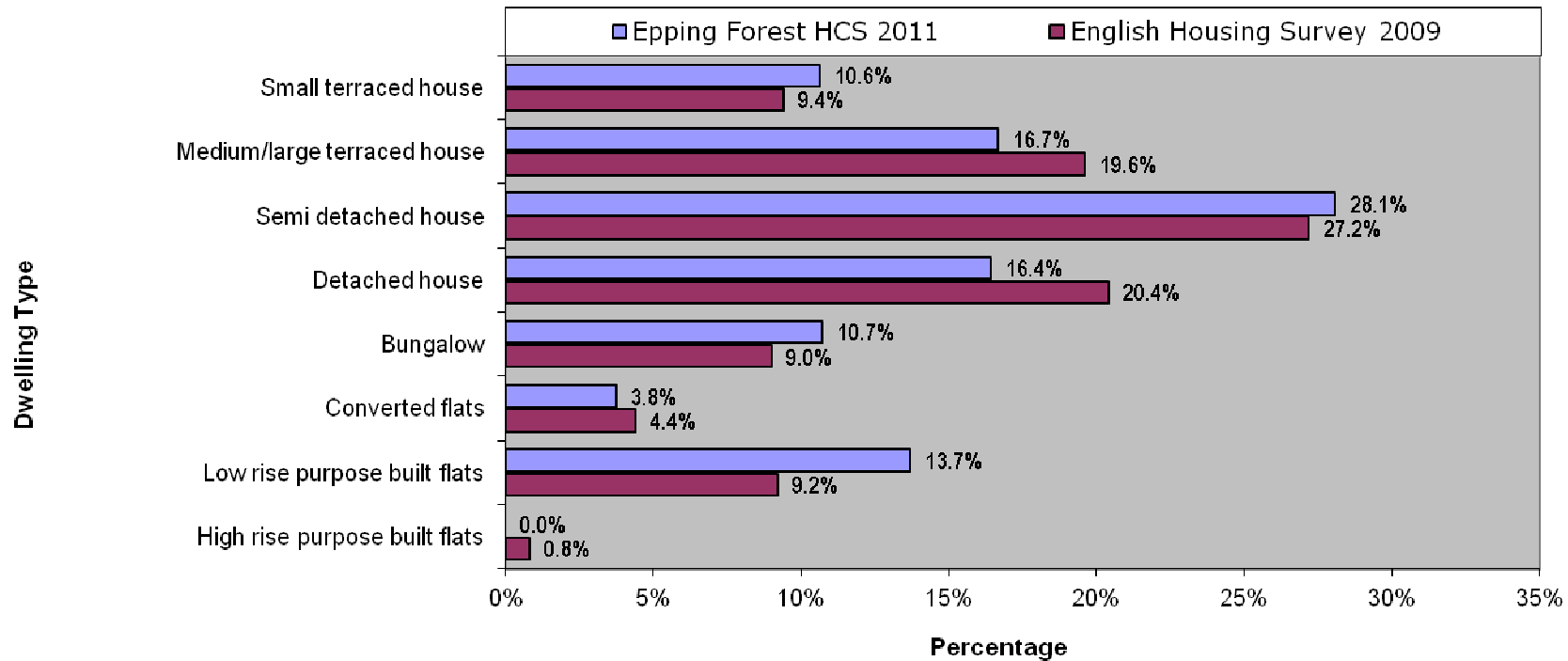
Tenure	Dwellings	%age	EHCS 2009
Owner occupied	38,920	70%	67%
Privately Rented	7,750	15%	16%
Private Sector Stock	44,670	85%	83%
Housing Association (RSL)	1,610	3%	9%
Local Authority & Other Public	6,650	12%	8%
Social Housing	8,260	15%	17%
All Tenures	52,930	100%	100%

EFDC: Construction Date of Dwellings



- Fewer dwellings built pre-1919
- Highest proportion built from 1945-1964

EFDC: Dwelling Types



- **More small terraced, semi-detached and low rise purpose built flats**
- **More bungalows but this type also includes mobile homes which are not included in the EHS dwelling type profile. When excluded bungalows show a slightly lower proportion than that found nationally**

EFDC: Household Profile

- **More heads of household in the 54-64 age group than nationally than nationally**
- **More heads of household in the 65+ age group than nationally**
- **More couples with no dependent child (43.1% compared to 40.2%) than in England overall, and one person households (29.5% compared to 24.9%) but with lower proportions of all other households types.**
- **Average incomes were less than those for England (including all income, not just earnings)**
- **Benefit receipt at 20% is the same as the national average.**

The Decent Homes Standard



A 'Decent Home' meets the following 4 Criteria:

- a) It meets the current minimum statutory standard for housing;**
- b) It is in a reasonable state of repair;**
- c) It has reasonably modern facilities; and,**
- d) It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.**

The Decent Homes Standard (results)



Criteria		Private Sector Non Decent	Private Sector Non Decent %	England Non decent %
A	Category 1 Hazard	6,010	13.5%	22.0%
B	Disrepair	4,790	10.7%	6.3%
C	Facilities	230	0.5%	2.8%
D	Thermal comfort	5,560	12.4%	10.9%
	Overall*	11,690	26.2%	31.5%

- **Failure rate largely driven by Category 1 Hazards and energy efficiency standards**
- **Non-Decency increased from April 2006 (Due to the introduction of the HHSRS)**

Non-Decency Criterion Failure by tenure

Tenure Name	Category 1 Hazard	Disrepair	Lacking Modern Facilities	Thermal Comfort Failure	Non Decent
Owner occupied	11.2%	10.1%	0.3%	7.1%	21.2%
Privately rented	24.3%	13.7%	1.7%	37.9%	49.7%



Non-Decency Criterion Failure by Construction Date

Construction date	Category 1 Hazard	Disrepair	Lacking Modern Facilities	Thermal Comfort Failure	Non Decent
Pre 1919	12.1%	19.2%	1.7%	9.2%	32.5%
1919-1944	16.3%	9.1%	0.4%	6.3%	25.5%
1945-1964	11.0%	10.2%	0.3%	8.2%	21.1%
1965-1980	14.7%	19.6%	0.4%	18.0%	33.4%
1981-1990	22.8%	1.5%	0.9%	35.9%	39.4%
Post 1990	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%	7.9%	12.0%

Non-Decency Criterion Failure by Dwelling Type

Dwelling type	Category 1 Hazard	Disrepair	Lacking Modern Facilities	Thermal Comfort Failure	Non Decent
Small terraced house	5.4%	10.9%	1.2%	9.2%	18.8%
Medium/large terraced house	6.6%	16.4%	0.4%	7.0%	22.1%
Semi detached house	11.3%	9.4%	0.1%	3.7%	18.9%
Detached house	14.9%	5.8%	0.1%	8.1%	20.8%
Bungalow	15.1%	10.0%	0.2%	1.7%	18.3%
Converted flats	15.2%	17.1%	1.9%	9.7%	32.0%
Low rise purpose built flats	21.7%	11.3%	0.9%	47.8%	54.0%
Mobile Homes*	63.3%	8.4%	2.0%	42.6%	75.2%

*There were 940 mobile homes representing 2.1% of the total stock.

Non-Decency Criterion Failure by Sub-area

Area Name	Category 1 Hazard	Disrepair	Lacking Modern Facilities	Thermal Comfort Failure	Non Decent
Epping and South	12.6%	10.6%	0.4%	12.2%	25.1%
Ongar and North	15.6%	15.2%	0.9%	12.6%	30.8%
Waltham Abbey	12.4%	2.5%	0.1%	12.8%	21.1%

Category 1 Hazards

- **Shift from unfitness to Category 1 Hazards – mandatory duty to take action where identified**
- **6,010 dwellings with Category 1 Hazards (13.5% compared with 22.0% nationally).**
- **Primary hazard failures:**
 - Excess Cold (76%) : Falling on Stairs (14%)**
- **Strongly associated with the private rented sector; mobile homes and low rise purpose built flats; those on a low income, those in receipt of a benefit, those aged under 25 and residents with a disability.**

Costs to make Decent



Reason	Total Cost (£ millions)	Cost per dwelling (£)
Category 1 Hazard	£34.4	£5,720
Repair	£28.7	£6,000
Amenities	£4.2	£18,570
Thermal Comfort	£9.4	£1,700
Total	£76.8	£6,570

Funding Options for Non-Decency Work



- **Regulatory Reform Order placed the primary responsibility on owners to maintain their own property, while recognising that vulnerable households still required assistance**
- **Specifically targeted grants offered by EFDC**
- **Interest bearing repayment loans**
- **Interest only loans**
- **Zero interest loans**
- **Equity release schemes**

Key Issues



- **Affordability – Older residents on lower income (pension and benefit receipt)**
- **Affordability - Relatively high levels of equity**
- **Vulnerability – 7,000 (16.3%) households have at least one resident with a disability**
- **Vulnerability - More residents age 65 and over (30%) than the national average (25%)**
- **2,780 (33.2%) of vulnerable households living in non-Decent dwellings**
- **An ageing population will increase demand for housing and support services putting pressure on budgets such as adaptations**

Key issues (cont...)

- **Maximise energy efficiency - EFDC should provide advice and where possible assistance to help improve the energy efficiency of dwellings and reduce Fuel Poverty.**
- **Fuel poverty at 14.0% though just below the national rate of 17.9% (EHS 2009), still posing a significant issue. The rise in fuel prices (3% increase between 2009 and the first quarter of 2011) causing a significant increase.**

The Future for Private Sector Housing

- **Continuing obligation to monitor housing conditions in the private sector.**
- **Continuing obligation to take action where Category 1 Hazards are identified.**
- **Continuing obligation to provide Disabled Facilities Grants.**
- **Continuing obligation to update private sector housing strategies.**
- **Increasing need to drive and monitor improvements in energy efficiency.**

CPC

Thank You

Epping Forest District Council

Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2012 – 2015

Housing Scrutiny Panel - 5 March 2012

Purpose of Report

- The Epping Forest DC Private Sector Housing Strategy 2007 – 2011 and is now due for review
- Purpose of this report is to seek your views on a draft Strategy to cover the period 2012 – 2015
- Draft will then form the basis for further consultation prior to submission to Cabinet
- Report also asks that the Panel considers progress with the Action Plan included in the report on an annual basis
- The draft Strategy involves significant changes in particular to the framework for offering financial assistance
- Also affects enforcement and the way that information, advice and specialist support is offered

The Broader Role in Private Sector Housing

- Local authorities have long had a responsibility to deal with unsatisfactory housing both through intervention using statutory powers and by offering financial assistance
- The Housing Act 2004 has retained a duty (Section 3) for local authorities to keep conditions in their area under review
- The role of a local authority is not just to await complaints (although dealing effectively with complaints is very important)
- Should also adopt a proactive response to deal with unsatisfactory conditions
- Aim of House Condition Survey is to give information to allow priorities for scarce resources to be allocated

Factors Driving New Strategy

- Range of factors drive draft Strategy:
 - National and relevant local policies
 - The local context:
 - Local District profile
 - The local housing market
 - Results from the House Condition Survey
 - A review of progress in the past four years
 - Financial factors likely to have an impact on the strategy
 - Comments from consultation

National Policies

- Since the 2007 Strategy there has been a change in Government and significant change in the financial climate - major Government priority is reducing deficit
- New Government has published *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*
- Has also enacted:
 - Localism Act 2011
 - Energy Act 2011

National Policies

- **Localism Act 2011** – gives greater freedom for local decision making (in particular moving away from regional targets)
- **Energy Act 2011** - provides for:
 - Green Deal** – no up front payment for energy efficiency work – paid for over a period of years from energy savings
 - Energy Company Obligation** – compulsory contribution from energy companies – to be used where properties hard to heat eg solid walls or vulnerable households
- **Laying the Foundations** focuses very much on revitalising the housing market but two priorities very relevant:
 - Thriving private rented sector (with high standards)
 - Bringing long term empty homes back into use (New Homes Bonus)

National Policies

Housing Act 2004 & Regulatory Reform Order 2002 remain the main relevant statutory provisions:

Housing Act 2004:

- Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Mandatory licensing of higher risk HMOs
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders for long term empty homes

Regulatory Reform Order 2002

- Gives councils the power to set their own local framework for discretionary financial assistance (grants/loans) to suit local needs
- Must offer mandatory DFGs
- However, must demonstrate that have taken account of national & local strategies and local housing conditions & needs
- Move towards loans/equity release Government policy

Local Policies

- A number of local strategies and policies are highly relevant
- Draft strategy has taken into account the Corporate Plan, Community Strategy, Local Plan, Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and Supporting People Strategy
- Consistent themes emerge:
 - Maximising the supply of affordable housing
 - Reducing health inequalities
 - Promoting energy efficiency and reducing Fuel Poverty
 - Promoting independent living for vulnerable groups
 - Developing an appropriate and reliable equity release product
 - Working with private sector landlords to promote the availability of affordable housing in particular for those potentially homeless

The Local Profile

- Population growth in the District lower than County & Region
- Age profile shows that higher proportion of residents post 65 years
- 16% of households where at least one resident with disabilities
- HCS estimated that potential cost of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) over the next five years at £3.7 million even after means testing
- Unemployment rate (7.0%) just above regional figure but below national average
- The District generally perceived as affluent and higher proportions of working people in managerial & professional roles
- However, Indices of Multiple Deprivation at very local level do show that there are pockets of deprivation
- Benefit receipt overall the same as nationally but rate in privately rented sector 38% compared with 16% for owner occupiers

Local Housing Market

- Both house prices and rental values are well above national averages
- Most recent Land Registry figures put the average house price at £350k compared with £229k nationally – fall since previous quarter
- However, semi-detached average still £328k & terrace £266k
- Rents also very high – 2 bed flat commonly £1,000 pcm
- Access to social housing difficult – waiting list over 5,800
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2010) estimated individual income £55-£60k or joint income £65-£75k needed for £200k property
- In reality only access to affordable housing for almost all newly forming households will be the private rented sector
- Role of private rented sector very important for vulnerable households – Private Sector Team work very closely with Housing Options Team
- One positive side of the high property prices is that facilitates equity release – average equity still in the order of £130k

House Condition Survey 2011

- Panel has already received information on the results of the HCS
- The results compare well with national figures – lower rates overall of non decency (26% cf 32%) & category 1 hazards (14% cf 22%)
- Thermal performance generally better although rate of thermal comfort failures of Decent Homes Standard (park homes factor)
- However, the survey did highlight a number of areas of concern

House Condition Survey 2011 – Issues of Concern

- District still behind the nominal PSA7 target for the proportion of vulnerable households in decent accommodation (67% of target 70%) – although significant progress made (was 58% in 2005)
- Conditions overall in the private rented sector significantly worse than in the owner occupied sector with all indicators
- Conditions worse with park homes, low rise purpose built flats & converted flats
- High proportion of long term empty homes (approximately 1,000)
- High potential demand for DFGs
- Higher proportion of older households than nationally

Progress Since 2007 – Financial Assistance

2007 Strategy – following discretionary financial assistance offered:

- **Small Works Assistance** (Owner occupiers where statutory hazards or defects likely to damage dwelling fabric - maximum eligible expense £5k)
- **Decent Homes Assistance** (Owner occupiers only where significant hazard or disrepair to bring the property in Council Tax Bands A – E only up to the Decent Homes Standard - maximum eligible expense £15k)
- **Thermal Comfort Grants** (Owner occupiers & landlords for heating works - maximum eligible expense £3,000 or £750 per HMO let)
- **Discretionary DFG/Relocation Grant** (Available in exceptional circumstances where the costs exceed the grant limit or some works outside the scope of the mandatory grant)
- **Empty Property Grant** (Owner occupiers and landlords to bring into use properties empty more than 1 year - maximum eligible expense £10k)
- **Conversion Grant** (Available to landlords to convert underused or redundant space into affordable living accommodation for rent - maximum eligible expense £10k per unit - £30k per scheme)

Progress Since 2007 – Financial Assistance

- Over past 4 years 367 discretionary grants made (£1.1m) – great bulk were Small Works Assistance (240) and Thermal Comfort Grants (103)
- After slow start, 14 Decent Homes Assistance grants made in 2010/11 (£185k)
- Housing Assistance Policy also provided for discretionary DFGs/Relocation Grants, Empty Homes Grants and Conversion Grants
- Some discretionary DFGs made but to date no completed relocation grants, empty homes grants or conversion grants
- Total of 195 DFGs over 4 years - £1.3m
- Substantial amount of the caseload handled by Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest (C.A.R.E.) the in-house home improvement agency

Progress Since 2007 – Financial Assistance

Year	Type	Amount £	Year Total £	Comment
2007/2008	DHA (1) SWA (15) TCG (10)	6,700 55,200 14,900	76,800	New Policy introduced in April 2007. £44,100 on grants under old policy
2008/2009	DHA (2) SWA (80) TCG (30)	57,100 252,500 38,600	348,200	£1,600 on grants under old policy
2009/2010	DHA (7) SWA (77) TCG (38)	42,500 198,200 69,400	310,100	First year of two-year HEEP scheme for energy efficiency grants
2010/2011	DHA (14) SWA (68) TCG (25)	185,300 191,300 44,800	421,400	Significant increase in DHA – “acceptance”? Year 2 of two-year HEEP scheme for energy efficiency grants
			£1,156,500	

- NB £1,316,790 spent on DFGs over same period (195 grants)
- Typically £370k but £280k last year as lower referrals

Progress Since 2007 - Enforcement

- 2,338 complaints – over 90% visited
- Almost all dealt with informally as landlords generally compliant
- 56 long term empty homes brought back into use through Council intervention (45 in 2010/11)
- Empty Dwelling Management Order currently pending
- 4 HMO licenses issued
- Proactive approaches with HMOs, empty homes and park homes sites

Progress Since 2007 – Information, Advice & Specialist Support

- Much general advice given by all Private Sector staff especially C.A.R.E. caseworkers including trial assessments
- Many Team members have C & G certificate in energy efficiency – frequent signposting to Warm Front and the former HEEP
- General advice free but fee (now 15%) charged for contract administration
- 200/11 – C.A.R.E. received 574 enquires & managed 124 cases
- Service also operates the Handyperson service (125 cases last year)
- Gardening & decoration services also at the moment
- If Council does move to full equity release then C.A.R.E. will be very important

Progress Since 2007 – Working with Landlords

- Whilst enforcement appropriate on occasions, Private Sector Technical Team has focussed on an informal, constructive approach
- In particular, work very closely with the Housing Options Team in finding accommodation for households threatened with homelessness
- The Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (rent deposits) has worked well - Technical Team inspect properties to ensure good standard
- Same principle now applied to the rental loan scheme (a limited form of accreditation)
- Had intended to introduce Landlords Forum but District unusual in that almost all landlords own one or two properties only
- Private sector leasing has started to work effectively – the Private Lease Agreements Converting Empties (PLACE) makes properties available for vulnerable households
- PLACE uses legacy funding from EERA

Financial Circumstances

- The draft Strategy has to reflect the realities of the current financial climate
- The previous Strategy was based on grants (although the 15 year repayment condition in the Decent Homes Assistance made it almost equivalent to a loan)
- Across the country local authorities have moved away from giving financial assistance by way of grants and towards loans/equity release
- Realistically this trend will only continue as capital allocations by the Government continue to tighten
- Accordingly the draft Strategy proposes:
 - In the medium term a move to full equity release
 - An interim framework to financial assistance based on loans
- Principles set out shortly

Draft Strategy - Advice, Assistance and Specialist Support

Draft Strategy proposes the following:

- Introduction of comprehensive assessment procedure to give advice where financial assistance cannot be offered
- Introduce restricted charge for the Handyman service to those in receipt of benefit (currently free of charge)
- Significant upgrade to private sector webpages to give greater presence to C.A.R.E. and to give resources page for landlords
- Interaction on web pages
- Linking fast tracking of benefits to accreditation to give an incentive to landlords who co-operate
- Greater publicity for the PLACE scheme

Draft Strategy – Enforcement

- Staffing arrangements now satisfactory (last Strategy acknowledged these were inadequate)
- Therefore, balance between proactive and reactive work will be increased with two priorities:

Bringing empty homes back into use:

- In line with Government policy
- maximises supply of affordable housing
- Reduces neighbourhood problems
- Generates revenue through the New Home Bonus

Park homes:

- Concerns over conditions highlighted in HCS
- General informal, constructive approach with property owners will be maintained but the Strategy makes it clear that the Council will not hesitate to take formal action when required

Draft Strategy – Financial Assistance

- Many councils offer simple loans taken from their capital budget (usually without interest)
- Over time recycles original investment but does not bring in any additional private finance/capital as equity release can do
- Aim of effective equity release system is to help vulnerable home owner release equity in the property to fund work
- Is complex and does involve giving independent financial advice (subject to strict Consumer Credit Act controls)
- May be significant overheads so often run as consortium of smaller LHAs
- Range of loan types – interest free, capital and interest, interest only and ‘property appreciation’

Draft Strategy – Financial Assistance

- Equity release complex so Strategy proposes introduction over minimum 18 month period
- In the interim period, Strategy proposes new framework for discretionary financial assistance
- This is essentially based on loans and reflects the realities of the current financial climate – lower expense limits
- Changes also reflect the practical experiences of staff administering financial assistance framework over the past 4 years
- NB other assistance available under PLACE scheme
- Incorporates a number of key principles

Draft Strategy – Financial Assistance

- With the exception of the discretionary Relocation Grant, all financial assistance will be repayable on disposal secured by a local land charge (or undertaking with park homes).
- No interest will be charged.
- No financial assistance will be made available to landlords - Officers will continue to use their best endeavours to deal with unsatisfactory conditions informally but if necessary enforcement action will be used and works done in default.
- Only Council Tax Bands A – E will be eligible for assistance.
- All applicants will be means-tested including those in receipt of Attendance Allowance/Disability Living Allowance.
- All discretionary financial assistance will only be available when capital funds permit.

Draft Strategy – Financial Assistance

- In summary, revised forms of discretionary assistance will be:
 - **Small Works Repayable Assistance** (Owner occupiers where statutory hazards or defects likely to damage dwelling fabric - maximum eligible expense £3k)
 - **Decent Homes Repayable Assistance** (Owner occupiers only where significant hazard or disrepair to bring the property up to the Decent Homes Standard - maximum eligible expense £10k)
 - **Discretionary Relocation Grant** (Available in exceptional circumstances where the costs exceed the mandatory DFG grant limit or some works outside the scope of the mandatory grant)
 - **Empty Property Loans** (Intending owner occupiers and landlords to bring back into use properties with hazard or disrepair empty more than 1 year - maximum eligible expense £10k)
- Thermal comfort issues can be dealt with using either the small works or decent homes standard repayable assistance

Mandatory DFGs

- The Strategy proposes one change with regard to mandatory DFGs
- Council currently places a charge on a property to recover costs (up to £10k) where the cost of the job exceeds £12k
- Charge can remain in place for a maximum of 10 years
- Council is entitled to place charge where the cost exceeds £5k and the Strategy proposes to adopt the £5k threshold
- Repayment will not be required for the costs of providing stair lifts, through floor lifts or removable equipment such as hoists
- Will be discretion to waive the requirement in exceptional circumstances
- Strategy also states that procedure for obtaining Occupational Therapist referrals will be reviewed

Discussion

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