

## Scrutiny Standing Panel Agenda



### **Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel Wednesday, 22nd January, 2014**

You are invited to attend the next meeting of **Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel**, which will be held at:

**Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping  
on Wednesday, 22nd January, 2014  
at 5.30 pm .**

**Glen Chipp  
Chief Executive**

**Democratic Services  
Officer**

Mark Jenkins (The Office of the Chief Executive)  
Tel: 01992 564607 Email:  
democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

#### **Members:**

Councillors S Murray (Chairman), Ms G Shiell (Vice-Chairman), K Avey, K Chana, Mrs R Gadsby, Ms J Hart, Mrs S Jones, Mrs J Lea, L Leonard, B Rolfe, Mrs J H Whitehouse and W Marshall (Tenants and Leaseholders Federation)

**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. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING (Pages 5 - 34)**

To agree the notes of the last Panel meeting held on 22 October 2013 (attached).

**5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 35 - 42)**

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

**6. REVIEW OF THE GARDEN MAINTENANCE SCHEME FOR OLDER AND DISABLED TENANTS (Pages 43 - 48)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**7. BRIEFING ON THE PROPOSED COUNCIL RENT INCREASE FOR 2014/15 (Pages 49 - 54)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report and appendix.

**8. PROPOSED HOUSING SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS AND SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS - 2014/15 (Pages 55 - 72)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**9. REVIEW OF PARKING ENFORCEMENT MEASURES ON HOUSING ESTATES (Pages 73 - 82)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**10. SHELTERED HOUSING AND OLDER PEOPLE'S HANDYPERSON SCHEMES - 1 YEAR REVIEW (Pages 83 - 98)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**11. SIX-MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT ON HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN 2013/14 (Pages 99 - 112)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report and appendix.

**12. HOUSING DIRECTORATE'S SERVICE STRATEGY ON TENANT PARTICIPATION (Pages 113 - 140)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**13. HOUSING DIRECTORATE'S SERVICE STRATEGY ON INFORMATION (Pages**

**141 - 158)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**14. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE WELFARE REFORM MITIGATION ACTION PLAN  
(Pages 159 - 160)**

(Director of Housing) To consider the attached report.

**15. 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.

**16. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting of the Panel is on Tuesday 25 March 2014 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1.

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**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL  
HELD ON TUESDAY, 22 OCTOBER 2013  
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING  
AT 5.31 - 8.50 PM**

**Members Present:** S Murray (Chairman), Ms G Shiell (Vice-Chairman), K Chana, Ms J Hart, Mrs J Lea, L Leonard, Mrs J H Whitehouse and W Marshall (Tenants and Leaseholders Federation)

**Other members present:** D Stallan

**Apologies for Absence:** Mrs S Jones and B Rolfe

**Officers Present** A Hall (Director of Housing), P Pledger (Assistant Director (Property and Resources)), R Wilson (Assistant Director (Operations)), L Swan (Assistant Director (Private Sector & Resources)), S Devine (Private Sector Housing Manager), P Duguid (Private Housing Manager) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

## **12. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

There were no substitutions made at the meeting.

## **13. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillors Mrs J Whitehouse and Mrs G Shiell declared a non pecuniary interest in the following item of the agenda regarding being Trustees of Epping Forest Re-Use. They advised that they would remain in the meeting for the consideration of this item and any subsequent voting thereon:

- Housing Strategy: 12 Month Progress Report on Key Action Plan 2012/13

## **14. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

### **RESOLVED:**

That the notes of the last Panel meeting held on 17 June 2013 be agreed.

## **15. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME**

### **(a) Terms of Reference**

It was noted that the Panel's Terms of Reference had absorbed the responsibilities of the defunct Housing Repairs Advisory Group. It was covered by Item 9.

### **(b) Work Programme**

The Panel's Work Programme was noted.

**16. PROGRESS REPORT ON PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY - PRESENTATION**

The Panel received a presentation regarding a Progress report on the Private Sector Housing Strategy from Mrs L Swan, Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector and Resources), Mrs S Devine, Private Housing Manager (Technical team) and Mr P Duguid, Private Housing Manager (Grants and C.A.R.E.).

The presentation covered:

- (a) Caring and repairing in Epping Forest;
- (b) Assisting vulnerable people in repairing, adapting or improving their homes;
- (c) The Handyperson Service;
- (d) New Charging from October 2013 – service users in means tested benefits would be charged a maximum fee of £30.00 each time they used the Handyperson Service;
- (e) The Gardening Scheme;
- (f) Safe and Well Project (Home from Hospital) – funded by the NHS, reducing admissions/re-admissions for older and disabled people and providing minor adaptations ensuring homes were safe on return from hospital;
- (g) Housing Assistance – Maximum payments for 2012-15 were £10,000 for Decent Homes, £3,000 for Small Works and £10,000 for Empty Homes;
- (h) Disabled Adaptations - 78 in 2012/13 and 83 in 2013/14;
- (i) Long Term Empty Properties – the Empty Property Officer had influenced the bringing into use of 405 empty properties during 2012/13;
- (j) Introduction of an Essex wide Landlord Accreditation Scheme – the purpose of the scheme was to recognise and promote good management and good quality properties in the private sector, with a view to driving up standards generally. This scheme was being introduced in the summer of 2014;
- (k) Licensing of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Sites – consultation with third parties and the GRT community was required before introduction of new standard site licence conditions;
- (l) Licensing of Holiday Sites – new standard site licence conditions were proposed for all holiday sites on the district; and

(m) Mobile Homes act 2013 – Council's would be able to charge for licensing of residential park home sites from April 2014. Officers were considering the various options for charging and would make recommendations to members in due course.

The Panel thanked the officers for their presentation and their hard work. The Panel requested that the presentation slides used by the officers should be attached to the notes of this meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Private Sector Housing Strategy Presentation be noted.

**17. REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY PANEL REVIEW - LEASEHOLDER CONTRIBUTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO COMMON PARTS OF FLAT BLOCKS**

The Panel received a report regarding the request for Scrutiny Panel Review – Leaseholder Contributions for Improvements to Common parts of Flat Blocks from the Assistant Director of Housing (Property).

A request for a Scrutiny Panel Review had been received from Councillors Mrs J Hart and K Angold-Stephens, which stated that the difficulty the Council encountered when improvements to communal areas of flat blocks were required and when there were tenants and leaseholders sharing the same building and the same communal areas. There had been specific problems encountered when an attempt was made to request essential improvements to the communal areas of some large flat blocks with similar problems in small flat blocks.

Following the introduction of self financing and subsequently the Council's new "Modern Homes Standard," more work was being planned to be undertaken to the Council's housing stock for which leaseholders were required to pay their proportion of the charges if that work affected components in and around their flat blocks.

**(a) The Lease**

The lease was always considered first when planning works to flat blocks. In the past, under Right to Buy, the Council had sold flatted accommodation using two types of lease which were categorised as pre or post 1991 leases. For those prior to 1991 the Council could not charge for improvements without the agreement of the leaseholder. For post 1991 leases, the Council could charge for improvements where identified in the 5 year estimates, if they were not identified, the Council could not charge for the improvements without the consent of the leaseholder. After 5 years they could be charged following a consultation.

**(b) Improvements**

The only type of improvement work that the Council had undertaken in the past, other than major improvement schemes, were door entry security installations. As this was a new installation, as opposed to a repair, it was classed as an improvement. In 1997 the Council agreed a door entry policy that allowed the installation of door entry security systems in blocks containing leaseholders subject to installations being undertaken only in blocks of flats having 25% leaseholders or less. The Council could not spend Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funds on homeowners' properties. Where there were more than 25% leaseholders, their views were taken into

consideration. Any leaseholder objecting would defer the works until the circumstances changed. The Council had not installed any systems for the last 4 years due to a lack of support by those with pre-1991 leases.

**(c) Leasehold Legislation and Consultation**

In 2002, the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act came into effect, outing more onus on landlords to consult with leaseholders on all aspects of repairs where the leaseholder would contribute more than £250.00. At all times, the Council must have regard to any observations received from leaseholders.

**(d) Planning the Works**

The increase in major works being undertaken currently, as a result of the increased resources available, the management of leaseholder issues from initial consultations to issuing service charges and reclaiming debts was becoming more difficult. The Council's Housing Assets Section held a detailed stock condition database highlighting when building components would reach the end of their useful life. To obtain best value for the Council and leaseholders, works were packaged together and timed to coincide with external repairs. The scale and frequency had increased significantly since the Modern Homes Standard was introduced, effecting leaseholder's ability and willingness to pay.

**(e) Financial Obligations**

The Council had a financial obligation to recover all charges relating to works in flat blocks where a lease existed. However, guidance suggested that leaseholders could be referred to as tenants, as they did not own the freehold to the property. Despite this contradiction, a charge relating to a leasehold property that was irrecoverable could only reasonably be charged to the HRA as there was no basis for a charge to the General Fund.

**(f) Financial Assistance**

The Council had in place a Sundry Income and Debt Policy for helping leaseholders pay for their proportion of the charges. This allowed the cost to be spread over a period of up to 12 months interest free.

**(g) Loans**

The Council was required by the Housing (Service Charges Loans) Regulations 1992, to give loans for the major repairs part of any service charge, in any one year, which was more than £2,740. The minimum and maximum loans were £920.00 and £36,270 respectively.

**(h) Capping the Contribution for Leaseholders**

The Council had a duty to recover the cost of the works. However, the Council had the option to cap the leaseholder's contribution for major improvements.

**(i) Placing a Legal Charge on the Property**



Where leaseholders were not able to pay for their proportion of the works, the Council could place a legal charge over the property so that the costs could be recovered when the property was sold in the future.

**(j) Buy-Back Option**

This option was entirely at the discretion of the Council, and subject to agreement by all parties. There was no current provision within the existing Housing Capital Programme to buy back any leasehold properties. The capital costs of purchasing properties would have to be funded and a valuation would need agreement with leaseholder.

**(k) Sinking Fund**

An option the Council could consider, would be to operate a Sinking Fund. This could not be offered to existing leaseholders as it was a requirement that all leases in a block should be similar. A Sinking Fund was where leaseholders paid a regular annual payment each year irrespective of work being carried out.

The Panel supported receiving a further report regarding the operation of a Sinking Fund to new leaseholders, but also felt that no support could be given to the exploration of alternative loan schemes to leaseholders.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (1) That the report regarding Request for Scrutiny Panel Review – Leaseholder Contributions for Improvements to Common Parts of Flat Blocks be noted;
- (2) That a further report be brought back to the Panel considering the benefits of operating a “Sinking Fund” for new leaseholders in new or existing flat blocks where there were no leaseholders;
- (3) That the Panel recommend that no alternative loan terms be offered to leaseholders;
- (4) That the Panel recommend to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee of making provision in the General Fund for the proportion of costs attributed to shops and other associated premises that were transferred from the HRA to the General Fund; and
- (5) That no response be made to the consultation paper issued by DCLG on Protecting Local Authority Leaseholders from Unreasonable Charges as this is no longer relevant.

**18. REVIEW OF PARKING ENFORCEMENT ON HOUSING MANAGED GRASSED AREAS**

At the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a report regarding Review of Parking Enforcement Measures on Housing Estates was due for consideration at this meeting. However, it was advised that the proposer of the review, Councillor Mrs H Kane, was unable to attend and the Panel deferred the report to its next meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Review of Parking Enforcement on Housing Managed Grassed Areas be deferred to the next Panel meeting.

**19. HOUSING SERVICE STRATEGY ON ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR - REVIEW AND UPDATE**

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) regarding the Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour Policies and Procedures.

The Housing Directorate's Service Strategies were produced around 15 years ago in accordance with an agreed standard framework and have since been updated. In total, 17 Housing Service Strategies had been produced, they were to a common format setting out how individual housing services would be delivered. The Panel considered and endorsed the service strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour Policies and Procedures. Members asked about the possibility of withholding repairs from tenants if they had been involved in anti-social behaviour. The Panel agreed to review this in October 2014.

**RECOMMENDED:**

That the Housing Service Strategy on Anti Social Behaviour Policies and Procedures be endorsed to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

**20. SIX MONTH REVIEW OF THE HRA FINANCIAL PLAN**

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Key Action Plan (2013/14) – 6 Month Progress Report.

In March 2013, the Council's latest Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan (2013/14) was produced, incorporating the Repairs and 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.

An important section of the HRA Business Plan was the Key Action Plan setting out the proposed actions the Council would be taking over the next year.

**RECOMMENDED:**

That the Six Month Review of the HRA Financial Plan be endorsed to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

**21. HRA FINANCIAL PLAN - HALF YEARLY UPDATE**

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding the HRA Financial Plan – Half Yearly Update.

At its meeting in March 2013, the Panel considered the Draft HRA Business Plan for 2013/14 and recommended its adoption to the Housing Portfolio Holder, which was subsequently approved. An important part of the HRA Business Plan was the HRA

Financial Plan setting out the anticipated HRA income and expenditure over the next 30 years. It was estimated that there would be a reduction in income to the Council as the rent for Council and Housing Association properties would be harmonised.

The Cabinet had asked the Panel to review updates to the HRA Financial Plan twice each year, at its meetings in October and March. Additionally, senior Housing and Finance officers formally reviewed the Financial Plan in July and January each year.

CIH Consultancy had acted as the Council's HRA Business Planning Consultants for a number of years and, at its March 2012 meeting, the Cabinet agreed that the Council should contract with CIH Consultancy acting as the Council's HRA Business Planning Consultants for a further three years until 2015. A three year agreement with CIH Consulting had been signed.

**RECOMMENDED:**

That the HRA Financial Plan Half Yearly Update be endorsed to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

**22. TWELVE MONTH PROGRESS REPORT ON HOUSING BUSINESS PLAN ACTION PLAN**

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding the Housing Strategy: 12 Month Progress Report on Key Action Plan 2012/13.

At its meeting in September 2009, the Cabinet adopted the Housing Strategy 2009-12. The 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.

When adopting the strategy, the Cabinet also agreed that Key Action Plans for the Housing Strategy 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 the Panel.

The 12 month Progress Report on the Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2012/13 was due for consideration by the Panel in July 2013, however the meeting was cancelled due to a lack of business.

The Housing Strategy was due for update in 2012 for a further three year period. The strategy had been deferred because most of the key issues relating to the production of the Council's Local Plan.

**RECOMMENDED:**

That the Twelve Month Progress Report on the Housing Business Plan Action Plan be endorsed to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

**23. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE WELFARE REFORM MITIGATION ACTION PLAN**

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding Welfare reform Mitigation Action Plan Quarterly Progress Report.

In view of the significant effect that the Government's welfare reforms would have on the Council and residents, a Welfare Reform Mitigation Project Team was formed in September 2012, to consider and implement ways that the effects of the welfare reforms could be minimised.

The Project Team formulated a Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan, which was adopted by the Cabinet in October 2012. This identified around 60 separate actions to undertake. In addition to progress with the Action Plan, the Cabinet asked the Panel to monitor progress with the delivery of the Action Plan at its quarterly meetings. As reported to the panel in June, very little progress with the Action Plan had been made because most of the remaining actions related to issues on which the Government still needed to make decisions or issues which the Government needed to implement. However, a further two tasks had been achieved and only three tasks had not yet been achieved.

**RECOMMENDED:**

That the Progress Report on the Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan be endorsed to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

**24. GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION PAPER "PROVIDING SOCIAL HOUSING FOR LOCAL PEOPLE"**

The Panel received a report and were asked if they wished to submit a response to the Government's Consultation Paper – "Providing Social Housing for Local People," from the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations).

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued a Consultation Paper on 14 October 2013 entitled Providing Social Housing for Local People, Strengthening statutory guidance on social housing allocations. The closing date for responses was 22 November 2013.

The consultation considered that local authorities should be "strongly encouraged" to have a period of residency for at least two years before qualifying for social housing. The District Council's policy was three years. The Panel supported this but felt that "strongly encourage" needed clarification.

The Government proposed guidance encouraging local authorities to adopt other criteria, alongside a residency test, so applicants demonstrating a strong association to the local area were not disadvantaged. The Panel felt more clarification was required around the consultation's reference to strong family association and the suggestion of applicants or members of their household being eligible if employed in the district. The Panel thought this needed clarification, for example was the employment full or part time. In any event the Panel felt that this should not form part of any local eligibility criteria.

Paragraph 11 of the consultation suggested that local authorities took account of special circumstances, for example protecting people who were moving into the district escaping violence. The Panel agreed that the response should point out that some cases were dealt with via the homelessness powers.

Members requested that the consultation and the councils response should be put in the Bulletin.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Panel's response to the Government's Consultation Paper "Providing Social Housing for Local People" be agreed.

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

The Chairman of the Panel advised that he would update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting on the recent work of this Panel.

**26. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting of the Panel will be held on Wednesday 22 January 2014 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1 and then on:

- Tuesday 25 March 2014 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1

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## **Private Sector Housing Strategy - Progress Report**

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**Presented by:**

**Lyndsay Swan, Assistant Director of Housing  
(Private Sector and Resources)**

**Sally Devine, Private Housing Manager (Technical  
Team)**

**Paul Duguid, Private Housing Manager (Grants  
and C.A.R.E.)**



## **Housing Strategy Action Plan 2013-14**

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**“To review the implementation of the  
new Private Sector Housing Strategy  
2012 to identify any required  
refinements and report to the  
Scrutiny Panel on the outcome”**





*Epping Forest District Council*

## Private Sector Housing Strategy - Progress Report

# Questions?

**Housing DIRECTORATE**

ISO 9001 UKAS CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE





## Private Sector Housing (Grants & C.A.R.E.)

Private Sector Housing Assistance  
&  
C.A.R.E.  
(Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest)  
The Council's Home Improvement Agency



## A Decent Home.....!!??





## **C.A.R.E.**

### **(Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest)**

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- | **A Home Improvement Agency managed and run by the Council,**
- | **Funded by Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council (Housing Related Support),**
- | **Assists vulnerable people to repair, adapt or improve their homes.**



## **Services provided by C.A.R.E.**

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- | **Advice and 'signposting'**
- | **Financial help;**
- | **Technical Support,**
- | **'Project Management'**
- | **Helping find trusted contractors**
- | **A Handyperson Service**
- | **A Gardening service**
- | **Safe and Well (Home from Hospital)**





## Handyperson Service

- u Plumbing (e.g. tap washers, toilet cisterns, ball valves, overflow, provision of lever taps);
- u Remedial carpentry;
- u Minor electrical works (fitting smoke detectors);
- u Glazing;
- u Security works (window/door locks);
- u Curtain rails;
- u Minor tiling;
- u Falls Prevention and safety works (fixing carpets, lowering cupboards, putting up shelves);
- l Small roof and guttering jobs



## New Charging from Oct 2013

- l Available to older people who are over the age of 60 and retired (or in the case of a couple, both over 60 and retired).
- l If the service user is on a means tested benefit (e.g. *Guarantee Pension Credit, Local Council Tax Support or Housing Benefit*) they will be charged a maximum fee of £30 each time they use the handyperson service, with the exception of falls prevention and home security work which will be free of charge.
- l If the service user is not on means tested benefit they will be charged a maximum of £50 for handyperson work and £25 each time they use the service for falls prevention and home security work.
- l Discretion can be applied where appropriate (e.g. applications from people with disabilities, who are on means tested benefits but under the age of 60).





## **Gardening Scheme**

- | Run in partnership with V.A.E.F. (Voluntary Action Epping Forest) subject to on going funding
- | Available to private owners or tenants; over 60 and on means tested benefit or under 60 disabled and on a means tested benefit
- | Gardens must be overgrown, trees or bushes overshadow or restrict entrances
- | Fear of crime
- | Perception of unoccupied home



## **Safe and Well Project ( Home from hospital )**

- | Funded by the NHS West Essex Transformation Fund;
- | In partnership with Papworth Trust and Royal Voluntary Service;
- | Reduce admissions / re- admissions for older and disabled people and facilitate a timely discharge;
- | EFDC/ C.A.R.E. Handyperson to provide minor adaptations and equipment to ensure homes are safe on return from hospital.



## Housing Assistance = ££££

- | Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) £30,000 max
- | Relocation Grants £10,000 max

### New Policy 2012- 2015

- | Decent Homes Repayable Assistance £10,000 max
- | Small Works Repayable Assistance £ 3000 max
- | Empty Homes Repayable Assistance £10,000 max
  
- | Equity release option for private owners



## Disabled Adaptations

Disabled Facilities Grants	<u>2012/ 13</u>	<u>2013/ 14</u>
Occupational Therapist Referrals:	Q1- 15	Q1- 33
	Q2- 17	Q2- 50
	Q3- 16	
	Q4- 30	
<b>Total :</b>	<u>78</u>	<u>83</u>



## Disabled Adaptations




## Gardening Scheme




**Epping Forest District Council**

## Before...

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**Housing DIRECTORATE**



**CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE**  
UK

The Service Standard

**Epping Forest District Council**

## Before...

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**Housing DIRECTORATE**



**CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE**  
UK

The Service Standard



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# Private Housing (Technical)

Sally Devine (Private Housing Manager - Technical Team))



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# Action Plan 2013-14

- | Feasibility study - fast tracking accredited properties
- | Empty properties
- | Essex Landlord Accreditation Scheme (ELAS)
- | Park home sites





## Potential fast tracking (3)

- I Carry out a feasibility study on the potential for fast track procedures for accredited properties
- I Delayed due to Welfare Reform legislation



## Empty Properties (4&7)

- I Target for 2012/13 was 40 long term empties back to use

Number of empty properties brought back to use annually						
2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
0	4	4	3	45	60	115





## Our approach

- | **Sausage machine**
- | **Carrots and sticks**
- | **Highlight advantages and disadvantages – Empty Homes Premium**
- | **Play the game and maximise the New Homes Bonus, concentrated visits July and August**



## Going forward

- | **PLACE loan**
- | **National Empty Property Loan**
- | **Matchmaker Scheme**
- | **Risk assess for enforcement**





## Introduce an Essex wide landlord accreditation scheme

- | **Action point 6**
  
- | **7 LAs have signed up to the Scheme**
- | **To promote good management practices and good property condition**
- | **At procurement stage**
- | **Ready to introduce summer 2014?**



## Gypsy, Roma and Traveller site licence conditions (8)

- | **Draft site licence conditions being prepared**
- | **Consultation with interested parties**
- | **Consultation with Gypsy Roma Traveller community**
- | **Issue new licences and conditions**
- | **Inspection of sites and enforcement**





## **Holiday site licence conditions**

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- | **Action point 9**
- | **Review existing**
- | **Propose new standard site licence conditions**
- | **Consult**
- | **Produce new licences and issue**



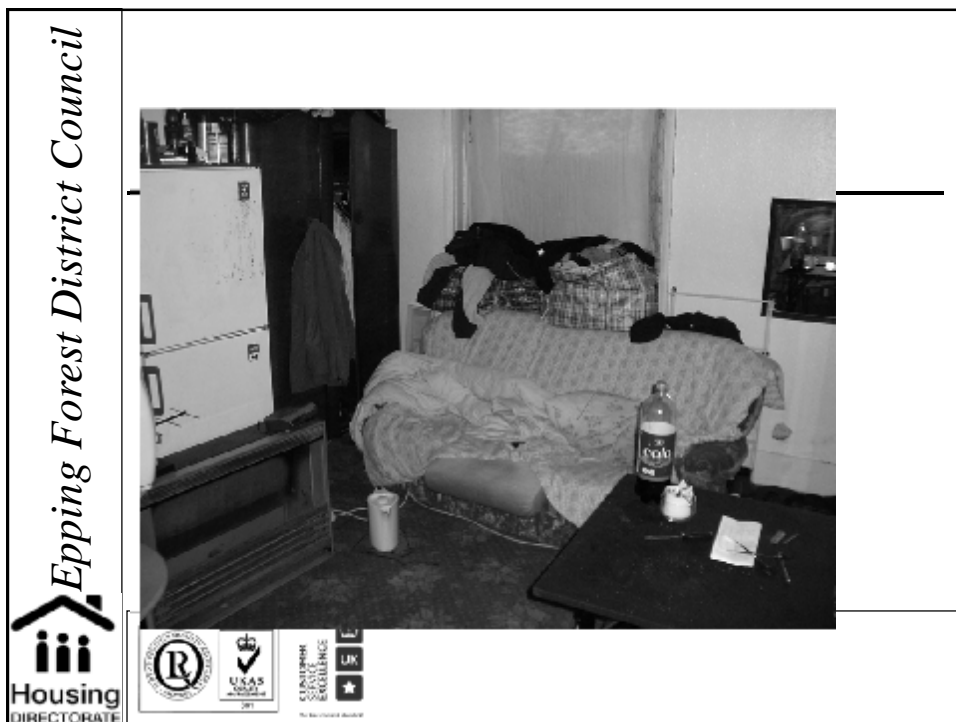
## **Mobile Homes Act 2013 (10)**

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- | **Councils can charge for licensing from April 2014**
- | **Can charge for new applications, transfers, amendments**
- | **Can charge an annual fee**
- | **Need to prepare and publish a charging policy**
- | **Can make exemptions or different charges for different sites**
- | **We will consult with residents**















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## TERMS OF REFERENCE - STANDING PANEL

**Title:** Housing

**Status:** Standing Panel

**Terms of Reference:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(9) To consider matters relating to the performance of the Council's Repairs Management Contract and to make any recommendations to the Housing Portfolio Holder or the Cabinet, as appropriate, as a result.

(10) 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 – 2013/2014

Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Scheduled Date	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
<b>Standard (Periodic) Items</b>				<del>17<sup>th</sup> June 2013</del> <del>23<sup>rd</sup> July 2013</del> <del>22<sup>nd</sup> October 2013</del> 21 <sup>st</sup> January 2014 25 <sup>th</sup> March 2014
(1) Housing Performance Indicators - 2012/13 Out-turn (Tenant-Selected & KPIs)	Low	June 2013	<b>Completed – June 2013</b>	
(2) Performance against Housing Service Standards and Review <i>(Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)</i>	Medium	June 2013	<b>Completed – June 2013</b>	
(3) Progress Report on the Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan	Medium	June 2013	<b>Completed – June 2013</b>	
(4) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants <i>(Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)</i>	Medium	June 2013	<b>Completed – June 2013</b>	
(5) Housing Strategy Action Plan 2013/14 <i>(Recommendations to Cabinet)</i>	High	July 2013	<b>No longer required</b> – Interim Housing Strategy Action Plan agreed by Housing Portfolio Holder	
(6) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme <i>(Recommendations to Cabinet)</i>	High	N/A	<b>No review this year</b> – Due to the introduction of the new Housing Allocations Scheme	

(7) 12-Month Progress Report on Housing Strategy Action Plan 2012/13	Low	July 2013	<b>Completed – October 2013</b>
(8) Six-Month Review of the HRA Financial Plan	Medium	October 2013	<b>Completed – October 2013</b>
(9) Six-monthly Progress Report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan	Low	October 2013	<b>Completed – October 2013</b>
(10) Progress Report on the Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan	Medium	October 2013	<b>Completed – October 2013</b>
(11) Briefing on the proposed Council rent increase for 2014/15	Low	January 2014	<b>Scheduled for this January 2014 Meeting</b>
(12) Six-monthly Progress report on Housing Strategy Action Plan 2013/14	Low	January 2014	<b>Scheduled for this January 2014 Meeting</b>
(13) Proposed housing service improvements and service enhancements – 2014/15 ( <i>Recommendations to Cabinet</i> )	High	January 2014	<b>Scheduled for this January 2014 Meeting</b>
(14) Progress Report on the Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan	Medium	January 2014	<b>Scheduled for this January 2014 Meeting</b>
(15) HRA Business Plan 2014/15 ( <i>Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder</i> )	High	March 2014	

(16) Six-Month Review of the HRA Financial Plan	Medium	March 2014	
(17) 12-monthly Progress report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan	Low	March 2014	
(18) Progress Report on the Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan	Medium	March 2014	
<b>Special (Planned) Items – Including Updated Housing Service Strategies</b>			
(19) New Flexible Tenancy Agreement and Revised Standard Secure Tenancy Agreement <i>(Recommendations to Cabinet)</i>	High	June 2013	<b>Completed – June 2013</b>
(20) Housing Service Strategy on Allocations (Review and update) <i>(Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)</i>	Medium	July 2013	<b>No longer required</b> – All issues now covered by the new Housing Allocations Scheme
(21) Progress Report on Private Sector Housing Strategy	Low	July 2013	<b>Completed – October 2013</b>
(22) Review of the difficulties with improving communal areas of flat blocks with leaseholders	High	Oct 2013	<b>Completed – October 2013</b>

(23) Housing Service Strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour (Review and update) (Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)	Medium	Oct 2013	<b>Completed – October 2013</b>
(24) Social Housing Fraud Scheme – Progress Report	Low	Jan 2014	<b>No longer required</b> – To be substituted for a full Housing Service Strategy on Social Housing Fraud (see 35 below)
(25) Sheltered Housing and Older People's Handyperson Schemes – 1 Year Review	Low	Jan 2014	<b>Scheduled for this January 2014 Meeting</b>
(26) Review of parking enforcement on Housing-managed grassed areas	High	<del>Oct 2013</del> Jan 2014	<b>Deferred to this January 2014 Meeting – to allow Cllr Kane to be present</b> - Referred by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel at the request of Cllr Kane
(27) Review of Mow and Grow Scheme for Council Tenants	High	Jan 2014	<b>Scheduled for this January 2014 Meeting</b>
(28) Housing Service Strategy on Tenant Participation (Review and update) (Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)	Medium	<del>July 2013</del> Jan 2014	<b>Scheduled for this January 2014 Meeting</b> – Following deferral from the July 2013 meeting, due to higher priority commitments and workload
(29) Housing Service Strategy on Information (Review and update) (Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)	Medium	<del>Oct 2013</del> Jan 2014	<b>Scheduled for this January 2014 Meeting</b> – Following deferral from the October 2013 meeting, due to higher priority commitments and workload



(30) Housing Service Strategy on Harassment (Review and update) (Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)	Medium	<del>July 2013</del> Mar 2014	<b>Deferred to March 2014 Meeting</b> – Due to higher priority commitments and workload
(31) Housing Service Strategy on the Private Rented Sector (Review and update) (Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)	Medium	<del>Oct 2013</del> Mar 2014	<b>Deferred to March 2014 Meeting</b> – Due to higher priority commitments and workload
(32) Response to Essex County Council's consultation on the Essex Housing Related Support (HRS) Strategy	Medium	<del>July 2013</del> Mar 2014	<b>Deferred</b> – To 2014, due to delays in the draft HRS Strategy being finalised by Essex County Council
(33) Review of Housing Management Staffing Levels – Welfare Reforms	Medium	Mar 2014	
(34) Housing Strategy 2014-2017	High	<del>Oct 2013</del> July 2014	<b>Deferred</b> – By Housing Portfolio Holder until the completion of the Preferred Options Stage of the Local Plan
(35) Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency (Review and update) (Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)	Medium	<del>Oct 2013</del> July 2014	<b>Deferred to 2014/15</b> - Due to higher priority commitments and workload

Items added after the original Work Programme was agreed			
(36) Possible operation of operating a "Sinking Fund" for new leaseholders in new or existing flat blocks where there are no existing leaseholders	Medium	Mar 2014	Requested at the October 2013 meeting of the Scrutiny Panel
(37) Housing Service Strategy on Social Housing Fraud <i>(Recommendations to Housing Portfolio Holder)</i>	High	Mar 2014	
Items for Future Years			
Housing Under-occupation Officer post – 1 Year Review	Low	July 2014	
12-Month Review of Housing Allocations Scheme	High	Oct 2014	
Review of Tenancy Policy Pilot Scheme	High	Oct 2014	

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2014**

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

**Subject: Review of the Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Disabled Tenants**

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

**Committee Secretary:  
Mark Jenkins extension 4607**



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

**1. That the Housing Scrutiny Panel reviews the progress made by Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) with the Gardening Scheme for older and vulnerable tenants, and incorporates a recommendation into its report to the Cabinet (on the use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancement Fund) that Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding of £20,000 per annum continues to be utilised to fund the VAEF gardening scheme for older and disabled Council tenants for a further two years from 2014/2015; and**

**2. In order to continue to provide the service to an increased number of tenants, the Housing Scrutiny Panel incorporates a further recommendation into its report to the Cabinet on the use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancement Fund (reported separately on the Agenda), that additional HRA funding of £20,000 per annum for two years from 2014/2015, (making a total of £40,000 per annum in each of these years), be provided to VAEF's Gardening Scheme for Older and Disabled Council Tenants.**

### **Report:**

1. The Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) Gardening Scheme for older and vulnerable tenants has been in operation since 2003. During 2012/2013 and 2013/2014, £20,000 per annum, funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), has been utilised to fund VAEF's part-time Garden Maintenance Co-ordinator Post, the purchase of some necessary equipment, and the general administration of the scheme. The same level of funding was granted in the two previous financial years. VAEF oversee voluntary garden maintenance work to older and disabled Council tenants' properties and undertakes some work for private sector residents, which is funded separately.

2. Tenants are only included on the scheme if there is no one physically able to carry out the work under the age of 70 years living at the property, with the service being provided regardless of whether they have younger relatives living in the District. Tenants in arrears of rent are ineligible to receive the service. Disabled tenants (regardless of their age) are included on the scheme, provided they meet the agreed criteria. No reference is made to housing benefit in terms of eligibility. All those applying are assessed by VAEF and are only included on the scheme if they genuinely cannot cope with their gardens and have no other means of maintaining them.

3. The service includes clearing and maintaining overgrown gardens, including lighter tasks such as lawn cutting, hedge trimming and light weeding, with priority being given to dealing with gardens that are unsafe and/or unusable and therefore hinder the tenant to enjoy the facility.

**Expansion of the VAEF Gardening Scheme for Older and Vulnerable Tenants**

4. At its meeting on 23 April 2012 (Minute 158 refers), the Cabinet agreed a range of Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements funded from resources made available as a result of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) self-financing. It was agreed that funding for the VAEF Garden Maintenance Scheme for older and vulnerable tenants be increased by £20,000 per annum for two years from 2012/2013 in order to increase the number of vulnerable tenants benefitting from the service.

5. As the additional funding was received by VAEF in around June 2012, it was not possible for them to recruit sufficient volunteers and additional administrative support in order to increase substantially the number of tenants benefitting from the service during that year. It was understandable that the additional funding would not have an impact until the following financial year.

**Review of the Scheme 2012/2013 & 2013/2014**

6. VAEF has provided a report on its activity for the period April to September 2013. In order to assess the improvement in the service due to the increased funding provided, the following table shows the work undertaken during this 6 month period compared to the corresponding period in the previous year:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>April to September 2012</b>	<b>April to September 2013 % increase in brackets</b>
Number of tenants' gardens maintained	79	138 (74%)
Total number of garden maintenance visits	168	296 (76%)
Average number of garden maintenance visits per tenant	2.13	2.15
Average cost of each garden maintenance visit	£69.45	£67.34
Hours worked by Project Gardeners	871	1326 (53%)
Hours worked by Project Administrator	338	494 (46%)
Number of tenants on the waiting list	0	0

7. As can be seen, the amount of work undertaken has substantially increased as a result of the additional funding provided.

8. VAEF undertook a survey of all tenants receiving the service in 2012/2013. The responses to questions asked are set out as an appendix to the report.

9. The additional funding has also enabled VAEF to better maintain their vehicles and equipment and purchase a second van. Both of their vans have been sign-written with the scheme's logo.

10. Furthermore, VAEF are planning a number of "Make a Difference Days" to promote the scheme in partnership with the Choices Learning Disabilities Project, and will be having promotional events to seek out more volunteers.

11. VAEF has confirmed that they can continue with the scheme for a further two years. A representative from VAEF will be in attendance at the meeting to answer any questions on the detail of the Scheme. The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to review the progress made by Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) with the Gardening Scheme for older and vulnerable tenants and incorporate a recommendation into its report to the Cabinet (on the use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancement Fund) that Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding of £20,000 per annum continues to be utilised to fund the VAEF gardening scheme for older and disabled Council tenants for a further two years from 2014/2015.

12. Furthermore, the Housing Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider that, as part of its report to the Cabinet on the use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancement Fund (reported separately on the Agenda), the Panel makes a further recommendation that in order to continue to provide the service to an increased number of tenants, additional HRA funding of £20,000 per annum for two years from 2014/2015, (making a total of £40,000 per annum in each of these years), be provided to VAEF's Gardening Scheme for Older and Disabled Council Tenants.

**Reason for decision:**

The Gardening Scheme provided by Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) has delivered an important service to older and disabled Council tenants over the last 10 years and is reviewed every two years. When bearing in mind the work can be undertaken by more than one volunteer, takes around 5 hours to complete and is well received by tenants, it clearly represents good value for money. It is therefore considered that the scheme should be continued for a further two years and additional HRA funding should be provided in order for the service to continue to be expanded.

**Options considered and rejected:**

1. Not to continue to fund the VAEF Gardening Scheme for older and disabled tenants.
2. To agree a different level of funding for the VAEF Gardening Scheme.

**Consultation undertaken:**

Set out as an Appendix to the report.

**Resource implications:**

Budget provision: Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding of £40,000 per annum from 2014/2015 for two years.

Personnel: None

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1985

Background papers: Service Level Agreement

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: Improved appearance of housing estates with fewer poorly maintained gardens.

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A

## APPENDIX

### VAEF Gardening Scheme Consultation Feedback 2012/2013

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
Do you have a disability?	84.42	15.58
Are you less likely to have an accident such as a fall now your garden is maintained?	83.9	12.5
Do you feel safer and less vulnerable in your home now that your garden is maintained?	94.6	1.78
Will this service enable you to stay in your home longer?	94.6	1.78

Question	Under 65	65-74	75-84	85-94	94 +
What age are you?	3.7	40.7	38.27	13.58	3.7

Question	Excellent	Good	OK
How would you rate the professionalism of the gardeners?	82	12.5	1.78
How would you rate the quality of the work carried out?	75	21.4	1.78

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## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2014**

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

**Subject: Council Rent Increase 2014/15**

**Officer contact for further information:**

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

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

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### **Recommendations:**

**That an oral briefing on the Housing Portfolio Holder's recommendation to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee, on the proposed Council rent increased for 2014/15, be received from the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing.**

### **Introduction:**

1. The proposed average Council rent increase will be considered, in the first instance, by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee at its meeting on 20th January 2014, in consultation with the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel (at the same meeting), which will make a recommendation to the Cabinet - who in turn will recommend a rent increase to the full Council.
2. It has become customary for the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing to brief the Scrutiny Panel at its January meeting on the Housing Portfolio Holder's proposed rent increase for the following year. Accordingly, at this meeting, they will provide an oral briefing to members of the Housing Scrutiny Panel on the proposed rent increase for 2014/15, and its rationale.
3. A major implication for the Council rent increase this year, and the longer term viability of the Council's HRA Financial Plan, is the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)'s proposals for the future of social rents, which were set out in a DCLG Consultation Paper in October 2013, inviting responses by 24th December 2013.
4. Further information on this consultation exercise, and the implications for the Council, are set in the separate report to the Scrutiny Panel on the Housing Improvements and Enhancements Fund, later in the agenda.
5. As a result of the DCLG's proposals, and at the request of the Housing Portfolio Holder, the Council's HRA Business Planning Consultants, CIH Consultancy, have been asked to model the effects of four different options for the 2014/15 rent increase. A Briefing Paper from CIH Consultancy on the four identified options is attached as an Appendix, which has informed the Housing Portfolio Holder's view, and is therefore provided to the Scrutiny Panel as background information.

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## Epping Forest District Council

### Impact of April 2014 Rent Increase and Consultation of Social Rents Policy

December 2013

#### Initial Update of the Plan

Following the publication of the September RPI of 3.2%, I have quickly updated your business plan model to reflect this. The last review of the plan demonstrated the funding availability for the following service enhancements:

Service Enhancements	Yrs 2-6 £m	Yrs 7-11 £m	Yrs 12-16 £m	Yrs 17-21 £m	Yrs 22-30 £m	Total £m
<b>Base Forecast</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>181.5</b>
<b>Revised Forecast</b>	<b>1.35</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>182.75</b>

This is based on rent convergence of April 2017 and the new social rent policy not being applied with the increase from the estimated 2.8% to 3.2% actual RPI results in the Yrs 2-6 enhancements potentially being increased to £1.35m per year with no impact on future years.

As per your requirements I have modelled the four options requested with the assumption of the new social rent policy, currently in consultation, being applied from April 2015.

#### Option 1

Rent Increase for April 2014 being based on rent convergence by 2014.15 (with individual increases limited to 3.7% plus £2). Any re-let properties are rented at the same out-going rent.

Average Rent Increase	5.74% £5.22
Maximum Rent Increase	6.80% £4.39
Estimated gain on Net Income from 2013.14	£1.577m
Impact to £1.35m service improvements 5 Yrs April 2014	£0.85m
Impact to £4.0m service improvements 5 Yrs April 2019	£3.3m

#### Notes:

The maximum rent increase (% based) has a lower cash value due to a lower rent than the average rent.

The estimated rent gain is based on rental income of 2 weeks.

Service enhancements are reduced due to the loss of future rent convergence.

### Option 2

Rent Increase for April 2014 being based on rent convergence by 2014.15 (with individual increases limited to 3.7% plus £2). Any re-let properties are rented at the formula (or target rent). Based on the averages for the last 5 years we have projected re-lets at 8% - but will be on a reducing balance basis.

Average Rent Increase	5.74% £5.22 (as option1)
Maximum Rent Increase	6.80% £4.39 (as option 1)
Estimated gain on Net Income from 2013.14	£1.618m
Impact to £1.35m service improvements 5 Yrs April 2014	£1.05m
Impact to £4.0m service improvements 5 Yrs April 2019	£3.55m

Note:

The in-year increase in income assumes that 6% will only have a partial effect given that re-lets occur on an even basis throughout the year.

### Option 3

Rent Increase for April 2014 being based on rent convergence by 2017.18 (with individual increases limited to 3.7% plus £2). Any re-let properties are rented at the same out-going rent.

Average Rent Increase	4.94% £4.49
Maximum Rent Increase	6.38% £4.76
Estimated gain on Net Income from 2013.14	£1.135m
Impact to £1.35m service improvements 5 Yrs April 2014	£0.6m
Impact to £4.0m service improvements 5 Yrs April 2019	£3.1m

### Option 4

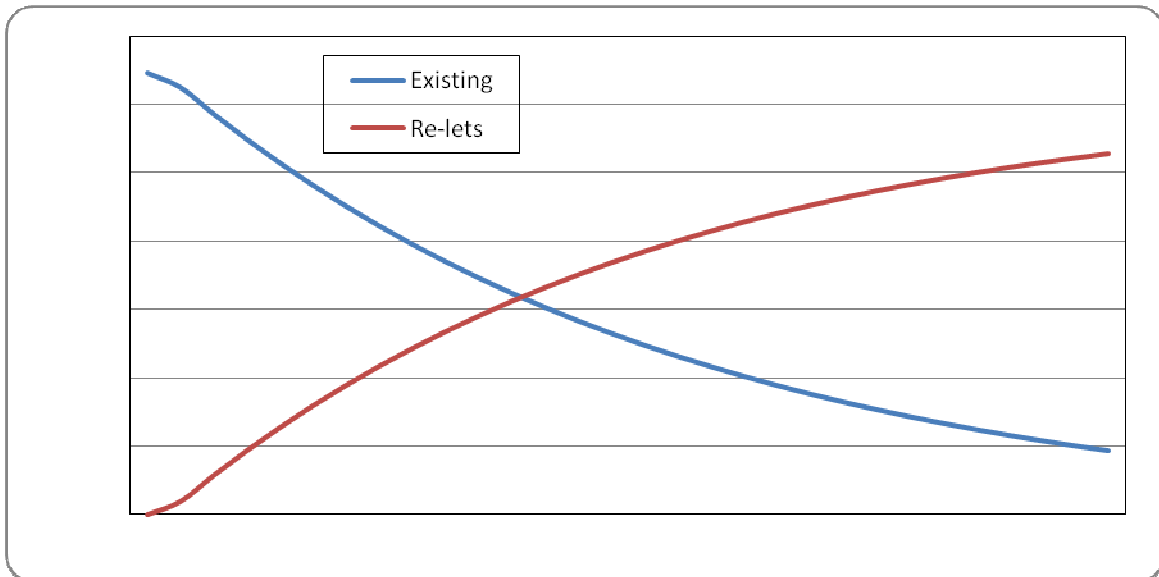
Rent Increase for April 2014 being based on rent convergence by 2017.18 (with individual increases limited to 3.7% plus £2). Any re-let properties are rented at the formula (or target rent). Based on the averages for the last 5 years we have projected re-lets at 8% - but will be on a reducing balance basis.

Average Rent Increase	4.94% £4.49 (as option 3)
Maximum Rent Increase	6.38% £4.76 (as option 3)
Estimated gain on Net Income from 2013.14	£1.384m
Impact to £1.35m service improvements 5 Yrs April 2014	£0.85m
Impact to £4.0m service improvements 5 Yrs April 2019	£3.45m

### Re-lets Basis

The information provided is that over a 5 year period the average in-year re-lets is 388 properties, excluding mutual exchanges. If we used an average stock level of 6,500 for that period this results in a percentage of 5.97% which we have rounded up to a flat 6%.

The following graph shows the average number of tenancies for existing and re-lets:

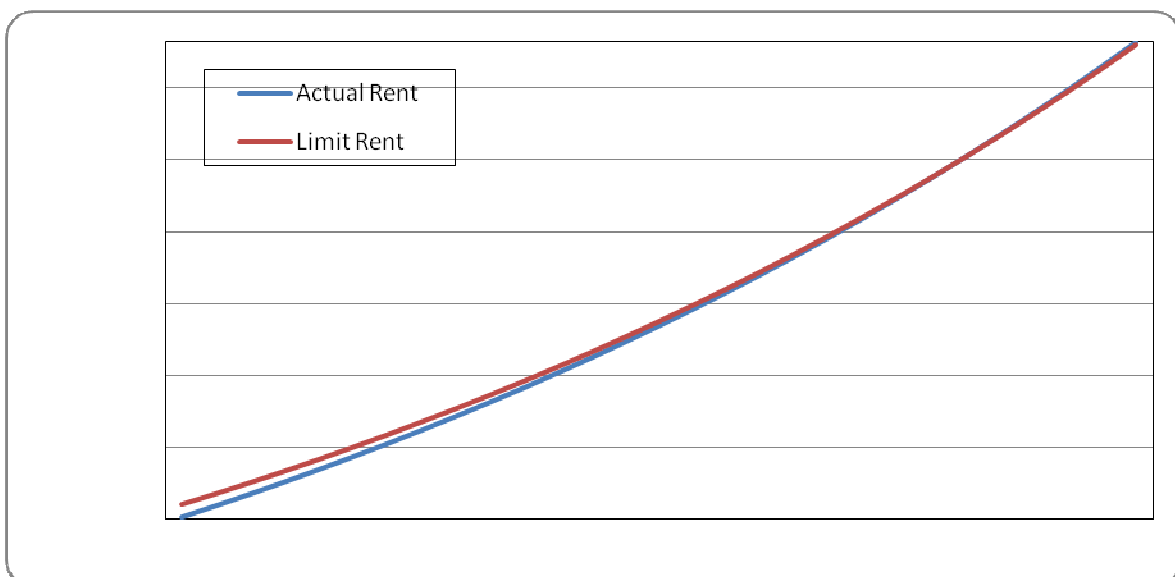


The 6% is applied on the basis of a reducing stock number for existing tenancies hence the steep increase in re-lets to formula rent in the early years of the plan.

### Limit Rent

It is difficult to predict the impact of rent rebate subsidy limitation given that Government will issue the 2014.15 limit rents in the early part of the 2014. We can only assume that they will follow the path of convergence for 2014.15 and then apply CPI +1% for April 2015 beyond.

In the graph below the actual rents are on the basis of option 4 with an estimated limit rent for 2014.15 of £99.33 (but our estimates could be as high as £100.28) depending on the formula rent used.



In this scenario the average rent does not exceed limit rent until year 25 by which time both the social rent policy may well have changed again but also Universal

Credit will be fully implemented which may see the demise of rent rebate subsidy limitation.

General Notes:

The calculations within this note are based on the rent and stock data currently held by us (provided at the beginning of this year) and the averages used may fluctuate due to the continuation of sales through right to buy which will affect these values.

Simon Smith  
December 2013

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2014**

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

**Subject: Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund – 2014/15**

**Officer contact for further information:**

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

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



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### **Recommendations:**

**(1) That, subject to the views of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation from its meeting to be held on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014 (to be reported orally) the following recommendations be made to the Cabinet:**

**(a) That the latest out-turn forecasts for each of the projects funded the Housing Improvement and Service Enhancement Fund in 2013/14, provided at Appendix 1, be noted;**

**(b) That the associated expenditure for any slippages on individual projects in 2013/14 be carried forward to complete the projects in 2014/15;**

**(c) That, subject to the average Council rent increase agreed by full Council for 2014/15, and its decision on rent levels for re-let properties;**

**(i) The proposed list of housing improvements and service enhancements for 2014/15, and the associated recommendations for each project, set-out in Appendix 2, be approved; and**

**(ii) That the amount allocated from the Fund to the Major Capital Projects Reserve in 2014/15 be reduced from £850,000 to £220,000, due to:**

- The required second year's funding for Marden Close and Faversham Hall (£508,000);**
- The proposals being put forward at Appendix 2 for the allocation of resources from the Fund next year (see below); and**
- The anticipated cessation of the Government's Rent Convergence Policy from April 2015;**

**(d) That the proposed £220,000 within the Major Capital Projects Reserve for 2014/15 be utilised to either help fund a capital project next year (subject to the subsequent approval of the Cabinet or Housing Portfolio Holder as appropriate), or be added to the funding made available for the Major Projects Capital Reserve in the following year (2015/16), for a larger capital project at that time; and**

**(e) That, at its meeting in January 2015, the Housing Scrutiny Panel be asked to consider and recommend to the Cabinet the proposed use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund for 2015/16;**

**(2) That the Scrutiny Panel's report to the Cabinet be based on the content of this report to the Scrutiny Panel;**

**(3) That the Cabinet be asked to record in the subsequent Cabinet Minutes all the Cabinet's decisions on the recommendations set out in bold at Appendix 2 (subject to the Scrutiny Panel's views on the proposed recommendations); and**

**(4) That, in view of the absence of the Chairman at the Scrutiny Panel meeting, the Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel presents the Scrutiny Panel's report to the Cabinet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2014.**

### **Summary:**

When the Cabinet agreed the strategic approach for the Council's new 30-Year HRA Financial Plan, it asked the Housing Scrutiny Panel to consider and recommend to the Cabinet a proposed list of housing improvements and service enhancements each year, utilising the additional funding made available as a result of HRA self-financing.

For the past two years, the Housing Scrutiny Panel has formulated lists of housing improvements and service enhancements, which have been subsequently approved by the Cabinet. An out-turn report on the forecast expenditure and the progress made on the projects agreed for 2013/14 is provided at Appendix 1.

When the Cabinet considered and approved the list of projects for 2013/14, it also asked the Scrutiny Panel to consider and recommend further housing improvements and service enhancements to be undertaken in 2014/15, funded from the additional HRA resources available next year. Proposals for the use of the anticipated £430,000 available for new projects next year, after the allocation of £220,000 to the Major Capital Projects Reserve in 2014/15 (subject to Cabinet and full Council agreeing the Housing Portfolio Holder's recommended rent increase for 2014/5) are provided in Appendix 2, with a summary of the costs provided at Appendix 3.

The amount of resources available to spend on new improvements and enhancements in 2014/15 and subsequent years is much less than anticipated this time last year - mainly due to the proposed cessation of the Government's Rent Convergence Policy from April 2015, which will significantly reduce the expected levels of rental income from 2015.

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

Anticipated additional resources of £430,000 are expected to be available within the HRA Budget 2014/15, to spend on additional housing improvements and service enhancements in 2014/15, in addition to the allocation of £220,000 to the Major Capital Projects Reserve.

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

To agree a different list of improvements and service enhancements, or to allocate funding differently between the proposed schemes.

### **Background**

1. At its meeting in December 2011, the Cabinet approved the strategic approach to the new 30-Year HRA Financial Plan, in readiness for the introduction of self-financing for the



HRA from April 2012. The approach agreed was to plan the repayment of the required loans to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) - to be taken out to fund the CLG's required debt settlement - over a 30-year period. This was to enable the Council to not only maintain the Council's housing stock to a new Modern Home Standard and implement a new Council Housebuilding Programme, but to also fund additional housing improvements and service improvements over the 30-year life of the Plan.

2. For the past two years, the Cabinet has asked the Housing Scrutiny Panel to consider and recommend a proposed list of housing improvements and service enhancements to the Cabinet, utilising the additional funding, which the Scrutiny Panel last did in April 2013.

3. The lists of improvements have comprised a mix of capital and revenue projects, requiring both one-off expenditure over 1-2 years and ongoing annual expenditure, which have focused on proposals that would provide a direct and demonstrable benefit to the Council's tenants.

4. At the same time as agreeing the Scrutiny Panel's proposals for 2013/14, the Cabinet also asked the Housing Scrutiny Panel to consider and recommend to the Cabinet at this meeting the proposed use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund for 2014/15.

5. The purpose of this report to the Scrutiny Panel is therefore to:

- Provide anticipated out-turns of expenditure for 2013/14, for both individual projects and the programme as a whole; and
- Recommend the use of the Housing Improvements and Service Improvements Fund for 2014/15,

### **Housing Improvements and Service Improvements Fund**

6. The estimated amount available to the Housing Improvements and Service Improvements Fund each year is, in effect, a balancing figure for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as a whole, over the 30-year period of the HRA Financial Plan. So, if net costs within the HRA over the 30 years are higher than previously forecast (or if income is lower), the amount available for new projects under the Housing Improvements and Service Improvements Budget each year can be reduced. Conversely, if net costs are lower (or if income is higher) the budget can be increased, in order to achieve the Council's prime strategic objectives for the HRA - which are to ensure that the PWLB loans can be repaid when they mature and that the HRA does not accrue balances (surpluses) that are higher than necessary, or falls into deficit.

7. Since housing-related income and expenditure is ring-fenced to the HRA, any annual HRA surpluses that are not required for any specific purpose therefore need to be spent, otherwise they simply result in increased HRA Balances – which is why the Housing Improvements and Service Improvements Fund was introduced from 2012/13.

8. The Fund operates in a similar way to the HRA's Housing Repairs Fund and the General Fund's District Development Fund (DDF) in that, each year, the HRA contributes an agreed amount to the Fund (based on the estimated surplus available through the HRA Financial Plan) and the Cabinet agrees the amount to be spent from the Fund on housing improvement and service enhancement projects in the following year. If there are any underspends on the Fund at the end of the year, they are carried forward into the following year; if there are any overspends (which would need to be funded from HRA Balances), the contribution from the HRA is reduced the following year by the total amount overspent. This approach gives greater flexibility, whilst still ensuring budgetary control.

## Progress with the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund 2013/14 and anticipated out-turns

9. The Cabinet agreed the Housing Scrutiny Panel's recommendation that 5 new housing improvements and service enhancements be undertaken in 2013/14, in addition to the completion of a further 5 projects extending / carried forward into 2013/14.

10. Appendix 1 provides a list of the agreed improvements/enhancements for 2013/14, together with the original budget and the latest forecast expenditure for each project. The following summarises the budget position for the overall 2013/14 Programme:

Original budget - 2013/14	£1,050,000
Latest anticipated expenditure forecast - 2013/14	£700,000

11. Generally, good progress has been made with the delivery of most of the projects during the year to date, although some of the Key Deliverables relating to the Repairs Management Contract with Mears have had to be carried forward to next year, for operational reasons.

12. Last year, on the recommendation of the Housing Scrutiny Panel, the Cabinet agreed to establish a Major Capital Projects Reserve within the Fund. The Reserve enables resources to be accumulated and available when required for major capital housing projects, subject to the schemes having the approval of the Cabinet or Housing Portfolio Holder as appropriate. The Cabinet made this decision because, although the HRA Financial Plan makes provision for increased capital expenditure on individual properties within the Council's housing stock - in order to ensure that they meet the full, modern standard (a higher standard than the Decent Homes Standard) - no provision is made for major capital housing schemes within the Plan. The need for major capital schemes has occurred from time-to-time, and has included the major improvement scheme at Springfields, Waltham Abbey, small scale stock transfers of sheltered housing schemes to housing associations to enable conversion and improvement works to be undertaken and the recently-planned conversion schemes at Marden Close and Faversham Hall, Chigwell Row.

13. It should be noted that, due to the anticipated cessation of the Government's Rent Convergence Policy from April 2015, which will significantly reduce the expected levels of rental income from 2015 (see below), the only projects to be funded from the Major Capital Projects Reserve this year are the first year's funding of the Marden Close and Faversham Hall Conversion Schemes at Chigwell Row. This has resulted in a planned underspend of £226,000 in the Reserve this year.

14. Moreover, last year, the Fund also included allocations of funding to the Reserve of £850,000 per annum in both 2014/15 and 2015/16. However, having regard to:

- The required second year's funding for Marden Close and Faversham Hall (£508,000);
- The proposals being put forward for the allocation of resources from the Fund next year (see below); and
- Again, the anticipated cessation of the Government's Rent Convergence Policy from April 2015;

only £220,000 is now available to allocate from the Fund to the Reserve in 2014/15. This can be utilised to either help fund a capital project next year, to be added to available funding in the following year (2015/16) for a larger capital project at that time.

## **Availability of funding for new housing improvements and service enhancements – 2014/15**

15. When the most recent HRA Financial Plan was produced in March 2013, it identified that £1.5million would become available for new and committed improvements/enhancements from April 2014 – on top of the £570,000 p/a available for new projects in April 2013. This forecast was subsequently reduced to £1.35million at the Quarter 2 Review of the HRA Financial Plan, reported to the Scrutiny Panel in October 2013, taking account of updated information - particularly the 2012/13 Out-turns and an assumed increased number of Right to Buy sales.

16. However, in late-October 2013, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published its long-awaited Consultation Paper on the future of social rents, with a response date of 24th December 2013. The document included the following proposals:

- From April 2015, rents for existing tenancies will only be able to increase by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) plus 1% per year (instead of the current Retail Prices Index (RPI) plus 0.5%), with no additional increase allowed (currently up to £2 per week) to achieve convergence with housing association rents for similar properties within the District;
- For new tenancies, the formula (or target) rent (i.e. the rent which housing associations currently charge for the same type of property in the same location) can be charged straight away when the new tenant moves in. Subsequently, such rents will also increase by CPI plus 1%; and
- Details of how such Council rent increases will be centrally-controlled through “rent rebate subsidy limitation” are still to be decided/published by the DCLG. This will be the way that the Government actually implements and ensures the above rents policy

17. The DCLG’s proposal to cease the rent convergence arrangements from April 2015 will have a significant detrimental effect on the Council’s HRA Financial Plan, which will result in the amount of resources available to the Fund from April 2014 being significantly reduced.

18. There is a separate item on the Scrutiny Panel’s Agenda to discuss the Housing Portfolio Holder’s proposed Council rent increase for 2014/15. However, based on the Housing Portfolio Holder’s current intended recommendations to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee that average Council rents should increase by 4.94%, and that vacant Council properties not currently at their target rent should be re-let at their target rent (and not at the same rent as charged to the previous tenant, or the tenants of similar properties in the locality), the amount of reduction in rental income (and therefore funding for housing improvements and enhancements) as a result of the DCLG’s proposed cessation of its rent convergence policy is estimated to be around £500,000 per annum for the next five years (reducing the amount available to the Fund from £1.35 million p/a to just £850,000 p/a).

19. Should, ultimately, the Cabinet not agree that Council properties should be re-let at their target rent, the resultant rental income from such properties would be reduced by a further estimated £250,000 per annum for the next five years. This would mean that the amount the HRA is able to contribute to the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund in 2014/15 would have to be reduced by £250,000, from £850,000 to £600,000.

20. The Director of Housing did formally respond to the DCLG’s Consultation on Social Rents Policy, drawing attention to the detrimental financial effect the Government’s proposals

will have on the Council's Housing Revenue Account - and, in particular, the effect on the Council's ability to undertake housing improvements and service enhancements – and asked the DCLG to continue with its current rent convergence policy, but perhaps giving councils discretion on whether or not to pursue rent convergence in their area until all council rents have achieved their "target rent". The Government's response to the consultation is awaited, but the general view of housing commentators is that the DCLG is unlikely to cancel its proposed cessation of its rent convergence policy.

21. Nevertheless, after taking account of the cost of previous commitments for improvements/enhancements in 2014/15, there is still an estimated £650,000 available in 2014/15.

22. The following table summarises the position for the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund for 2014/15:

Expected HRA contribution to Fund – 2014/15	£850,000		
Savings from the Fund's 2012/13 Out-turn	£143,000		
Anticipated savings/slippage from 2013/14	£308,000		
<b>Total resources available to Fund in 2014/15</b>		1,301,000	
Amount required due to committed costs of 2013/14 projects (ongoing and one-off)		(£701,000)	
<b>Remaining resources available for 2014/15</b>			£650,000
Amount proposed to be allocated to the Major Capital Projects Reserve in 2014/15			(£220,000)
<b>Available to fund new projects in 2014/15</b>			£430,000

#### **Proposals for the use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund 2014/15**

23. Following consultation with the Housing Management Team and all the Housing Managers, the new projects for 2014/15 listed at Appendix 2 are put forward for recommendation to the Cabinet. For each proposal, a description is provided, together with details of the one-off and/or ongoing annual funding required, and whether the expenditure is capital and/or revenue. At the end of each proposal, the formal recommendation(s) are provided in bold.

24. Appendix 3 provides a spreadsheet with each of the proposals listed, summarising the one-off and ongoing expenditure for each of the next three financial years.

25. It should be noted that, even after utilising all of the resources available to the Fund in 2014/15, there will still be a further £510,000 and £750,000 available to spend on new projects in the following two years (2015/16 and 2016/17), based on current forecasts. Furthermore, despite the Government's proposed cessation of its rent convergence policy from April 2015, it is currently estimated that the HRA's contribution to the Fund can be increased by £2.65million per annum to £3.45million per annum from April 2019.

26. It is therefore proposed that a further recommendation be made to the Cabinet that, at its meeting in January 2015, the Housing Scrutiny Panel be asked to consider and recommend to the Cabinet the use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund for 2015/16.

27. As was the case last year, it is also suggested that the Scrutiny Panel's report to the Cabinet be based on the content of this report. In view of the Chairman's expected absence at this Scrutiny Panel meeting, it is proposed that the Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel presents the Scrutiny Panel's report to the Cabinet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2014.

**Resource Implications:**

£430,000 available for new projects in 2014/15, after allocating £220,000 to the Major Capital Projects Reserve, included within the HRA Budget 2014/15.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

Localism Act 2012

Local Government and Housing Act 1989

Housing Act 1985

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

(a) The proposed Oakwood Hill Estate Enhancements will result in an improved environment on the estate.

(b) The proposed increased budget for external wall insulation of Council properties will improve their energy efficiency.

(c) The proposed refurbishment of communal kitchens at sheltered housing schemes is likely to result in lower energy costs, due to the installation of more energy-efficient appliances.

(d) The proposed continuation of the additional funding for the Mow and Grow Scheme, will result in improved gardens for those older and vulnerable people that benefit from the continued funding.

(e) The proposed provision of scooter stores at sheltered housing schemes will result in a safer and more appropriate environment for residents to park their scooters than at present.

(f) The proposed installation of new front doors to leasehold properties in flat blocks will result in a much safer building for residents, due to the improved fire safety.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will be consulted on the proposals within this report at its meeting scheduled for 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014. The Federation's comments will be reported orally at the Scrutiny Panel meeting.

**Background Papers:**

None.

**Impact Assessments:**Risk Management

The identified risks are the usual risks relating to improvement projects e.g. actual costs of works exceeding the agreed budget and health and safety issues.

**Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund - 2013-14  
Programme Costs (One-off and Ongoing)  
(As at January 2014)**

No.	Proposal	Responsible Officer	£000's						Cap. or Rev.	
			2013/14		2014/15		2015/16			
			One-off	Ongoing	One-off	Ongoing	One-off	Ongoing		
<b>Outstanding Projects from 2012/13</b>										
12/13 A	Mains-Powered Smoke Detector Installation Programme	H. Thorpe	Latest	129						C
			Original	129						
12/13 B	Conversion of communal toilets for disabled use	H. Thorpe	Latest	52						C
			Original	52						
12/13 C	On-Line Rents System for Tenants	D. Clifton	Latest	0	15					R
			Original	7	0					
12/13 D	Repairs Management Contract - Additional Key Deliverables	P. Pledger	Latest	10	31					R
			Original	41	0					
12/13 E	Locata Hosting System	R. Wilson	Latest	7						R
			Original	11						
<b>TOTALS (Outstanding Projects from 2012/13)</b>			Latest	<b>198</b>	<b>46</b>					
			Original	<b>240</b>	<b>0</b>					
<b>Agreed New Projects for 2013/14 (with Marden Close &amp; Faversham Hall 2013/14 capital costs carried forward to 2014/15)</b>										
1	Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan	A. Hall	Latest	48	78	30	78	0	56	R
			Original	81	78	43	79	22	79	
2	Senior Cleaner	R. Wilson	Latest		10		21		21	R
			Original		17		17		17	
3	Sheltered housing schemes - Increase in furniture budget	D. Pegler	Latest		14		14		14	R
			Original		14		14		14	
4	In-Year Housing Improvements and Enhancements Fund	A. Hall	Latest	50						C / R
			Original	50						
5	Marden Close (Feasibility Estimate - inc. fees)	P. Pledger	Latest	104		388				C
			Original	0		0				
6	Faversham Hall Conversion	P. Pledger	Latest			120				C
			Original			0				
7	Other Schemes - Major Capital Project Reserve	A. Hall	Latest	0		220		0		C
			Original	330		850		850		
<b>TOTALS (Agreed Projects for 2013/14)</b>			Latest	<b>202</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>91</b>	
			Original	<b>461</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>872</b>	<b>110</b>	
<b>GRAND TOTALS (Outstanding &amp; Agreed New Projects)</b>			Latest	<b>502</b>	<b>871</b>	<b>91</b>				
			Original	<b>810</b>	<b>1,003</b>	<b>982</b>				
<b>Savings from 2012/13 Out-Turn</b>						143				
<b>Anticipated savings/slippage from 2013/14</b>						308				
<b>Amount expected to be available for HRA Budget for new Enhancements in year</b>						850		850		
<b>Total amount of budget available to spend in year</b>						1,301		850		
<b>Available to allocate to new enhancements in year (after previous year's commitments - i.e. Latest Grand Totals above)</b>						<b>430</b>		<b>759</b>		

**Proposed List of Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements**

**2014/15**

**(1) Front Door Fire Safety Replacement Programme for Leaseholders in Flat Blocks**

<b>One-off cost(s):</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>£125,000</b>
	<b>2016/17 – 2018/19</b>	<b>£100,000 p/a (3 years)</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£425,000</b>
<b>Annual cost:</b>	<b>Nil</b>	
<b>Form of expenditure:</b>	<b>Capital</b>	

1. As part of its new Modern Home Standard, the Council has agreed to replace front doors to Council properties, as part of its ongoing Planned Maintenance Programme. However, front doors to individual flats in flat blocks with enclosed common parts are required to be fire-protected, to achieve at least ½ hour fire protection.
2. The replacement of fire-protected front doors in flat blocks was also the subject of a separate Cabinet decision in relation to when permission will be given to tenants to lay carpets in the common parts of flat blocks; the provision of replacement fire-protected front doors to all flats was one of the conditions when carpets would be allowed to be laid.
3. Within the leases of flats sold under the Right to Buy, responsibility for the *door frame* of is the Council's, but the leaseholder is responsible for the *actual door*. This split in responsibility therefore means that each party (the Council and leaseholder) needs to reach agreement on their replacement, since the frame cannot be replaced without interference with the door, and vice versa.
4. There are around 750 flats across the District that requires a fire-protected front door, where access to the property is off an internal common area. The cost of replacing such doors is around £750 each, which includes replacement of both the door and frame.
5. Since, under the terms of the lease, it is the leaseholder's responsibility to meet the cost of replacement front doors, and because the cost is quite high, most leaseholders are not prepared to meet this cost, when the Council replaces the doors of its own properties to provide the required fire protection. This causes a problem since, although the Council properties have adequate fire protection from the communal areas, and vice versa, the integrity of these fire protection measures is compromised by the inadequate fire-protected doors of the leasehold properties. This not only causes a risk to the leaseholder from fire and smoke entering their property from the communal areas, it also increases the risk for other residents, including the Council's tenants, if a fire starts within a leasehold property, since it can spread to the communal area much more easily.
6. This is a problem being experienced by many local authorities across the country. In response, and in order to safeguard the safety of their tenants and other leaseholders, many councils are meeting in full, or contributing to, the costs of providing fire-protection doors to leasehold properties.
7. Therefore, since it is in the Council's interest that all front doors in blocks are fire-protected, and in view of the low level of take-up from leaseholders to install fire-protected doors (due to their cost), it is suggested that a scheme is introduced whereby the Council

offers to contribute 75% of the cost of replacement doors where the door comes off of an enclosed common part (i.e around £565 per door), if leaseholders meet the remaining 25% cost (around £185).

7. This is the first year of the Front Door Replacement Programme (2013/14), and some leaseholders have agreed to meet the full cost of having fire-protected doors installed in their flats. Therefore, in order to treat all leaseholders equitably, it is suggested that, in such cases, these leaseholders be given a refund of 75% of the cost; where they have already paid, it is suggested that the refund be applied to their 2014/15 annual maintenance charge. Those leaseholders who did not agree to have fire-protected doors installed, will be advised of the proposed scheme and offered to have a new door installed in 2014/15.

8. The cost to the Council of the proposed scheme, to fund the Council's 75% contribution, would be around £425,000 in total (if all leaseholders accept the offer). This would be spread over the next four years, in line with the External Repairs and Redecorations Programme (although the cost next year will be £25,000 higher than the remaining three years, in order to meet the cost of refunds from the 2013/14 Programme).

#### **Recommendations:**

(a) That, in order to help ensure that all front doors in blocks of Council flats are fire-protected, a scheme be introduced whereby the Council offers to contribute 75% of the cost of replacing fire-protected front doors to leasehold properties, where the door comes off of an enclosed common part, if leaseholders meet the remaining 25% cost;

(b) That, in order to treat all leaseholders equitably, where leaseholders have already agreed to pay, or have paid, the full amount for the installation of a fire-protected front door, they be given a discount/refund of 75% of the cost, with refunds for installations already paid being applied as a credit to the leaseholder's 2014/15 annual maintenance charge;

(c) That those leaseholders who, to date, have not agreed to have new fire-protected doors installed, be advised of the proposed scheme and offered to have a new door installed in 2014/15; and

(d) That the scheme be funded through an allocation of funding from the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund of £125,000 in 2014/15 and £100,000 per annum for the following three years.

## **(2) Oakwood Hill Estate Enhancement Scheme, Loughton**

**One-off cost(s):** £200,000 (£100,000 p/a in 2014/15 and 2015/16)  
**Annual cost:** Nil  
**Form of expenditure:** Capital

1. The Oakwood Hill Estate, Loughton is a former Greater London Council (GLC) Estate, comprising a myriad of 133 houses, 144 flats and 136 maisonettes (in three-storey blocks), built in the early 1970s and serviced by a complex and extensive network of paths and roads. The Estate was transferred to Epping Forest District Council, along with all the GLC's other dwellings in our District, in 1980.

2. Over recent years there has been a marked deterioration of the environment in and around the Oakwood Hill Estate, particularly the paths, roads, lighting, refuse facilities and landscaping.



3. The Housing Portfolio Holder has recently been approached by both the two District Council Ward Members and the County Council Divisional Member for the Estate, expressing their concerns about the deterioration of the Estate's environment; in response, the Housing Portfolio Holder has accepted that the Estate would benefit from an Estate Enhancement Scheme.

4. The main improvements required relate to the network of paths and roads (and their associated lighting), of which the majority are adopted by the Highways Authority and, therefore, maintainable at public expense by Essex County Council.

5. Notwithstanding this fact, there are still a number of paths, landscaping and other aspects (e.g. estate signage and waste disposal arrangements) that are the District Council's responsibility and would benefit from improvement. The Housing Portfolio Holder therefore intends to recommend to the Cabinet that the District Council spends £200,000 towards the cost of improvements on the Estate over the next two years (i.e. £100,000 per annum in 2014/15 and 2015/16).

6. However, the Housing Portfolio Holder has written to Cllr Rodney Bass, the County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation, to request that he gives consideration to the County Council match-funding the District Council's contribution of £200,000, in order to undertake the required repairs and improvements to the adopted paths and roads on the Estate that are the responsibility of the County Council. A response is awaited.

7. Separately, County Cllr Chris Pond (who is also a Loughton Town Councillor) has put forward a request to Loughton Town Council that it also considers making a modest financial contribution towards the proposed environmental improvement scheme. Cllr Pond has advised that this has been agreed in principle, subject to the Town Council's budgetary processes.

8. If the Cabinet agrees to the proposed allocation of funding, it is the Housing Portfolio Holder's intention to establish and chair a Member/Officer "Task Force", including senior housing officers, ward members and the ECC divisional member, as well as other representatives from the Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association (OHERA), the Oakwood Senior Citizens Club and Essex CC Highways.

#### **Recommendations:**

**(a) That £100,000 per annum be allocated in 2014/15 and 2015/16 (£200,000 in total) to fund an Estate Enhancement Scheme at the Oakwood Hill Estate, Loughton;**

**(b) That the Housing Portfolio Holder's request to the County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation that the County Council provides match funding for the Enhancement Scheme be noted; and**

**(c) That a Member/Officer "Task Force" be established, chaired by the Housing Portfolio Holder, and including senior housing officers, ward members, the ECC divisional member, and representatives from the Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association (OHERA), the Oakwood Senior Citizens Club and Essex CC Highways.**

### **(3) Refurbishment of Communal Kitchens in Sheltered Housing Schemes**

**One-off cost(s):** £140,000 (£70,000 p/a in 2014/15 and 2015/16)  
**Annual cost:** Nil  
**Form of expenditure:** Capital

1. All of the Council's sheltered housing schemes benefit from communal facilities, including a laundry room, lounge and kitchen - which are all used regularly, although the communal kitchens tends to be used the most. With the exception of Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey, none of these kitchens have been refurbished since the schemes were first built, and they therefore now look very tired and dated, with the cupboards and worktops having reached the end of their operational life and in need of replacement.

2. The sizes of kitchens vary from scheme to scheme, so it is difficult to properly estimate the cost of refurbishing each kitchen. However, based on the cost of the recently-refurbished kitchen at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey, it is estimated that a total budget of £140,000 would be sufficient to fund the refurbishment of the remaining 12 kitchens. It is proposed that the work be programmed over 2 years, with funding of £70,000 per annum allocated each year.

#### **Recommendation:**

**That £70,000 per annum be allocated in 2014/15 and 2015/16 (£140,000 in total) to refurbish all 12 remaining communal kitchens at the sheltered housing schemes that now require renewal.**

### **(4) Provision of Mobility Scooter Stores at Sheltered Housing Schemes**

**One-off cost(s):** £50,000  
**Annual cost:** Nil (funded from fees)  
**Form of expenditure:** Capital

1. Increasing numbers of residents at the Council's sheltered housing schemes are purchasing electric mobility scooters, which has led to an increasing problem of where residents can store them. Some stand-alone scooter stores have been provided at a small number of sheltered schemes but, in many cases, residents have no option but to park/store them in communal lounges or corridors - which not only causes a nuisance for other residents, but also raises health and safety concerns.

2. There has therefore become a desperate need to provide additional scooter stores at a number of sheltered housing schemes. The proposed budget of £50,000 would be sufficient to provide around 25 scooter stores across the District, with those schemes with the greatest demand and sufficient space to provide the stores given the greatest priority.

3. Users would pay a weekly charge for the rental and electricity charge usage, which is reviewed annually by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee as part of the Housing-Related Fees and Charges.

#### **Recommendation:**

**That £50,000 be allocated in 2014/15 to fund the provision and installation of around 25 electric mobility scooter stores, with those schemes with the greatest demand and sufficient space to provide the stores given the greatest priority.**

## **(5) Extension of Mow and Grow Scheme**

**One-off cost(s):** £40,000 (£20,000 p/a in 2014/15 and 2015/16)  
**Annual cost:** Nil  
**Form of expenditure:** Revenue

1. A full report on this proposal is included elsewhere on the Scrutiny Panel's Agenda

### **Recommendations:**

**The recommendations relating to the proposal are included in the full report.**

## **(6) Provision of Wi-fi at Norway House, North Weald**

**One-off cost(s):** £8,000  
**Annual cost:** £500 per annum  
**Form of expenditure:** Capital/Revenue

1. The Chairman of the Housing Scrutiny Panel, Cllr Stephen Murray, has put forward this proposal for the Scrutiny Panel to consider, which has been evaluated and is supported by officers.

2. Cllr Murray has drawn attention to the difficulties brought to his attention by residents of Norway House of them and, more importantly their children, being unable to access the internet from their personal PCs, laptops and tablets in their rooms to undertake school and college work, as well as for domestic, leisure and other uses.

3. Since Norway House only provides temporary accommodation for around 4-6 months, it is not worth residents paying to have a landline installed in their rooms for broadband, and it is understood that the use of dongles is unreliable in this location.

4. Cllr Murray has therefore suggested that the Council provides Wi-Fi at Norway House that residents can use. The Council's ICT Service has been consulted, which has confirmed that the installation of Wi-Fi at Norway House would be technically possible and that ICT has the capacity to arrange the installation in 2014/15 and support the system on an ongoing basis. An on-site Wi-Fi survey would be required to ensure that the expected coverage can be received, and network cabling and wireless access points would need to be purchased and installed in the areas identified by the survey. Configuration for the access points would be controlled by the Council's wireless system.

5. The ICT Service has advised that, subject to survey, the maximum cost of implementation would be around £8,000, with on-going costs no more than £500 per annum.

6. For a variety of reasons, not least the bureaucracy that would be involved, it is proposed that residents would not be charged for the Wi-Fi usage, and that the cost of access is included within their room charge. An appropriate level of regulation of internet access would be applied, through the use of filters, in a similar way to the Council's Wi-Fi system at the Civic Offices.

7. Having assessed the proposal, officers are of the view that the installation would provide an essential service for the residents of Norway House and their children and is therefore supported.

## Recommendations:

- (a) That a Wi-Fi system be provided and supported by the Council at Norway House, North Weald, funded by an allocation of one-off funding of £8,000 in 2014/15 and an ongoing support cost of £500 per annum;
- (b) That an appropriate level of regulation of internet access be applied, through the use of filters; and
- (c) That residents not be charged for the Wi-Fi usage, with the cost of access considered to be included within their room charge.

### **(7) Initial Feasibility Study for Chalet Replacement Project at Norway House, North Weald**

<b>One-off cost(s):</b>	<b>£6,000 – 2014/15</b>
<b>Annual cost:</b>	<b>Nil</b>
<b>Form of expenditure:</b>	<b>Revenue</b>

1. In 1992, 5 pairs of chalets (10 chalets in total) were erected in the grounds of Norway House, the Council's Homeless Person's Hostel in North Weald, in order to respond to an increasing demand for temporary accommodation at that time. Each chalet comprises a lounge and two bedrooms, with pairs of chalets sharing a kitchen and bathroom. The total cost of supplying and erecting the chalets in 1992 (including fees) was around £235,000 (£47,000 per pair of chalets).
2. At the time of erection, temporary planning permission was provided for a period of 10 years. Permanent planning permission was granted in 2003.
3. The chalets have provided essential supplementary accommodation to the temporary accommodation provided within the main building at Norway House over the past 21 years. Indeed, in recent years, the need for temporary homeless accommodation has increased, if the Council is to continue to comply with the statutory requirement to not use bed and breakfast accommodation for families in excess of 6 weeks.
4. However, the chalets will soon be reaching the end of their usable life and are already experiencing maintenance and operational problems. The construction of the chalet comprises stud walls. The cavities under the floor of the chalets are accessible to small animals/rodents and, due to the construction of the floor, dampness has entered a number of chalets from the ground, causing the floors in some areas to rot and warp. Therefore, sections of the kitchen and lounge area floors in some chalets have had to be replaced. Dampness within the chalets is a common problem, and mould can often be found on walls, furniture and clothing belonging to the occupants.
5. The PVCu glazed windows are in need of replacing; many do not open properly or have broken locks and handles which are difficult to replace given the age and design of the windows. Problems have also arisen with drainage in some of the bathrooms.
6. Families share a small kitchen (around 3.3 square metres) with one sink and one cooker. A space is provided for each family to have a fridge freezer, and each family have two a wall cabinet and a base unit. There is very little worktop space for preparation of meals.
7. In each chalet, two families share a small bathroom (comprising a bath and toilet and communal cupboard); the size of the bathroom is just 3 square metres, so there is no space

to install a shower, which is more appropriate to modern living. Families find the sharing of a bathroom particularly problematical, with cleanliness and hygiene cause sometime causing arguments between families. Even with two families sharing harmoniously, with, potentially, up to 9 people sharing a bathroom or all needing to use this facility within a short time frame (e.g. before school or work) problems occur, causing residents and their children to be late for work or school.

8. In addition, most of the rooms within the main building of Norway House now have the use of their own bathroom and only share a kitchen – following a programme of bathroom installations over a number of years - which provides a more appropriate and suitable living environment for residents. Residents still need to have some element of sharing, otherwise secure tenancies would be created instead of licences – which is the Council's preferred form of occupancy for Norway House. It would therefore be preferable if the chalets also had their own bathrooms, and only shared kitchens (but of a larger size than presently).

9. It is felt that there is therefore a need to start planning for the renewal of the existing chalets within the next five years or so. The first stage in such a process would be to undertake an initial feasibility study to assess the design, planning and other issues associated with the provision of replacement chalets. This could include an assessment of the potential to provide an increased number of chalets in the grounds of Norway House. The feasibility study would also assess the costs of supply, erection and fees for different numbers of chalets.

10. Officers have sought a quote from Keegans, one of the Council's Framework Consultants, to undertake the feasibility study, which is £6,000 and is considered to be acceptable.

11. It is therefore proposed that the Fund initially meets the cost of the feasibility study in 2014/15, with a view to the cost of a Chalet Replacement Project being met from the Major Capital Projects Reserve at some time in the future, which would be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Panel and agreed by the Cabinet at the appropriate time.

#### **Recommendations:**

**(a) That £6,000 be allocated in 2014/15 to fund an initial feasibility study to assess the design, planning and other issues – together with the costs - associated with the provision of replacement chalets at Norway House, North Weald;**

**(b) That the feasibility study includes an assessment of the potential and costs to provide an increased number of chalets in the grounds of Norway House; and**

**(c) That, in principle, the costs of the Chalet Replacement Project be met from the Major Capital Project Reserve held within the Fund, at an appropriate time in the future, subject to the approval of the Cabinet.**

### **(8) In-Year Housing Improvements and Enhancements Fund**

<b>One-off cost(s):</b>	Nil
<b>Annual cost:</b>	£50,000
<b>Form of expenditure:</b>	Capital / Revenue

1. For the last two years, a small part of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund has been set aside as an In-Year Fund for small additional projects of benefit to tenants that may be identified during the course of the year by members and officers. This has enabled the projects to be undertaken quickly, rather than having to wait

until the commencement of the following financial year. Individual one-off projects costing in excess of £10,000 have to be formally authorised by Housing Portfolio Holder.

2. Last year, the Cabinet agreed the Scrutiny Panel's recommendation to include an annual provision of £50,000 for the In-Year Fund, within the main Housing Improvement and Service Enhancements Fund – which has been included within the Fund Programme accordingly.

**Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund - 2014-15  
Programme Costs (One-off and Ongoing)**

No.	Proposal	Responsible Officer	£000's						Cap. or Rev.		
			2014/15		2015/16		2016/17				
			One-off	Ongoing	One-off	Ongoing	One-off	Ongoing			
<b>Outstanding Projects from 2013/14</b>											
13/14 A	On-Line Rents System for Tenants	D. Clifton	Latest								R
			Original	15							
13/14 B	Repairs Management Contract - Additional Key Deliverables	P. Pledger	Latest								R
			Original	31							
13/14 C	Marden Close (Feasibility Estimate - inc. fees)	P. Pledger	Latest								C
			Original	388							
13/14 D	Faversham Hall Conversion	P. Pledger	Latest								C
			Original	120							
<b>TOTALS (Outstanding Projects from 2013/14)</b>			Latest								
			Original	554							
<b>Proposed New Projects for 2014/15</b>											
1	Front Door Fire Safety Replacement Programme for Leaseholders in Flat Block	H. Thorpe	Latest								C
			Original	125		100		100			
2	Oakwood Hill Estate Enhancement Scheme	P. Pledger	Latest								C
			Original	100		100					
3	Refurbishment of Communal Kitchens - Sheltered Schemes	H. Thorpe	Latest								C
			Original	70		70					
4	Provision of Electric Mobility Scooter Stores	H. Thorpe	Latest								C
			Original	50		50					
5	Extension of Mow and Grow Scheme	R. Wilson	Latest								R
			Original	20		20					
6	Provision of Wi-Fi at Norway House	R. Wallace	Latest								C
			Original	8							
7	Norway House Chalet Replacement Project - Feasibility Study	P. Pledger	Latest								C
			Original	7							
8	In-Year Housing Improvements and Enhancements Fund	A. Hall	Latest								C / R
			Original	50							
9	Other Schemes - Major Capital Project Reserve	A. Hall	Latest								C
			Original	220							
<b>TOTALS (Agreed Projects for 2013/14)</b>			Latest	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
			Original	650	0	340	0	100	0		
<b>GRAND TOTALS (Outstanding &amp; Agreed New Projects)</b>			Latest	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
			Original	1,204	0	340	0	100	0		
<b>Savings from 2013/14 Out-Turn</b>						0					
<b>Anticipated savings/slippage from 2014/15</b>						0					
<b>Amount expected to be available for HRA Budget for new Enhancements in year</b>						850		850			
<b>Total amount of budget available to spend in year</b>						850		850			
<b>Available to allocate to new enhancements in year (after previous year's commitments - i.e. Original Grand Totals above)</b>						<b>510</b>		<b>750</b>			







## Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2014**

**Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D Stallan**

**Subject: Review of Parking Enforcement Measures on Housing Estates**

# SCRUTINY



Epping Forest District Council

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

**Democratic Services Officer: Mark Jenkins (01992-564067)**

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### Recommendations:

1. That at the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made at its meeting on 4 June 2013 (Minute 12 (b) refers), the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel reviews the approach to parking enforcement to prevent unauthorised parking on Housing-owned grass verges, and considers any recommendations to be made to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for onward reference to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

### Report:

1. At its meeting on 4 June 2013, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed, as part of its Work Programme, that the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel reviews the approach to parking enforcement to prevent unauthorised parking on Housing-owned grass verges hence the need for this report. The Public Interest Justification raised by the Proposing and the two Supporting Councillors was as follows:

*“Considerable damage to grass and the “green” concept on which many residential areas were designed is gradually disappearing. The damage caused could pose safety hazards for users of the highway (e.g. deep rutting which could pose a hazard to pedestrians).”*

### Background

2. At its meeting on 1 September 2008 (Minute 60 refers), in order to ease parking problems on housing estates, the Cabinet agreed that the maximum amount of grassed verge to be removed in order to construct a vehicular crossover to allow residents to park their vehicle/s in their front garden be increased from 6 metres to 12 metres in length. On the recommendation of the Housing Portfolio Holder, it was further agreed that, for any proposed crossover in excess of 6 metres, a consultation exercise involving local residents and Ward Members be undertaken prior to approval and construction.

3. The Cabinet also agreed at this meeting that the additional £300,000 budget available in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme from 2009/2010 be made available to fund further off-street parking schemes and be match funded from the General Fund. Progress made on off-street parking schemes since the Cabinet agreed additional funding in September 2008 is set out in the table attached at Appendix 1.

### Parking enforcement on Housing Estates

4. The Housing Scrutiny Panel considered reports on options for parking enforcement at its meetings on 18 March 2008, 3 July 2008 and 23 March 2009. The reports were concerning the increase in complaints at that time from the public about unauthorised parking; these include increased telephone calls, letters and occasionally petitions.

5. The complaints were about two main issues. Firstly, residents were unhappy that more vehicles were being parked on grass verges causing damage to the open green spaces, which are costly to repair and can be dangerous to pedestrians and children playing. When, in response, enforcement action is taken by the Council, in the form of installing bollards, jockey rails or shrub planting, other residents complain about having nowhere to park, with cars being displaced into already heavily congested side streets.

6. In addition to receiving complaints from the public, officers were at that time receiving enquiries from Members. Some Members were asking that enforcement action be taken to prevent vehicles from parking on the grassed verges, with other Members asking officers not to take action as it will displace vehicles and cause problems in side streets.

7. On 18 March 2008, the Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed that a Member Survey be undertaken on unauthorised parking on housing estates. The survey sought Members views on the amount of funding for off-street parking schemes, the extension of the 6 metre rule for vehicular crossovers and whether any enforcement measures should be put on-hold until off-street parking schemes are installed or the 6 metre rule is extended. Only 6 Members responded, the outcome of the Member Survey is attached at Appendix 2.

### ***Draft policy***

8. The Housing Scrutiny Panel asked officers in 2008 to draft a policy on the approach to be taken on unauthorised parking on housing-owned land. The draft policy is attached at Appendix 3. The draft policy was considered by the Panel. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and officers had concerns that the proposed policy may be difficult to enforce for the following reasons:

### ***Tenants and Leaseholders views on the draft policy***

- Any policy could prove to be inconsistent, and costly should any car owners be taken to Court for continually parking on grassed verges without permission.
- More clarification should be given within the policy on matters relating to safety, including sight lines, etc.
- Parking on grass verges should not be allowed where damage could be caused to underground utilities.
- Consideration could be given to parking permits.

9. The Tenants and Leaseholder's Association at that time (by a majority of 5 in favour and 2 against) concluded that unauthorised parking on housing-owned grass verges, should generally not be permitted across the District. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation were consulted again at their meeting on 31 October 2013, their views are set out under the consultation section of the report.

### ***Officers views on the draft policy***

10. Officers responsible for housing management in the north and the south of the District were consulted on the draft enforcement policy in 2008. Although they were generally happy with policy itself they had the following concerns:

- Any enforcement policy will be difficult to apply, as it is always going to be unclear and difficult to interpret.
- An enforcement policy could be subjective in its application and difficult decisions will need to be made, which as with the current arrangement, some will be in favour and

others against.

- When a decision is made, the Council may have difficulty explaining to residents why it is allowed in one area and not another.
- Cannot allow cars to cause an obstruction, or damage verges which would result in high cost re-instatement works. Installing “grasscrete” on areas where enforcement action is not taken may not be the answer, it could imply that parking is encouraged.

11. The Housing Portfolio Holder requested in 2008 that other councils be contacted and asked about their policies. A summary of the responses given at that time is attached at Appendix 4.

12. Due to the concerns of the Housing Portfolio Holder, the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and officers that the proposed policy may be difficult to enforce, it was considered not to be an option.

13. At its meeting on 23 March 2009, the Panel considered the following three options:

#### **Option One – Unauthorised parking is fully enforced**

14. If all unauthorised parking on estates was fully enforced, a programme of works could be undertaken on housing-owned grass verges, either installing jockey rails, bollards or the planting of shrubs, which would be costly. Although this would solve the problems of damage being caused to the grassed areas, due to the large numbers of vehicles being parked on grass verges, this would cause further congestion in side streets.

#### **Option Two – Postponement of parking enforcement in identified priority areas**

15. Any parking enforcement could be postponed in identified priority areas, where off-street parking schemes have been agreed, until the schemes have been constructed, or residents have had the opportunity to construct a new vehicular crossover (particularly under the new 12 metre rule). However, Members would need to consider the action to be taken in areas which are of less priority.

#### **Option Three – Carry out enforcement measures on an ad hoc basis**

16. Carrying out enforcement measures on an ad hoc basis is the current practice of housing management. Jockey rails or shrubs are installed at sites where the problem is particularly bad and the most complaints are received, following a local consultation exercise. If this option was continued, all Ward Members are consulted prior to any enforcement measures being undertaken.

17. The Panel agreed in March 2009, that accordance with Option Three, enforcement measures be undertaken on an ad hoc basis where problems are particularly bad, following consultation with local residents and Ward Members. It was further agreed that the policy would be reviewed 2 years after operation. The Panel further reviewed the position in January 2011 as part of its Work Programme, and agreed that the policy should continue.

#### ***Ad hoc parking enforcement since March 2009***

18. The Panel is asked to note that since 2009; very few enquiries have been received from Members on the matter, and no formal complaints regarding parking issues have been received under the Council’s Compliments and Complaints Procedure. Following consultation exercises, enforcement measures have been undertaken in the following areas with no further complaints or issues being raised since they were installed:

- Valley Hill Close, Loughton
- Shelly Close, Ongar.

- Hanson Green, Loughton
- Torrington Drive, Loughton
- Boxted Close, Buckhurst Hill
- Highwood Lane, Loughton

### ***Parking enforcement by Essex County Council***

19. Officers have contacted Essex County Council to enquire about any enforcement measures they undertake on County-owned grass verges. They advise that they do not have an enforcement policy as in their view it is not illegal and they do not have any enforcement powers. The County does not install any bollards etc. to prevent parking in such areas as they have limited resources. They would consider seeking an Injunction against any resident who may be causing any danger by parking a vehicle in a particular location.

20. The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the approach to parking enforcement to prevent unauthorised parking on Housing-owned grass verges, and consider any recommendations to be made to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for onward reference to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

### **Consultation**

21. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation considered the report at their meeting on 31 October 2013. They support the continuation of the existing policy whereby enforcement measures are undertaken on an ad hoc basis where problems are particularly bad, following consultation with local residents and Ward Members. In addition, the Federation encouraged the Council to provide more funding for off-street parking schemes in order to convert grass verges for parking, and would urge the Council to include additional parking as part of any future housing developments.

### **Resource implications:**

Budget provision: Budget provision for additional parking enforcement may be required if such measures are agreed

Personnel: Additional staffing may be required if increased enforcement action is agreed

Land: Parking on land held under Housing Act powers

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1985

Background papers: Previous reports submitted to the Housing Scrutiny Panel on dates set out in the report.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: Affect of parking on housing-owned grass verges upon the environment.

Key Decision reference: (if required) Not a Key Decision

**APPENDIX ONE**

**Progress with off-street parking schemes since September 2008**

<b>Location</b>	<b>No. of bays</b>	<b>Total cost (£)</b>	<b>Cost per bay (£)</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Parndon House, Buckhurst Hill	11	30,011 <i>(estimate)</i>	Unknown	Phase 4 estimated start date 2014/15
Collard Green, Loughton	4	8,637	Unknown	Phase 4 estimated start date 2014/15
Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey	34	102,997 <i>(estimate)</i>	Unknown	Phase 4 estimated start date 2013/14
Centre Green, Epping	12	53,179 <i>(estimate)</i>	Unknown	Phase 4 estimated start date 2013/14
Avenue Road, Theydon Bois	7	33,431 <i>(estimate)</i>	4,775	On-site 7 October 2013
Barfields Gardens, Loughton	10	45,179 <i>(estimate)</i>	4,517	Completed 2013/14

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**APPENDIX ONE (Continued)**

<b>Location</b>	<b>No. of bays</b>	<b>Total cost (£)</b>	<b>Cost per bay</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Audley Gardens, Loughton	18	47,314	2,628	Completed 2012/13
Harvey Gardens, Waltham Abbey	14	42,863	3,061	Completed 2012/13
Chester Close, Loughton	8	25,356	3,169	Completed 2012/13
School Lane, Abbess Roding	9	28,393	3,154	Completed 2011/12
Colebrook Gardens, Loughton	23	46,409	2,017	Completed 2011/12
Hillcroft, Loughton	38	73,778	1,941	Completed 2011/12
Gravel Close, Chigwell	N/A	N/A	N/A	Abandoned due to lack of land
Grosvenor Close, Loughton	N/A	N/A	N/A	Off street parking already available – abandoned due to lack of land



## APPENDIX TWO

### Unauthorised Parking on Housing Estates Results of Member Survey

Number of forms returned: 6

1. Do you agree that all the additional funding should be spent on off-street parking schemes on housing estates?

Yes 5                      No 1

If no, would you agree to part of the additional funding being spent on off-street parking schemes on housing estates?

Yes 1                      No Nil

If yes what proportion? 60%

2. Do you agree that the 6 metre rule should be extended?

Yes 5                      No 1

If yes, what should the 6 metre rule be extended to?

12 metres 4

14 metres Nil

No restriction 1

3. Do you agree that enforcement should be put on hold until the off-street parking schemes are installed and the 6 metre rule is extended?

Yes 3

No 3

If yes, how long should enforcement action be put on hold?

4 months after policies in force 2

1 year 1

2 years Nil

3 years Nil

4 years Nil

5 years Nil



## **APPENDIX THREE**

### **UNAUTHORISED PARKING ON HOUSING-OWNED GRASSED VERGES**

#### **DRAFT PARKING ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

1. Generally, the Council will not allow any vehicles to be parked on Housing-owned grass verges or green spaces.

2. However, if the Area Housing Manager assesses that generally, residents in the area are unable to park within 5 minutes walk of their home, enforcement action will not be taken.

3. Where circumstances in paragraph 2 apply, enforcement action will only be taken if one of the following circumstances applies:

- Where the grassed area is considered to have particular important amenity value.
- Where non residents park their vehicles on grass verges.
- Where residents/non residents park heavy vehicles whose gross unladen weight is 2 tonnes or more.
- Where residents/non residents park caravans, boats or commercial vehicles.
- Where the Council has already constructed an off-street parking scheme.
- Where residents/non residents are parking vehicles on pedestrian footpaths.
- Where vehicles are overhanging footpaths, pavements or causing an obstruction.
- Where access is gained crossing a lay-by or where there is no dropped kerb.
- Where there is potential to cause damage to trees or shrubs.
- Where it is generally considered to be unsafe.

## APPENDIX FOUR

### Summary of responses on the approach taken by other Council's on parking enforcement received in March 2009.

Authority	Response
Harlow District Council	Do experience problems with parking on estate greens. Ad hoc approach taken some letters sent some vehicles stickered and jockey rails installed at some locations. No formal policy.
Brentwood Borough Council	Same approach as Harlow District Council.
Uttlesford District Council	Same approach as Harlow although no parking signs are installed and off street parking schemes have been constructed. They have a Corporate enforcement team who take action against residents who illegally park. No formal policy.
Welwyn and Hatfield District Council	Bollards and jockey rails are installed at some locations and they have a bye law which prohibits parking on Council land which is difficult to enforce. No formal policy.
Stevenage Borough Council	Have a parking strategy being trialed across half the Borough including a local traffic order prohibiting parking on Council greens which is enforced by parking attendants. Where there are major parking problems parking schemes are being constructed prior to traffic orders being put in place.

Officers contacted Harlow and Uttlesford District Councils and Brentwood Borough Council in October 2013, all of whom confirmed they take a similar approach to the Council on parking enforcement.

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 28 January 2014**

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

**Subject: Review of Handyman Scheme – One year on**

**Officer contact for further information:**

**Paul Pledger – Asst Director of Housing (Property) (01992 56 4248)**

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

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### **Recommendations:**

**That the Scrutiny Panel notes the contents of the report, 1-year on from the introduction of the Handyman Scheme;**

### **Background**

1. Up until April 2012, the Council only operated a Handyperson Scheme for non-Council tenants over 60 years of age and in receipt of benefits. The scheme was provided by the Council's Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest (CARE) Scheme, funded at a cost of a £10,000 per annum to the General Fund, with the administration costs funded by Essex County Council through the Supporting People regime and the works undertaken by private contractors.
2. In addition to this, the Council also funded Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) to provide preventative advice and undertake minor works in the homes of older and disabled non-Council tenants, to avoid them falling and injuring themselves in their homes. At that time, the funding supported around 5-hours a week in total.
3. As part of the Council's Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements introduced in April 2012, the Cabinet agreed to provide a free of charge Handyperson Scheme to the following groups of tenants, irrespective of means:
  - a. Those living in sheltered accommodation; and
  - b. Those living in any other Council dwelling.
4. For those living in sheltered accommodation, the Council has directly employed a multi-skilled operative, who attends each scheme on a scheduled rota basis for around half a day each week to undertake small repairs and odd jobs for the older tenants, which would normally be their responsibility, some of which could lead to them injuring themselves if they undertook them themselves and fell. The jobs are pre-booked through the Scheme Manager.
5. For those older Council tenants in both older-people's grouped housing schemes and in

general needs housing (who have nobody of working-age living with them) and to Council tenants with defined physical disabilities, who have nobody without defined physical disabilities living with them, the Council has entered into an agreement with Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) to provide a similar service. These repairs are generally booked through the Housing Repairs Service. However, occasionally VAEF take referrals directly. The grant paid to VAEF amounts to £36,000 per annum for an initial period of 3-years starting in 2012.

6. Attached at appendix 1 is the list of jobs available through the Handyman Scheme, of which some are entirely free of charge and others attract a payment for parts only.
7. During the last 12-months it is estimated that this combined service has undertaken more than 1,000 jobs across the eight sheltered schemes and over 280 jobs throughout the district in other Council accommodation.
8. The overall cost of the scheme is around £77,500 per annum, which takes account of the grant to VAEF, parts supplied by the Council, labour and vehicle costs.
9. Since its introduction in April 2012, the Council's Handyman Service has attracted a very high rate of satisfaction (100%), and has proved to be a very popular Service Enhancement. Attached at Appendix 2 is the first annual report of the Handyman Scheme from the VAEF, which includes a number of testimonials.

**Handy Person Scheme – List of Qualifying Jobs**

Qualifying Jobs	Tenant to supply materials	Council to provide materials
Bulb Changing	X	
Electrical plugs	X	
Telephone extension cable running	X	
Radiator bleeding	n/a	n/a
Altering timers for heating	n/a	n/a
Tap washers		X
Shower Holders (that work off taps)	X <sup>1</sup>	
Shower curtains & poles	X <sup>2</sup>	
WC seats	X <sup>3</sup>	
Sink, basin and bath plugs		X
Blocked drains, sinks, toilets, baths and pipes	n/a	n/a
Plumbing in washing machines	n/a	n/a
Loose tiling over baths or sinks	X <sup>4</sup>	X
Cupboard Doors that are loose or off	n/a	n/a
Tightening door handles	n/a	n/a
Door and window locks		X
Spy holes		X
Door chains		X
Draft exclusion		X
Small ramps to go over threshold when gaps or height difference is a problem for wheelchair		X
Replacing curtain rails	X	X (Battens)
Coat rails	X	
Shelving, hooks & rails	X	
Picture hanging	X	
Carpet trimming		X (Threshold Bars)
Flat pack assembly	X	
Path clearance	n/a	n/a
Putting up individual washing lines (Not communal)	X <sup>5</sup>	
Replacing broken fence posts		X
Fitting locks to back gates ( for secure access )		X
Replacing gate springs		X

<sup>1</sup> The Council can supply, but will be recharged at cost

<sup>2</sup> The Council can supply, but will be recharged at cost

<sup>3</sup> The Council can supply, but will be recharged at cost

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<sup>4</sup> Tenant to supply their own tiles if not Council standard 150mm x 150mm white tiles

<sup>5</sup> The Council can supply, but will be recharged at cost

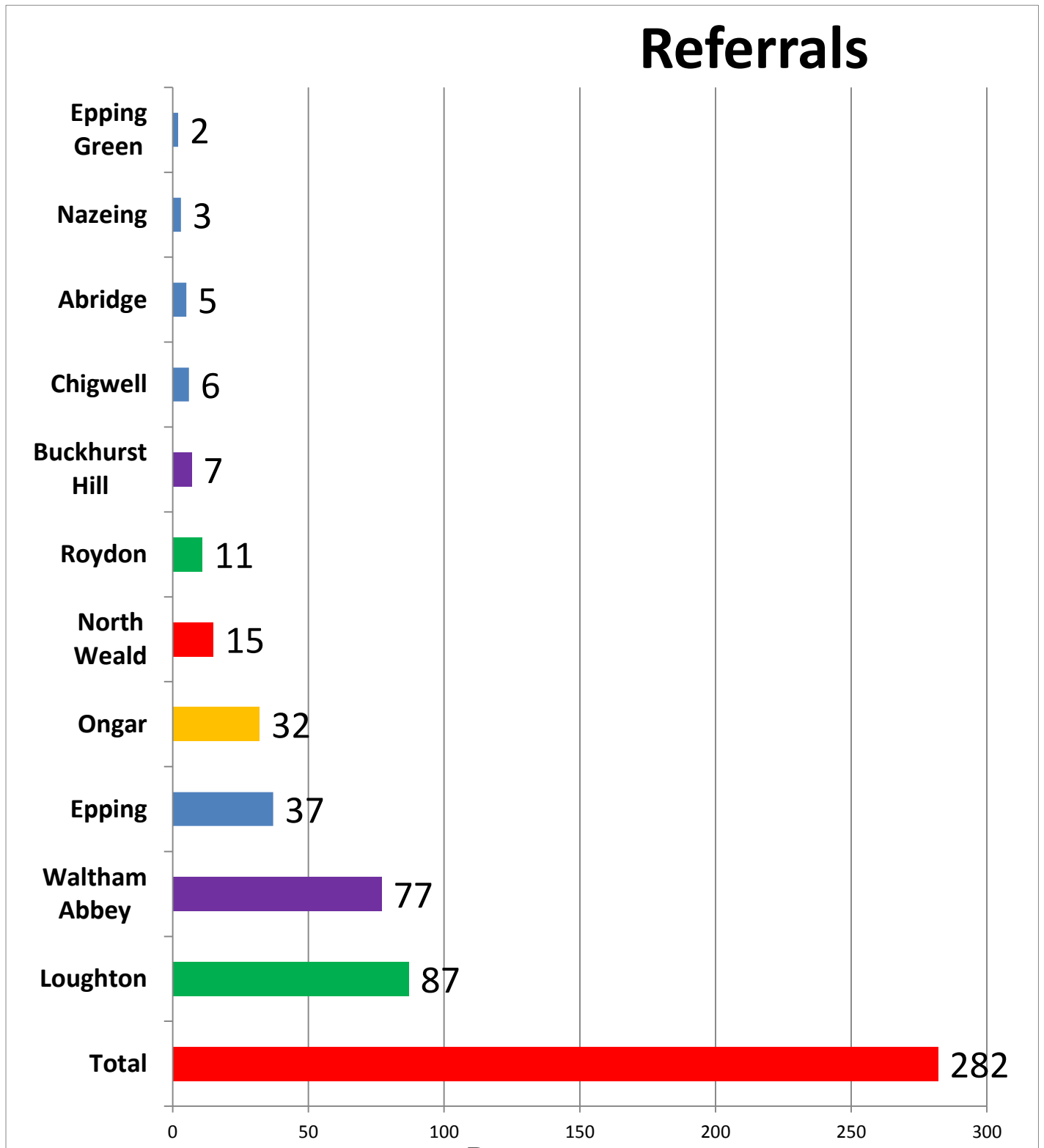


# Handyman Service

1<sup>st</sup> Annual Report

1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013

# GEOGRAPHICAL INFO





Over 100 light bulbs changed

Over 10 door chains fitted

60+ toilet seats fixed / fitted

Over 5 spy holes fitted

## TASK INFO

20+ curtain rails & blinds installed

8 fence repairs

8 key safes fitted

15+ smoke alarms installed

15+ sink / basin plugs fitted

100+ tap washers replaced

Over 10 tiling jobs completed

More than 10 locks fitted

As I live completely on my own this service helped me enormously and his work was excellent I would recommend him to everybody

(Mrs C – Waltham Abbey)

Job done within two hours of my initial call and at a very reasonable cost. We were very pleased with the service and the gentleman's manner. As a pensioner it's nice to get a reliable service, thank you.

(Mrs B- Roydon)

## FEEDBACK

This service is invaluable to us older people and I cannot think of any way to improve as I would already rate it A\*\*\* triple star – long may it continue!

(Mrs N Waltham Abbey)

It means a lot as you get older and cannot reach up high any more to do light bulbs and curtains etc. the list is endless. Chris is great to have around – thank you

(Mrs B – Theydon Bois)

I am more than grateful to Chris (handyman) and was so pleased with the work that he did. I am a disabled pensioner and these things I just can't do – thank you.

(Mrs T – Roydon)

Very prompt in coming to do the work that was done – very quick service. I know who to ask for next time, thank you.

(Mrs A -Loughton)

Within an hour of my call a chap came and fitted a new smoke alarm and we feel much safer now – thank you for being so prompt.

(Mr R North Weald)

## FEEDBACK

I am a pensioner living on my own and unable to do these things myself – thank you

(Mrs P – Loughton)

Living on my own I am unable to do certain jobs around the house myself so it was really helpful to have some assistance. Chris is very very polite and I cannot speak highly enough of his work. He tidied up after completing the task and I was very satisfied with the work, all done with a very pleasant attitude – thank you

(Mrs N – Waltham Abbey)

Excellent – I tried but just couldn't reach the light

(Mr F - North Weald)

This service is very good for us as myself and my husband are unable to do a lot of these things. Thank you very much for your help.

(Mrs L – Epping Green)

This service is great and should be more publicised, maybe there could be a list of works that can be undertaken?

(Mrs T – Loughton)

## FEEDBACK

I was very satisfied, he did a good job.

(Mrs W – Loughton)

Without this service I wouldn't even be able to put my clothes out for drying. I am very grateful as I do not have anyone who can do this for me.

(Mrs L – Waltham Abbey)

Simply – Invaluable!

(Mr P – Waltham Abbey)

It is a very good service as me and my husband are in our eighties and he has dementia and it is really hard to get anything done.

(Mrs P – Epping)

I find the service very helpful because there are a lot of things I am now unable to do due to my disability and the gentleman was very polite and nothing was too much trouble.

(Mrs T – Loughton)

Doing a service for me such as cleaning out my shower drain is so helpful as I am disabled and on oxygen. He was great, very helpful and I would like to thank you for having this service on hand.

(Mr V – Waltham Abbey)

## FEEDBACK

This service helps me very much!

(Mr F – Loughton)

I am a pensioner and just little things like hanging a picture, fitting some light bulbs & putting up shelves make a big difference to you home especially when you're not able to do these things yourself. The gentleman, Chris, was very polite and very good at his work, also very clean and tidy.

(Mrs H – Waltham Abbey)



(Address on file)

23rd Sept 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

Very recently I moved into one of your warden controlled flats, at the above address, and I feel I must write to say how very impressed I have been at the service offered by a Mr Chris Bullock. Not only is he an affable man, but also very helpful and competent, nothing is too much trouble, one only has to ask for help or mention something and he does it.

On that note I must say what a valuable asset he is to your department.

yours faithfully

LETTER FROM  
TENANT



(Address on file)

26<sup>th</sup> September 2013

Dear **Ms Foile**

We wish to write to you again to express our continued thanks and gratitude for the Handy Person Service project via Epping Forest District Council for tenants who are elderly, vulnerable and or disabled.

Myself and my husband are both registered disabled, myself having severe sight loss and arthritis, my husband has severe renal failure, ulcerated colitis, both of which restrict are ability to carry out physical activities. We moved to our one bedroom bungalow in March this year and although we are under retirement age, we are considered as vulnerable people due to our disabilities.

Since making initial contact with EFDC and being referred to the Handy Person Service we have found Chris Bullock to consistently be extremely helpful, very courteous and always carries work out to a very high standard.

We will definitely continue to use the Handy Person Service as we find it invaluable to us. As we said in our previous letter, without the service, we would feel extremely vulnerable as we would have to rely on trade's people that we do not know and have the risk of being over charged and also not having the security of knowing the person or having them on recommendation.

We are both so very pleased with Chris and the service VAEF provide and find it a highly dependable and useful. As also expressed previously, Chris is an excellent workman, always very pleasant, prompt and neat and tidy and also creative in that he suggests ideas on how we may improve our original idea in relation to an individual task. Overall we cannot praise Chris or the service enough!

We intend to continue using the service in the future and hope that it continues to receive the funding to enable it to carry out the wonderful work to people who are in genuine need.

With best wishes

**LETTER FROM  
TENANT**



# GALLERY







# GALLERY



# HANDYMAN SERVICE

THE HANDYMAN SERVICE IS A PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE BETWEEN EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL AND VOLUNTARY ACTION EPPING FOREST WHICH STARTED IN OCTOBER 2012.

THE SERVICE IS FUNDED BY EFDC AND PROVIDES A HANDYMAN SERVICE TO TENANTS OF EFDC PROPERTIES PROVIDED THEY ARE OVER 60 OR DISABLED AND HAVE NO ONE ELSE WHO CAN ASSIST THEM.

INITIAL CONTACT IS MADE VIA THE EFDC REPAIRS LINE ON 01992 564199 WHERE THE SERVICE IS EXPLAINED FURTHER AND WHERE APPROPRIATE REFERRED TO THE HANDYMAN SERVICE. THE HANDYMAN THEN MAKES CONTACT AND ARRANGES TO VISIT TO UNDERTAKE THE WORK REQUIRED.

MATERIALS USED ARE SOURCED AT THE LOWEST POSSIBLE COST TO THE TENANT.

THE SERVICE IS FREE OTHER THAN THE COST OF MATERIALS FOR THOSE ELIGIBLE.

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2014**

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

**Subject: Housing Strategy: 6-Month Progress  
Report on Key Action Plan 2013/14**

**Officer contact for further information:**

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

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

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### **Recommendations:**

**That the 6-Month Progress Report on the Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2013/14, attached as an Appendix, be considered, with any comments passed to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing accordingly.**

### **Report:**

1. At its meeting in September 2009, the Council's Cabinet adopted the Housing Strategy 2009-2012. The Housing Strategy assesses the District's current and future housing needs and sets out the Council's approach to meeting those needs.
2. 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.
3. When adopting the Housing Strategy, the Cabinet also agreed that Key Action Plans for the Housing Strategy should be produced and updated on an annual basis for approval by the Cabinet.
4. The Housing Strategy itself was due to be updated last year, for a further three-year period. However, the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed that the production of the next Housing Strategy should be deferred until the completion of the Preferred Options for the Council's new Local Plan, since much of the Housing Strategy is dependent on the Local Plan. In the meantime, the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed a further Housing Strategy Key Action Plan for 2013/14.
5. The Cabinet has previously agreed that progress with the Key Action Plans should be monitored on a 6-monthly basis by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, in accordance with its Terms of Reference. Therefore, the 6-Month Progress Report for the current Key Action Plan for 2013/14 is attached as an Appendix, which the Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and to provide any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing.

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**Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2013-14  
(January 2014)**

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Progress Report (as at January 2014)
1	General	Review the Housing Strategy 2009-2012 and produce an updated Housing Strategy for 2014-2017, following a consultation exercise on a Draft Housing Strategy	Director of Housing	Sept 2014	<b>Not yet due</b> – A Draft Housing Strategy will be formulated during 2014.
2	Housing Market	Complete the supplementary report on the accommodation needs of older people, for the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), to inform the Draft Local Plan	Principal Planning Officer (Forward Planning)	<del>Sept 2013</del> March 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – A further draft has been received from the consultants. The final version is expected by March 2014.
3	Housing Market	Consider the formation of a Harlow and Epping Forest Joint Strategic Housing and Infrastructure Delivery Board, comprising elected members from Harlow DC and Epping Forest DC, to oversee the strategic delivery of housing and associated infrastructure affecting the two local authorities, in order to ensure the proper planning of the area and fulfilment of the “Duty to Co-operate”	Director of Planning and Economic Development	<del>Oct 2013</del> March 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – An initial officer/member meeting has been held between the Council and Harlow DC to discuss and agree the membership and arrangements for the group going forward.
4	Housing Market	Produce a Draft Local Plan, taking account of the responses to the Issues and Options Paper, including a proposed target for the delivery of new homes to 2031.	Asst. Director of Planning (Policy & Conservation)	<del>April 2014</del> July 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – A report on the key points arising from the Issues & Options consultation responses was received by Cabinet in June 2013. The Council must next determine its own Objectively Assessed Housing Need and, following a number of workshops for members and local councils, the Cabinet will receive a

					report in Spring 2014 which identifies a range of figures for further testing through the Local Plan process.
5	Housing Market	Undertake a Consultation Exercise on the Draft Local Plan and process the responses	Asst. Director of Planning (Policy & Conservation)	<del>May 2014</del> Feb 2015	<b>Not yet due</b> – The Consultation Exercise is expected to commence in September 2014, following which the responses will need to be processed and then reported to the Cabinet.
6	Housing Market	Submit the final version of the Local Plan for an Examination in Public	Asst. Director of Planning (Policy & Conservation)	<del>Oct 2015</del> Spring 2016	<b>Not yet due</b> - Following consultation on the Draft Plan, further work will need to be undertaken to take account of the responses to the Draft Plan and preparation of the Plan to be submitted for examination. Prior to submission there is a requirement under the regulations for pre-submission publication and representations to be sought on soundness for a minimum of 6 weeks. This is currently scheduled for the end of 2015, with submission to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination in Spring 2016.
7	Housing Market	Consider subscribing to the Hometrack Service, in partnership with neighbouring councils, to provide ongoing housing market intelligence for planning and housing purposes	Director of Housing / Prin. Planning Officer (F/ward Planning)	<del>Oct 2013</del> Apr 2014	<b>No progress</b> – Due to other priorities within both the Housing and Planning Directorates, and vacancies arising within the Planning Directorate, this Service has not yet been evaluated
8	Housing Market	Work with partners to produce an Infrastructure Delivery Plan in preparation for the Council's proposals for the introduction of Community Infrastructure Levies (CILs)	Director of Housing / Prin. Planning Officer (F/ward Planning)	May 2014	<b>Under consideration</b> – A decision first needs to be made on whether or not to introduce a CIL. A report will be considered by members on this issue during.  In any event, work has already commenced on the formulation of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which will be required whether or not the Council introduces a CIL.
9	Regeneration	Work in partnership with Essex County Council, Epping Town Council and other partners to develop a sustainable regeneration scheme for	Director of Corporate Support Services	Sept 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Expressions of interest from potential developers to undertake a comprehensive redevelopment of the site were received in Autumn 2013, which are under consideration.

		the St Johns Area of Epping, in accordance with the adopted Design and Development Brief, which includes an appropriate amount of market and affordable housing			Epping Town Council has now appointed its own consultants to advise them on its interests, and the three councils are now working together to appoint a preferred development partner(s) from those expressing interest. A report on the appointment of the preferred development partner(s) will be considered by the Cabinet in Spring 2014.
10	Regeneration	Appoint one of the Council's Preferred Housing Association Partners to develop the Council's land at The Broadway, Loughton, in accordance with the approved Broadway Regeneration Action Plan and Development and Design Brief, including the provision of significant levels of affordable housing	Director of Housing	<del>March 2014</del> Feb 2014	<b>Alternative action being pursued</b> – Following the introduction of the Council's own Housebuilding Programme, consideration is being given to undertaking this development as Year 2 of this Programme, rather than by a housing association.  A report on this proposal is due to be considered by the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee, at its meeting on 4 <sup>th</sup> February 2014.
11	Affordable Housing Provision	Work with housing associations and developers to provide 80 new affordable homes for rent and shared ownership by March 2015 and a further 27 new affordable homes by March 2016, at the following sites with planning permission:  (a) Jennikings Nursery, Chigwell – 52 new homes (b) Manor Road Garden Centre, Chigwell – 17 new homes (c) St. Johns School – 38 new homes	Director of Housing	March 2015	<b>In progress</b> – The two developments in Chigwell commenced on site in March and April 2013, and are due for completion in May 2014 and February 2015.  Phase 1 of the development at St Johns School, Epping is due to commence in Feb 2014 - with Phase 2 commencing in Sept 2014
12	Affordable Housing Provision	Complete Phase 2 of the Open Market Home Ownership Scheme with B3Living Housing Association (BHA) - to enable first-time buyers in the District to purchase a property of their choice from the open market through shared ownership, funded	Director of Housing	<del>March 2014</del> May 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Following the successful completion of Phase 1 - which assisted 8 local residents into low cost home ownership - a further 2 local residents have purchased properties from the open market for shared ownership under Phase 2. A further 2 applicants have been approved, and are currently selecting properties, and a further application is being processed.

		jointly by the Council, B3Living and the applicant			
13	Affordable Housing Provision	Prior to completion of Phase 2 of the Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme, consider whether to provide additional resources to assist more first-time buyers by undertaking a Phase 3 of the Scheme	Director of Housing	<del>Jan 2014</del> May 2014	<b>Not yet due</b> – Consideration will be given to whether or not to undertake a Phase 3, once all purchases under Phase 2 have been processed.
14	Affordable Housing Provision	Seek planning permission for residential development at the Council's Pyrles Lane Nursery site, Loughton, including the provision of at least 40% affordable housing, by addressing the issues resulting in the previous planning permission refusal	Chief Estates Officer	<del>Dec 2013</del> Apr 2014	<b>In Progress</b> - An outline planning application was refused in 2013. The purchase of a private property adjacent to the site by the Council is due to be completed in January 2014, which will assist with the provision of a better access to the site.  Consideration is being given to addressing the other issues identified, in order for a revised planning application to be submitted.
15	Affordable Housing Provision	Work with the Parish of Loughton to facilitate its strategic review of its landholdings, with a view to new affordable housing being provided on surplus Church land	Director of Housing	July 2014	<b>In progress</b> – The Parish has appointed Hastoe Housing Association as its preferred development partner, which is undertaking an assessment of each of the sites and will provide indicative layouts to the Parish's Development Adviser for consideration.
16	Affordable Housing Provision	Undertake a competitive exercise to appoint an affordable housing viability consultant for a 3-year period in order to provide specialist advice and undertake the validation of viability appraisals submitted by developers: (a) Asserting that the Council's expected level of affordable housing provision is unviable; (b) Proposing a financial contribution in lieu of the provision of on-site affordable housing; or	Director of Housing	<del>Dec 2013</del> April 2014	<b>No Progress</b> – Due to other workload and priorities.



		(c) Applying to renegotiate previously agreed planning obligations on the grounds of viability			
17	Council Housebuilding Programme	Adopt a Development Strategy for the Council Housebuilding Programme	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	Sept 2013	<b>Achieved</b> – The Development Strategy was adopted by the Cabinet in September 2013.
18	Council Housebuilding Programme	Obtain planning permission, procure a works contractor and start on site with the Year 1 Development Package of sites, comprising around 25 new affordable rented homes	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	<del>March 2014</del> April 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Planning permission has been obtained for one of the Year 1 sites, with planning applications submitted for the remaining Year 1, which are awaiting determination.  Subject to the sites receiving planning permission, a works contractor will be procured, with a start on site planned for April 2014.
19	Council Housebuilding Programme	Seek Development Partner status for the Council with the Homes and Communities Agency, to enable the Council to bid for future HCA funding	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	<del>Dec 2013</del> March 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Although publication of the HCA's Prospectus for its next National Affordable Housing Programme is still awaited, East Thames (the Council's development agent) is already preparing to both seek Investment Partner status for the Council with the HCA and to submit a bid for funding from the HCA.
20	Council Housebuilding Programme	Complete development and financial appraisals for around 50% of the identified potential development sites and formulate a Pipeline Programme of developments for at least Years 2-4 of the Programme	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	<del>July 2014</del> Sept 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Priority is being given to appraise the sites being recommended for Year 2 of the Programme, with appraisals for the remaining sites to follow.
21	Council and Housing Association Accommodation	Implement the Council's new Allocations Scheme, including the introduction of a Local Eligibility Criteria and new Banding Criteria	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	Sept 2013	<b>Achieved</b> – The new Allocations Scheme was successfully introduced in September 2013, as planned.

22	Council and Housing Association Accommodation	Review the new Housing Allocations Scheme and make any required revisions to the Scheme in the light of the first year's experience	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	Oct 2014	<b>Not yet due.</b>
23	Council and Housing Association Accommodation	Update the existing District-wide Nominations Agreements with each of the Council's Preferred Housing Association Partners for new rented housing developments - to take account of the new Affordable Rents Framework - and formulate new District-wide Nominations Agreements for shared ownership properties with the same partners.	Director of Housing	<del>Nov 2013</del> May 2014	<b>No Progress</b> – Due to other workload and priorities.
24	Council Housing	Commence a major conversion scheme to convert 20 unpopular bedsits at Marden Close, Chigwell Row to provide 10 self-contained one-bedroomed rented flats for Housing Register applicants	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	Mar 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Planning permission has been received and the scheme is planned to commence on site in March 2014, together with the conversion of the ground floor of Faversham Hall to provide an additional two self-contained flats.
25	Council Housing	Implement the Council's new Tenancy Policy, through the introduction of flexible (fixed term) tenancies for 10 year periods (including an introductory tenancy period) for all Council properties with 3 or more bedrooms	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	Sept 2013	<b>Achieved</b> – The new Tenancy Policy was successfully introduced in September 2013, as planned.
26	Council Housing	Consult all existing Council tenants on proposed changes to their new tenancy conditions - to bring them up to date to reflect current legislation, Council policies and good practice – and issue new tenancy conditions to all tenants, having regard to the outcome of the consultation exercise.	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	March 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – The consultation exercise has been completed. A report on the outcome of the consultation will be considered by the Cabinet in February 2014, with the new tenancy agreement due to be introduced in April 2014.

27	Council Housing	Review the Council's new Tenancy Policy to consider: (a) Whether flexible (fixed term) tenancies should be provided for 2 bedrooomed properties; (b) Whether to introduce a means test as part of the Assessment Criteria at the prior to the end of the tenancy; and (c) Any required revisions to the Policy in the light of the first year's experience	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	Oct 2014	<b>Not yet due.</b>
28	Council Housing	Introduce and publicise a new Social Housing Fraud Hotline to obtain leads on potential social housing fraud.	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	<del>Oct 2013</del> May 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – A number of initiatives to combat social housing fraud are being considered.
29	Council Housing	Bring together all the Council's fraud functions, including social housing fraud into one corporate team, to provide synergy, consistent working practices and shared intelligence	Chief Internal Auditor	<del>Oct 2013</del> April 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – The Chief Internal Auditor is planning the introduction of the one team from April 2014.
30	Council Housing	Produce and submit to the Housing Scrutiny Panel a progress report on the success of the new Housing Under-occupation Officer post, and the assistance provided to under-occupying older tenants to transfer to smaller accommodation	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	July 2014	<b>Not yet due.</b>
31	Council Housing	Deliver the remaining actions within the Council's Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan, particularly the preparations for the Government's introduction of direct payments of Universal Credit, including the housing element, to claimants	Director of Housing	July 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – 70% of all the 59 tasks on the Action Plan have now been achieved, with only one other task that is able to be undertaken now, not yet achieved.  The outstanding task relates to a longer-term ambition to work with the Council's Preferred Housing

					Association Partners to secure and provide private-rented housing as part of the non-affordable housing provision on new developments or through acquisition from the open market. Although the Director of Housing has raised this issue with the Council's Preferred Partners, due to the long lead-in times for such projects, it will be some time until this task will be able to be achieved.
32	Council Housing	Implement the Council's new Modern Home Standard through programmes of work to the Council's housing stock, whilst ensuring that the Decent Homes Standard continues to be met for all properties.	Housing Assets Manager	March 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Completion of the first year's programme of works towards all Council properties meeting the Modern Home Standard is on target.
33	Homelessness	Implement the provisions within the new Housing Allocations Scheme to place homeless families with less than 3 years' residence in the District in private rented accommodation	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	<del>Sept 2013</del> Apr 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – This is a major policy shift for the Council that needs to be carefully planned and implemented, and requires resources to assist homeless families in receipt of housing benefit to access the private rented sector.  The best way to implement and resource the policy is currently being considered by officers.
34	Homelessness	To consider whether to work in partnership with a third party to lease private rented properties to let at market rents to homeless families with less than 3 years' residence in the District, for a management fee, in order to increase the number of such properties available to the this client group.	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	Oct 2013	<b>No longer required</b> – Officers have determined that the required management fee for such an arrangement would be too high, and cannot be justified.
35	Homelessness	Undertake a promotion campaign to inform existing tenants of flats that they can seek transfers to houses under the new Housing Allocations	Housing Options Manager	<del>Dec 2013</del> Jan 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Letters are being sent to all tenants of flats in batches, informing them of the provisions of the new Scheme. This process will be completed by the end of January 2014.

		Scheme, in order to increase the number of suitable vacant flats available to offer to homeless families temporarily accommodated in the Council's Homeless Persons Hostel			
36	Diversity	Undertake a Census of all Council tenants in order to collect information about the protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act) and their household members, and undertake an analysis of the results to understand the profile of the Council's tenants, for presentation to the Housing Scrutiny Panel	Asst. Director of Housing (Private Sector and Resources)	March 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – The Census has been completed, with an exceptional return rate of over 50% from tenants achieved.  The information from most of the returned forms has now been input onto the Housing IT system, and a consultant has been appointed to analyse the results and produce a report for consideration by the Housing Scrutiny Panel.
37	Diversity	Collect information from all housing applicants about their protected characteristics in order to understand the profile of the Council's housing applicants	Asst. Director of Housing (Private Sector and Resources)	Oct 2013	<b>Achieved</b> - This information was collected as part of the on-line re-application process for all housing applicants.
38	Diversity	Compare the protected characteristics of housing applicants provided with Council accommodation with the protected characteristics of all Housing Register applicants, to ensure that the Housing Allocation Scheme does not materially discriminate against any groups of local residents	Housing Options Manager	Sept 2014	<b>Not yet due.</b>
39	Diversity	Complete an Accommodation Assessment for Gypsy Roma and Travellers (GRT), in order to inform the Local Plan in respect of the accommodation requirements for the GRT community	Asst. Director of Planning (Policy & Conservation)	<del>Dec 2013</del> June 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – The Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA) has commissioned consultants, ORS, to undertake a county-wide assessment.  A draft report has been received, which is currently under consideration by EPOA. Once finalised, ORS will present its report to officers and members across

					Essex, and the final report will be considered for adoption by the Cabinet.
40	Supported Housing – Older and Other Vulnerable People	Include a requirement in the Draft Local Plan that all new housing developments in the District should meet the Lifetime Homes Standard	Principal Planning Officer (Forward Planning)	Under Review	<b>In Progress</b> – The existing Local Plan policy requires that a proportion of new dwellings are constructed to the Lifetime Homes Standard, and any revised policy will consider whether this proportion should be increased.
41	Supported Housing – Older and Other Vulnerable People	Agree the Council's approach for the delivery of its Careline Service, following the outcome of the County Council's considerations of the possible introduction of a new county-wide Telecare Contract	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	<del>Dec 2013</del> Apr 2014	<b>No Progress</b> – The Council is awaiting the intentions of Essex County Council, which has been delayed due to the introduction of the County Council's new officer structure.
42	Supported Housing – Older and Other Vulnerable People	Review the success of the in-house Handyperson Scheme and VAEF Handyperson Scheme around 12 months after their introduction	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	<del>Oct 2013</del> Jan 2014	<b>Nearly Achieved</b> – A report on the success of the Handyperson Scheme will be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Panel at its January 2014 meeting.
43	Supported Housing – Older and Other Vulnerable People	Provide the remainder of the £30,000 General Fund and HRA grants allocated to Epping Forest Re-Use, to assist residents on low incomes purchase good quality second hand furniture at affordable prices.	Director of Housing	May 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Quarterly payments for the grants from both the General Fund and HRA have been paid to Epping Forest Re-Use.
44	Supported Housing – Older and Other Vulnerable People	Work in partnership with other organisations to introduce a multi-agency Family Solutions Team for Harlow and Brentwood, to identify and meet the needs of "troubled" families with complex needs	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	<del>Dec 2013</del> Mar 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Officers are working with the County Council on the liaison arrangements between the Council and the proposed new Team.

45	Supported Housing – Older and Other Vulnerable People	Investigate the feasibility of the Council itself undertaking occupational therapy assessments for disabled adaptations to Council properties and required adaptations to private sector homes (through the provision of disabled facilities grants), in order to reduce the waiting time for assessments.	Asst. Director of Housing (Private Sector and Resources)	July 2014	<b>No longer required</b> – Following the introduction of a new approach by the County Council to undertaking OT assessments, using private OTs to supplement the work of its own OTs, there is no longer any backlog of assessments, which are now being undertaken within 28 days.  There is therefore no need to investigate the feasibility of the Council itself undertaking occupational therapy assessments.
46	Empty Homes	Bring at least 40 long-term empty properties back into use by Council intervention, including the continued use of the PLACE Scheme	Private Housing Manager (Technical)	March 2014	<b>On Target</b> – 34 long-term empty properties were brought back into use by Council intervention in the first three quarters of 2013/14. It is expected that the target for the year will therefore be achieved.
47	Rural Housing	Continue to work with Hastoe Housing Association and Parish Councils to investigate the development potential for rural housing schemes in villages, through the Council's Rural Planning Exceptions Policy	Director of Housing	July 2014	<b>Little Progress</b> – Although Hastoe is willing to work with parish councils to investigate the development potential for rural housing schemes in villages, very little interest has been shown by parish councils.  The most recent interest was shown by Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers Parish Council, but this project is being held in abeyance, pending the Parish Council undertaking its proposed new Neighbourhood Plan.
48	Decent Homes – Private Sector	Review the implementation of the new Private Sector Housing Strategy 2012, to identify if any required refinements, and report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel on the outcome	Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector and Resources)	Oct 2013	<b>Achieved</b> – A presentation on the implementation of the new Private Sector Housing Strategy was given to the Housing Scrutiny Panel in October 2013, when it was identified that no changes were required.
49	Decent Homes – Private Sector	Consider and consult upon whether or not charges should be made for the licensing of permanent residential and holiday park home sites in the District, and the enforcement of licence	Private Housing Manager (Technical)	July 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – The Housing Portfolio Holder has agreed to a consultation exercise being undertaken with all park home residents on a proposal to charge for park home licensing.

		conditions and determine a charging regime if appropriate			A report on the outcome of the consultation exercise will be considered by the Cabinet in March 2014.
50	Decent Homes – Private Sector	Introduce new licence conditions for existing and new gypsy and traveller sites in the District, following consultation with site residents and statutory agencies	Private Housing Manager (Technical)	July 2014	<b>In Progress</b> – Although draft licence conditions have been produced, officers are currently considering recent guidance on this issue, prior to undertaking the consultation exercise.
51	Decent Homes – Private Sector	Introduce a Landlords Accreditation Scheme to promote good practice for the management of privately rented homes and the provision of good quality homes	Private Housing Manager (Technical)	Oct 2014	<b>Achieved</b> – The Landlords Accreditation Scheme has been successfully introduced.
52	Decent Homes – Private Sector	Consider and adopt a corporate protocol for dealing with unsuitable living conditions within agricultural and nursery accommodation, from a housing, planning, legal and economic development perspective	Private Housing Manager (Technical)	March 2014	<b>Not yet due.</b>
53	Decent Homes – Private Sector	Review the charging policy for the CARE Handyperson Service, to safeguard the future viability of the Service and to ensure that it is appropriately targeted at those in need of the Service	Private Housing Manager (Grants & CARE)	Sept 2013	<b>Achieved</b> – The Housing Portfolio Holder has introduced a new charging policy, on the recommendation of the CARE Advisory Group.



## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2014**

**Portfolio: Housing – Cllr David Stallan**

**Subject: Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Tenant Participation**

**Officer contact for further information: Lyndsay Swan (01992 56 4146)**

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

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



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

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers and endorses the Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Tenant Participation, 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 sets 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 Housing Related Support (formerly Supporting People) funding under the conditions of the contract.

3. The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and endorse the updated Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Tenant Participation, 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 Strategy on Tenant Participation

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation was consulted on and endorsed the Strategy at its meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2013.

**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 Strategy

Background papers: N/A

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: As set out in the Strategy

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A None

**Epping Forest District Council**  
**HOUSING SERVICE STRATEGY ON**  
**TENANT PARTICIPATION**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This Housing Directorate Strategy relates to the Council's approach to tenant participation, and how tenant participation will be delivered. This is an essential part of the Council's housing service since the main recipients of the service are the tenants themselves. The Council aims to provide housing services that are effective, relevant and responsive to tenants' needs. Furthermore, it is a requirement of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England that tenants are given the opportunity to influence and be involved in the provision of the service.

1.2 Tenant Participation will, in the main, be facilitated by Housing Directorate on behalf of the Council. However, the Council will seek the support of the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation (see paragraph 1.3) and recognised tenants groups to help with tenant participation. Where appropriate, the Council will also seek the assistance of appropriate contractors and consultants, especially those specialising in tenant participation.

1.3 The Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation is a democratic organisation, recognised by the Council. It includes up to two representatives from each recognised tenants association and may include other co-opted members at the discretion of the Council and the Federation. The Federation represents the views of the tenants associations and acts as a consultative body for the Council on a range of housing issues. It has an Executive Committee to co-ordinate its activities.

1.4 Although this Service Strategy refers to "tenants", this term includes the Council's leaseholders.

1.5 This Housing Service Strategy was formulated in consultation with representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder on \*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*.

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

2.1 The Council's Tenant Participation Service embraces all of the housing services that the Council provides to its tenants. The Council has a good track record of consulting with tenants and keeping them informed of issues that are important and of interest to them. However, the Council will continue to strive to improve its approach on a continuous basis.

2.2 The Council has around 6,500 tenanted properties and over 900 leasehold properties. As at October 2013, there were 8 recognised tenants associations operating within the District, namely: Debden Tenants Panel (Loughton), Limes Farm Community Association (Chigwell), Ninefields Residents Panel (Waltham Abbey), Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association (Loughton), Pelly Court Residents Association (Epping), Romeland Residents Association (Waltham Abbey), Roundhills Residents Association (Waltham Abbey) and Shelley Residents Association (Ongar). Residents of the District's sheltered schemes are represented by a Sheltered Housing Forum. The Leaseholders Association represents the Council's leaseholders. A Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group has been established to discuss the Council's Repairs and Maintenance service and a Website and Publicity group has been set up to look at the Council's website, housing information leaflets and publicity documents from a customer viewpoint.

In January 2013 a Tenant Scrutiny Panel was established to take an independent detailed look at how the Housing Directorate is performing and to carry out in depth reviews of

various aspects of the housing service.

2.3 The Council appointed a dedicated full time Tenant Participation Officer (TPO) in April 2000. The TPO is based within the Housing Resources Section of the Housing Directorate, reporting to the Principal Housing Officer (Information & Strategy).

### **3. Coverage**

3.1 This Housing Directorate Strategy covers the Council's;

- a) commitment to tenant participation;
- b) general approach to providing information to tenants;
- c) general approach to tenant participation;
- d) approach to developing and supporting recognised tenant associations;
- e) plans for the development of tenant participation for the three year period 1st April 2013 - 31st March 2016;
- f) general approach to the operation of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;
- g) plans to assist with the development of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;
- h) Tenant Participation Agreement with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;
- i) arrangements for monitoring its approach to tenant participation; and
- j) commitment to the progression of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

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

4.2 The Council has adopted a *Housing Charter* and a set of *Housing Service Standards* which set out the Council's general approach to the provision of housing services.

4.3 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan is published annually and sets out priorities and objectives for Housing Services, including tenant and leaseholder participation and consultation.

4.4 In March 2000, the Council's Housing Committee undertook and approved a comprehensive *Review of Tenant Participation*, following consultation with all of the Council's tenants and leaseholders and the District's former Tenants Forum (since replaced by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation).

4.5 The Review;

- a) raised issues and questions relating to the approach of the Council and the Tenants Forum on specific aspects of tenant participation;
- b) established the position at that time ("the baseline"); and
- c) identified around 130 actions

4.6 In conjunction with the Review, in March 2000, the Council and the Epping Forest District Tenants Forum formulated, approved and signed the first *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*. Following the establishment of the present Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Agreement was reviewed and updated in 2002, 2005, 2008 and again in 2011. It sets out the intentions of the Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in the approach they will take to:

- a) the provision of information to tenants and to tenant participation generally;
- b) the operation of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;
- c) the development of tenant participation generally; and
- d) reviewing the Agreement.

4.7 A copy of the "*Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*" is attached as Appendix 1 to this Service Strategy.

4.8 In 2010 the Tenant Services Authority introduced its *New Regulatory Framework for*

*Social Housing in England* which set out the standards expected from social housing providers in England in the provision of housing services, and how these standards would be regulated. In order to meet part of these standards, the Council produced a *Tenant Participation Impact Statement* setting out how Tenant Participation has impacted on the residents of the Epping Forest District and how residents have helped influence the Council's housing policies and procedures. In April 2012, the Homes and Communities Agency took over responsibility for regulation of social housing from the TSA and introduced amended standards set out in the *Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England 2012*.

4.9 The Housing Directorate's *Annual Report to Tenants* sets out how the Housing Directorate has performed over the past twelve months. The Annual Report includes information on tenant involvement and empowerment.

4.10 The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation reports to tenants through the 'Tenants Voice' section of the Council's *Housing News* publication.

## **5. Aim & Objectives**

5.1 The aim of the Council's Housing Service Strategy on Tenant Participation is:

"To 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 *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*".

5.2 This aim will be met by:

- a) complying with the commitments set out in the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*;
- b) providing information to tenants that is timely, in plain language, expressed clearly, of good quality and tailored to both the general and individual needs of tenants;
- c) recognising the special needs of certain tenants and responding positively to those needs;
- d) consulting tenants on housing issues that are important to them, in the most appropriate way, which will be different depending on the issue concerned;
- e) enabling tenants to scrutinise the Council's housing performance and make recommendations about how performance might be improved;
- f) conducting tenant satisfaction surveys to obtain feedback from tenants on the Council's performance in the delivery of housing services;
- g) responding to complaints in an effective manner and correcting failings in service delivery;
- h) encouraging, supporting and developing tenants associations;
- i) keeping the Council's tenant participation structure under review;
- j) encouraging, supporting, consulting and developing the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and working in partnership with the Federation to maximise the benefits that can be achieved from tenant participation to improve the delivery of housing services;
- k) ensuring that appropriate training is made available for tenants and Council officers and members;
- l) agreeing service standards with tenants as set out in the Homes and Communities Agency's *Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England 2012*;
- m) agreeing a set of tenant-selected performance indicators with the Tenants & Leaseholders Federation to be monitored on a quarterly basis;
- n) ensuring that appropriate funding and resources are made available to support and develop tenant participation;
- o) seeking, where appropriate, Council-wide support for tenant participation in line with the Council's corporate commitment to community engagement;
- p) carrying out tenant 'profiling' to enhance the service and ensure the Council is

- meeting the needs of the diverse community; and
- q) monitoring and reviewing the Council's approach to tenant participation.

## 6. Statutory requirements

6.1 The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012 includes the 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard'. This is one of the four consumer standards for housing providers within the Framework. Under this standard, providers are required to provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards. They must also ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- the formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities;
- the making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards;
- the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved;
- the management of their homes;
- the management of repair and maintenance services; and,
- agreeing local offers (standards) for service delivery.

Other relevant statutory requirements are:

a) *Housing Act 1985:*

- Provision of information about tenancies (*Section 104*)
- Consultation on matters of housing management (*Section 105*)
- Information about housing allocation (*Section 106*)
- Consultation before disposal to a private landlord (*Section 106A*)

b) *Equality Act 2010:*

The Council has a duty to ensure the following:

- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (i.e. their age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; gender, and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it;
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low; and,
- Ensuring people from all sections of our community are given equal opportunity to participate.

c) *Localism Act 2011:*

The 2011 Localism Act gave people more power over what happens in their neighbourhood, including:

- The Community Right to Bid giving community groups the right to bid to buy community buildings and facilities that are important to them;
- The Community Right to Challenge allowing voluntary and community groups to bid to run a local authority service where they believe they can do so differently and better. This may be the whole service or part of a service;
- Neighbourhood planning measures allowing communities to shape new development by coming together to prepare neighbourhood plans;
- The Community Right to Build allowing local communities to propose small-scale, site-specific, community-led developments;

- The Community Right to Reclaim Land giving communities the right to under-used or unused land owned by public bodies is brought back into public use;

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

7.1 The way in which tenants will be consulted, informed and involved is set out in:

- a) The *Epping Forest District-Wide Tenant Participation Agreement*\*
- b) The Tenant Participation section of the Council's website; and
- c) The *Annual Report to Tenants*.

\*Participation agreements are also made between the Council and the Epping Forest Sheltered Housing Forum, The Epping Forest Leaseholders Association and all Council recognised tenants groups in the district.

## **8. General Principles**

8.1 The detailed general approach that the Council will take, on an on-going basis, is set out in Sections 6, 7 and 9 of the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.

## 9. Future Developments

9.1 The following 'SWOT' analysis identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by areas covered in this Strategy and was completed in conjunction with the Director of Housing, Assistant Directors of Housing, Housing sectional managers and representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

### Strengths

- Knowledgeable and committed staff
- Customer Service Excellence Award
- All, tenants, leaseholders and applicants receive up to date news and housing information via a dedicated section of a district-wide tenants newsletter
- All tenants receive a Tenants Handbook, which includes a section on Tenant Participation
- Information about Tenant Participation available on-line
- Regular progress meetings held between Tenant Participation Officer, Section Managers and Service Heads.
- Partnership working with EFDC Community Development Team
- Good working relationship between staff and tenants/leaseholders
- Partnership working with other local Housing providers through the East of England Resident Involvement Group
- Good track record of involvement
- Good representation across district
- Tenants know contributions are valued
- Well organised TP structure
- Dedicated TP officer
- Nice area to live – residents don't want to leave
- Tenants on our side (using complaints/compliments to make a difference)
- Good selection of existing tenant groups
- TP Officer -very experienced and has fostered good relationships with tenants
- The Federation has an excellent Chairman
- The experience of the Information & Strategy section
- Housing Management play a supporting role to TP
- Tenants are involved in policy decisions
- Proactive selection process - complainant to participant
- Good networking with other authorities
- Assists with external accreditations
- Promotes member involvement with tenants
- Provision of Training for members of tenant groups
- Mixture of urban and rural properties – not facing same pressures as inner cities
- Stock condition

### Weaknesses

- Lack of tenant profiling to enable service to be tailored to tenants needs
- Lack of resources to carry out more tenant profiling and increase participation
- Good service – Tenants less likely to be involved because they are satisfied
- Some areas not represented
- Difficult to encourage membership
- Only one TP Officer (Lack of resource)
- Heavy, paper-based reports and long agendas put people off contributing or attending
- Mostly office based meetings, not easily accessible to those with disabilities
- Reluctance to embrace technology
- Can attract negative contribution or people with a personal agenda
- Lack of corporate buy in
- Mixture of urban and rural properties – not facing same pressures as inner cities – less reason to be involved



## Opportunities

- Greater use of ICT systems, particularly the Council's website
- Use of other new technology as appropriate
- Continue to develop partnership working with outside organisations
- Enhance profile of Tenant Participation in conjunction with Tenants & Leaseholders Federation and recognised residents associations
- Develop tenant profiling to enable services to be tailored accordingly
- Development and progression of Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- Development of more 'issue based' focus groups
- Corporate commitment to engaging with communities
- Involvement of Repairs and Maintenance Tenant Liaison Officer
- New technology – social media, blogs
- Making people aware of support groups
- More use of members (Councillors)
- Restructure – cross directorate working
- Loyalty of involved tenants
- Less heavy reports and agendas – use of technology
- Other directorates could tap into our experience to undertake their statutory consultation
- Share TP resource with other authorities
- Tenant involvement in mystery shopping
- More use of tenant groups in estate inspections
- Tenants to select standard fixtures and fittings and specification of kitchens, etc
- Council restructure could allow for additional resource
- Need to attract a more diverse range of people e.g. there is a lack of young people willing to get involved.
- Incentives for involvement – points for participation, etc.

## Threats

- Major changes in legislation
- Transfer of housing stock
- Financial restrictions
- Only one TP officer – succession planning
- Possible conflict between Federation and Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- High representation of older tenants. What happens when they move on?
- Financial cuts
- Major dispute between Federation and EFDC
- Loss of key staff
- Lack of attendees/business
- Managing expectation
- A resource (TP Officer) that is responsible for so much
- Potential reduction in public spending, TP could be seen as a luxury

## 10. Action Plan

Action	Lead officer	Timescale	Resource Implications
Undertake a survey ('census') of all tenants to update their details, as well as collecting and recording diversity data	Chris Sobey	August to October 2013	Within existing resources
Develop and progress the Tenant Scrutiny Panel to ensure continuous recruitment and relevant training is maintained and to ensure that qualitative feedback on housing services is provided	Lyndsay Swan/Richard Jones	On-going	Extra resources may be needed depending on training required
Set up regular training sessions for members of residents associations using internal and external training resources	Richard Jones	On-going	Within existing resources
Inform all new leaseholders about the Leaseholders Association	Richard Jones	On-going	Within existing resources
Develop a programme of estate walkabouts in liaison with Housing Management	Richard Jones	Annually	Within existing resources
Update Local Tenant Participation Agreements	Richard Jones	Annually	Within existing resources
Update Epping Forest District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement	Richard Jones	June 2014	Within existing resources
Administer the provision of support grants for recognised residents groups	Richard Jones	Annually	Within existing resources. £50 - £250 per association
Administer the provision of minor estate enhancement grants for recognised residents groups	Richard Jones	Annually	Within existing resources. £50 - £500 per association
Set up Estate Level Agreements or recruit block/street voices in areas not represented by residents associations to increase participation and improve services	Richard Jones	On-going Dependent on resources	Increase in resources required
Establish, through recruitment and training, a group of EFDC tenants to undertake future 'mystery shopping of the Council's housing services'	Richard Jones	March 2014	Within existing resources

Develop TP area of Council's website to include contributions from tenants groups.	Richard Jones/Chris Sobey/Website & Publicity Focus Group	March 2014	Within existing resources
Carry out 're-branding' of TP function in liaison with Website & Publicity Focus Group	Richard Jones/Chris Sobey	March 2014	Some extra resources required for publicity and promotional materials
Continue to investigate use of new technology to engage with tenants	Richard Jones	On-going	Possible extra resources needed
Develop use of social media to engage with tenants	Richard Jones/Website & Publicity Focus Group	On-going	Within existing resources
Continue to expand cross-boundary working with neighbouring authorities	Richard Jones	On-going	Within existing resources

## 11. Resourcing the Strategy

11.1 The Council has a specific budget of £87,200 within its Housing Revenue Account in respect of tenant participation initiatives in 2013/14, with an increased amount expected in 2014/15\*. (This figure includes the costs of staffing and support services)

Employees	£60,570
Transport	£790
Supplies and Services	£4,800
Support Services	£21,040
<b>Total</b>	<b>£87,200</b>

The tenant participation budget in 2013/14 and 2014/15 will fund:

- a) a full time dedicated Tenant Participation Officer;
- b) a dedicated budget of at least £87,200 per annum, including up to £3,000 per annum in grants to recognised residents associations;

11.2 In addition, other existing housing budgets will be used to fund associated tenant participation activities and issues (e.g. "Housing News", photocopying and printing etc).

11.3 The current and projected staff resources for tenant participation are as follows:

	Staff Resource Projections			
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
<b>Av no. staff to provide service (FTE p/a)</b>	1.24	1.24	1.24	1.24

11.4 As a guide, the proposed breakdown of staff resources for tenant participation in

2013/14 is as follows:

<b>Staff Resource Breakdown – 2013/14</b>	
<b>Post(s)</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Director of Housing	0.01
Asst Directors of Housing	0.07
Housing Resources Manager	0.05
Principal Housing Officer (Strategy/Info)	0.1
Tenant Participation Officer	0.9
Other staff	0.11
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.24</b>

## **12. Key Targets & Performance Monitoring**

12.1 The Council will monitor performance on tenant participation through:

- a) feedback from the Tenants & Leaseholders Federation;
- b) feedback from all other representative groups;
- c) the results of tenant satisfaction surveys;
- d) regular update meetings with senior housing officers;
- e) consultation with residents at district-wide or local events; and,
- f) feedback from the council's website.

12.3 The Council will monitor the performance of this Housing Service Strategy as set out in Section 13 of the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.

## **13. Reviewing the Strategy**

13.1 The *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement* will be reviewed around May 2014 and renegotiated with the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation with effect from the 1st November 2014.

13.2 This Housing Service Strategy will be reviewed in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation no later than November 2015 for renewal in June 2016. However, an earlier review will be undertaken if required, especially in the light of the review and monitoring of the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.



# Tenant Participation Agreement 2011 - 2014

**Epping Forest District Council  
and  
Epping Forest Tenants & Leaseholders  
Federation**

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**Housing**

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## 1. Parties to the Agreement

1.1 This Tenant Participation Agreement ('Agreement') is dated the 1<sup>st</sup> day of December 2011 and is between Epping Forest District Council ('the Council') and the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation ('the Federation').

## 2. Definitions

'Consult'	To seek views and to take the views into account when making decisions.
'District'	The area administered by the Council.
"Epping Forest District Leaseholders Association"	A group representing Lessees of residential non-commercial, properties of which the Council is the freeholder.
'Estate based agreements'	Individual written agreements between the Council and recognised tenants associations, setting out the approach the Council and the tenants association will take to tenant participation.
'Executive Committee'	A committee of the Federation established to carry out the business of the Federation and comprising representatives of recognised tenants associations.
'Federation'	The Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, which comprises all the recognised tenants associations in the District, the Epping Forest Leaseholders Association, the Epping Forest Sheltered Forum and Rural Tenants Forum, whose representatives meet on a regular basis to discuss local housing issues, and with whom the Council consults on housing issues.
"Housing Management Team"	The Director of Housing, the Asst. Director of Housing (Operations), the Asst. Director of Housing (Property), the Asst Director of Housing (Private Sector and Resources)
'Housing News'	The periodic newsletter, produced by the Council's Housing Directorate and delivered to the homes of all the Council's tenants and leaseholders and if appropriate, Housing Register applicants, giving information on housing issues of interest to tenants.
"Housing Portfolio Holder"	The Councillor given responsibility to make decisions on housing issues by the Council's Cabinet.

"Housing Scrutiny Panel"	A non-executive committee of the Council that considers policy issues in detail prior to decisions being made by the Housing Portfolio Holder or the Cabinet and monitors matters relating to housing.
'Leaseholders'	Lessees of residential, non-commercial, properties of which the Council is the freeholder.
'National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts'	The National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts' (Agreements) published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Communities and Local Govt)* in March 2005.
"Sheltered Forum"	A group made up of tenant representatives from the district's Sheltered Housing and Group Dwelling schemes.
'Tenant Associations'	Groups of tenants who represent the interests of all tenants within a defined geographical area, and which meet a specified criteria set by the Council for formal recognition by the Council.
'Tenants'	Secure or Introductory tenants and residential leaseholders of non-commercial properties of the Council.
'Tenant Management'	Organisations comprising tenants who choose to manage their Organisations' and 'TMOs' own housing services, as provided by the relevant Housing Acts.
'Tenant Participation'	The involvement of tenants and leaseholders in the provision of housing services to them.
'Tenant Participation Agreement'	A Tenant Participation Compact as defined in the Government's National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts.
'Tenant Participation Officer'	The Council Officer responsible for the promotion and development of tenant participation and for giving support to the Federation.
'The Forester'	The periodic newsletter, produced by the Council and delivered to the homes of all residents in the Epping Forest District, giving information on Council-based issues of interest.



### **3. Purpose of the Agreement**

3.1 This Agreement sets out the intentions of the Council and the Federation in the approach they will take for;

- a) the provision of information to tenants and to tenant participation generally;
- b) the operation of the Federation; and
- c) reviewing the Agreement.

3.2 This Agreement is a statement of commitment by both the Council and the Federation. It is not legally enforceable. The reason for this is that, for it to be legally enforceable, it would be necessary for the Council to enter into a legal agreement with individually named tenants on behalf of the Federation who would become personally liable for any breaches of the agreement. It is accepted that such a responsibility would be unacceptable to both the Council and the Federation and could hinder the intention of promoting the involvement of tenants in the delivery of housing services.

3.3 This Agreement has been drafted in accordance with, and having due regard to, the guidelines set out in the 'National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts' produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister\*.

3.4 Although the Government refers to 'Tenant Participation Compacts', the Council and the Federation believe that the description 'Tenant Participation Agreement' is more understandable to tenants. The term 'Tenant Participation Agreement' has therefore been adopted. However, for the avoidance of doubt, it is confirmed that they amount to the same.

3.5 Neither the Federation nor its Executive Committee will be liable, either jointly or as individual members, for any losses incurred as a result of any act or decision of the Federation or its individual members, unless that act or decision was made wilfully or fraudulently.

### **4. Duration of the Agreement**

4.1 The Agreement will be effective for a three-year period from the date of signature and will be subject to review in accordance with the arrangements set out in this Agreement.

### **5. Joint Statement of Commitment to Tenant Participation**

5.1 The Council and the Federation recognise the importance and benefits of tenant participation.

5.2 The Council and the Federation aim to enable the Council's tenants to participate in the delivery of their housing services through;

- a) the receipt of good quality information;
- b) adequate and appropriate consultation on relevant housing issues;  
and
- c) opportunities to provide feedback to the Council.

5.3 Together and independently, the Council and the Federation will ensure that appropriate, effective and adequate arrangements are made to enable tenants to participate in the delivery of their housing services, to the extent detailed in this Agreement.

5.4 The Council and the Federation will work together to ensure that the Federation is an organisation that is effective, efficient, open, accountable, fair and properly represents the views of tenants.

## **6. The Council's General Approach to Providing Information to Tenants**

The Council intends to take the following approaches to informing tenants about their housing services on an ongoing basis:

### 6.1 General:

Information provided by the Council to tenants will be;

- a) in plain language;
- b) expressed clearly, avoiding jargon; and
- c) of good quality, timely and tailored to tenants' needs.

### 6.2 General Information to all Tenants:

- a) The Council will endeavour to provide general information to all tenants on the following:
  - i) Housing strategies & investment plans, including present/future capital works;
  - ii) Housing management issues and issues relating to the delegation of housing services;
  - iii) Tenant participation and Agreements, including opportunities for being involved in decision-making and the support available for getting involved;
  - iv) Key performance indicators; and
  - v) Matters of interest to tenants.
- b) General information to all tenants will be reported in 'Housing News', produced at least three times each year, and provided to the local press and radio through media press releases. Special issues of 'Housing News' will be published to deal with important issues that require extensive coverage.
- c) The Council will provide each Tenant with a copy of the Tenant's Handbook. This will include information on Tenant Participation and a summary of this Tenant Participation Agreement.
- d) The Council will make available to tenants, on reasonable request, any publications that it produces.
- e) The Council will maintain a Housing Section of the Council's website, that will provide tenants with the following information:
  - a) A-Z of Housing Services
  - b) Contact details for Housing Services
  - c) Housing publications and leaflets
  - d) Latest housing news
  - e) Tenant Participation
- f) The Council will produce an Annual Report to Tenants, reporting on the performance of the Housing Directorate throughout the previous year. A copy of the Annual Report will be provided to every tenant.

### 6.3 Important Information to Individual Tenants on Specific Issues:

- a) Tenants will be advised of important and specific issues affecting all tenants by individual letter.

- b) Tenants of individual estates will be informed of important issues affecting them (eg improvement schemes) either by special newsletter, by letter or through resident's meetings.
- c) Tenants will be provided with written confirmation of repairs they have reported to the Council within three working days of report.

#### 6.4 Information to Tenants with Special Needs:

- a) Special arrangements will be made on request to provide information in large print, Braille or spoken word for visually impaired tenants.
- b) The Council will publicise the arrangements for providing information to tenants in large print, Braille or spoken word.
- c) Special language requirements for non-English speaking tenants will be considered when providing information to tenants and the Council will utilise the translation service appointed by Essex County Council to translate information to individual tenants when necessary on request.
- d) A portable Hearing Loop will be made available to visitors to Council offices, on request.

### **7. The Council's General Approach to Tenant Participation**

The Council intends to take the following approach to tenant participation on an ongoing basis:

#### 7.1 General:

The Council's detailed approach to tenant participation will be set out in a Housing Directorate Strategy on Tenant Participation. This approach will be summarised in a chapter of the Council's Housing Strategy and within the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

#### 7.2 Consultation with Tenants on General Issues:

Individual tenants will be consulted on important general housing issues and policies either through 'Housing News' or by individual letter.

#### 7.3 Consultation with Tenants on Specific Issues:

- a) Tenants of individual estates will be consulted on major issues that affect them (eg improvement schemes) either by special newsletter, by letter or through residents meetings, and their views will be taken into account.
- b) Where individual choices are available to tenants on specific issues (eg improvement schemes), they will be consulted either through letter/questionnaire or personal visit, on tenants' preferences.

#### 7.4 Obtaining Feedback from Tenants and Dealing with Complaints:

- a) The Council will undertake a comprehensive tenants satisfaction survey every two years or as directed by Government, and compare the results with those of other local authorities and registered social landlords.

- b) Tenants will be sent Repairs Satisfaction Forms every time they report a repair, and invited to complete and return the form after the repair has been undertaken, giving comments on their level of satisfaction in respect of:
  - i) the general quality of the work;
  - ii) the politeness and co-operation of the workmen;
  - iii) how clean and tidy their home was left by the workmen;
  - iv) the time it took for the repair to be undertaken; and
  - v) the general standard of the service received.
- c) Tenants will be provided with satisfaction forms after the Council has undertaken planned improvements to their home.
- d) The Council will operate and publicise a Complaints and Compliments Procedure, with increasing levels of reporting, to enable tenants to progress their complaints, commencing with complaints made to the officer dealing with the matter and with the provision for complaints to be made to the Council's Chief Executive, a Complaints Panel of Councillors and the Local Government Ombudsman.

#### 7.5 Developing and Supporting Tenant Associations:

- a) Council officers and members will endeavour to identify opportunities for the formation of new tenants associations when they deal with individual tenants and informal groups of tenants.
- b) Practical, and where appropriate, financial support and advice will be provided by the Council to new groups wishing to form tenants associations, including attendance at meetings.
- c) Tenants wishing to form tenants' associations will be encouraged to form steering groups in the first instance. The Council will formally recognise tenants association steering groups that:
  - i) comprise at least 10 named tenants from within the geographical boundary of the proposed tenants association;
  - ii) agree one person to be 'lead resident' until a formal Constitution has been agreed and a Chairman has been formally elected;
  - iii) make the 'lead resident' responsible for any money received or paid by the Steering Group; and
  - iv) endeavour to form a recognised tenants association within 6 months of recognition as a steering group.
- d) The Council will provide start-up funding of £100 to any recognised steering group wishing to form a recognised tenants association, and will provide a further grant of £200 on formal recognition as a tenants association.
- e) Tenants association steering groups will be required to return any unexpended funding made available by the Council if the proposed tenants association is not formed within 6 months of the first meeting of the steering group.
- f) The Council will formally recognise tenants associations that:
  - i) have a membership of at least 10 named tenants at any one time;
  - ii) have membership open to all tenants and leaseholders within the defined area of coverage;

- iii) have a written Constitution, in a form acceptable to the Council's Director of Housing, following agreement at an open meeting to which all members are invited, and only make changes to the Constitution at an open meeting to which all members were invited;
  - iv) provide a copy of the latest version of the Constitution to the Council within ten working days of adoption or any amendments being agreed;
  - v) democratically elect their Chairman and give all members of the Tenants' Association equal opportunity to seek election as Chairman;
  - vi) have an annual general meeting to elect key officer positions including the Chairman, which a minimum necessary number of tenants attend before the meeting can take decisions;
  - vii) take minutes of the Annual General Meeting;
  - viii) hold at least two meetings of the association within a twelve-month period, to which all members of the association are invited;
  - ix) designate a person as Treasurer (or similar), who is made responsible for maintaining records of any income and expenditure and producing a written summary of income and expenditure (accounts) annually;
  - x) ensure that all expenditure by the association, including petty cash, is authorised by at least two officers of the association;
  - xi) ensure that any cheques or withdrawals of money from any of the association's bank or building society accounts are signed by two officers of the association;
  - xii) have the accounts audited for accuracy and probity by a person, independent of the Treasurer, at least once every twelve months; and
  - xiii) submit copies of its accounts to the Council within one month of them being audited;
  - xiv) agree (and sign) an Estate-based Tenant Participation Agreement setting out the agreed responsibilities of the Council and the Association, based on the Council's Model Tenant Participation Agreement to be produced in liaison with the Tenants Federation; and
  - xv) have a mechanism for written communication with their members.
- g) Reference to tenant associations in this Agreement includes resident and community associations that have a wider membership than just tenants, including residents/tenants panels.
- h) Estate-based Agreements will be drafted by the Council and sent for comment to new tenant associations that meet the Council's requirements for recognition within three months of their Constitution being approved by their membership.
- i) The Council will provide annual Tenants Association Support Grants of up to £250 to each recognised tenants association, with the individual amounts provided to each tenants association agreed by the Council's Housing Portfolio Holder on an annual basis after taking into account;
    - i) the amount requested by the tenants association;
    - ii) the size of the association;
    - iii) the Council's perceived performance of the association over the previous year;
    - iv) the association's use of funds during the previous year; and
    - v) the need for funding based on the latest accounts of the association.

- j) Where possible the Council will make premises available for the use of tenants associations to hold meetings of all its members, or alternatively meet the reasonable cost of hall bookings, for no more than 4 meetings per annum. However, communal lounges of sheltered housing schemes will only be made available to tenant associations that substantially represent the tenants of the sheltered housing scheme concerned.
- k) The Council will provide a free printing/photocopying service to recognised tenants associations and recognised tenants association steering groups for a maximum of 1,000 sheets of A4 (or equivalent) per annum per association/steering group.
- l) The Council will delegate a budget of between £50 and £500 per annum to each recognised tenants' association for minor estate enhancements within the defined boundaries of the area covered by the individual associations, with the individual amounts agreed by Housing Portfolio Holder.
- m) The Council will arrange and provide training to representatives of tenants associations on housing-related issues as required.

#### 7.6 Tenant Management Organisations:

- a) Tenant Management Organisations comprise tenants who choose to manage their own housing services, in accordance with the detailed rules set out in law and by the Government. Details of these rules will be provided by the Council on request. Tenants seriously wishing to investigate the formation of Tenant Management Organisations will be fully supported by Council officers.
- b) Any proposals for the formation of Tenant Management Organisations will be given full consideration by the Council.

#### 7.7 Promotion of Tenant Participation:

- a) The Council will hold regular 'Tenant Participation Roadshows' or alternative events, across the district, with the aim of starting new Tenants Associations and promoting existing associations.
- b) The Council will endeavour to attend local events across the district, e.g., fetes, fun days, to promote Tenant Participation.
- c) The Council will carry out surveys of tenants' interests from time to time in order to assess opportunities for participation, set up focus groups to discuss specific topics and consult with tenants on particular issues.

### **8. The Council's General Approach to the Operation of the Federation**

The Council intends to take the following general approach towards the Federation on an ongoing basis:

#### 8.1 Information:

- a) Copies of the following plans will be provided to members of the Federation's Executive Committee annually:
  - i) Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan;

- ii) Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan.
- b) Housing officers will provide the Federation with advice and information on relevant housing issues, at both national and local levels, as appropriate.
- c) The Director of Housing or another member of the Housing Management Team, and the Tenant Participation Officer will attend each meeting of the Federation's Executive Committee to report on current issues.
- d) The Housing Portfolio Holder or Deputy Housing Portfolio Holder will endeavour to attend meetings of the Federation's Executive Committee.
- e) The Council will provide the Federation's Executive Committee with general information on the following:
  - i) Housing strategies & investment plans, including present/future capital works;
  - ii) Housing management issues and issues relating to the delegation of housing management;
  - iii) Tenant participation and Agreements, including opportunities for being involved in decision-making and the support available for getting involved;
  - v) The Council's housing performance including agreed tenant selected indicators both annually and quarterly; and
  - vi) Matters of interest to the Federation.
- f) In order to keep Members of the Council informed about tenant participation, the Tenant Participation Officer will provide a quarterly report on the Federation's activities in the Council's Members Bulletin.

## 8.2 Consultation:

- a) The Council will endeavour to consult the Federation's Executive Committee on strategic and policy issues affecting all tenants and leaseholders and, where possible, before consideration by the Housing Portfolio Holder or Council committees, ensuring a minimum consultation period of 14 days.
- b) In particular, the Federation will be consulted on;
  - i) the Council's housing strategies contained within its Housing Strategy prior to amendment;
  - ii) the Council's draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan annually;
  - iii) the Council's draft annual Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan annually;
  - iv) proposed amendments to the Housing Allocations and Mutual Exchange Schemes annually;
  - v) new housing policies or proposed changes to existing policies, affecting all or the majority of tenants; and
  - viii) fees and charges for housing related services.
- c) Council housing officers will endeavour to respond in writing to queries from members of the Federation's Executive Committee within 5 working days.

- d) The Chairman of the Federation's Executive Committee will be invited to attend meetings of the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel to represent the views of the Federation and tenants and leaseholders generally.

### 8.3 Publicity:

- a) Publicity will be given to tenants on the work of the Federation through:
  - i) Housing News;
  - ii) The Forester; and
  - iii) The Council's Website.

### 8.4 Support and Funding:

- a) The Council will provide a sufficient annual budget for tenant participation to support the Federation's activities.
- b) The Council's Tenant Participation Officer will produce, and arrange the copying of, agendas and minutes for the Federation, on behalf of and in conjunction with the Chairman of the Federation.
- c) In liaison with the Federation, the Council will maintain a Mailing List of the Federation's Executive Committee members and send the following information to members on behalf of the Federation:
  - i) Agenda and details/dates for future meetings in advance of the meetings;
  - ii) Minutes of meetings (within one month of the meetings being held); and
  - iii) General information.
- e) A basic desktop publishing service will be provided by the Council for the Tenants Federation News sheet and other Federation information (eg posters).
- f) The Council will ensure that the Federation is aware of the resources available to them, including staff time.
- g) The Council will provide transport or pay the reasonable transportation costs of residents attending meetings of the Federation.

### 8.5 Training:

- a) The Tenant Participation Officer will co-ordinate the Federation's training requirements.
- b) The Tenant Participation Officer will notify the Federation's Executive Committee of relevant training courses for tenants that he/she becomes aware of.
- c) Available places on courses held by the Council under its Corporate Training Programme will be made available to key members of the Federation, subject to Council staff having first refusal.



## 9. The Federation's General Approach to its Operation

The Federation intends to take the following general approach towards its own operation:

### 9.1 Structure and Constitution:

- a) The Federation will have a written Constitution in a form acceptable to the Council's Housing Portfolio Holder, following agreement at a meeting of the Executive Committee to which representatives of all the recognised tenants associations in the District and the Leaseholders Association are invited.
- b) The Federation will only make changes to the Constitution at a meeting of the Executive Committee to which representatives of all the recognised tenants associations in the District and the Leaseholders Association are invited.
- c) The Federation will provide a copy of the latest version of the Constitution to the Council within ten working days of any amendments being agreed;
- d) The Federation will comply with the Constitution at all times.
- e) The Federation will endeavour to ensure that it represents all tenants and leaseholders.
- f) The Federation will maintain an Executive Committee to carry out the business of the Federation, including the offices of Chairman, Vice-Chairman and if considered necessary, Secretary, with the officers of the Executive Committee elected annually from the standing representatives of the recognised tenants associations, the Leaseholders Association and the Sheltered Forum, with the exception of the Chairman who shall be elected every three years.
- g) The Federation will appoint one member of its Executive Committee as "Tenant Liaison Representative", to act as a link between the Federation and tenants who are not members of recognised tenants associations.
- h) The Federation's Executive Committee will hold an Annual General Meeting and give all members of the Executive Committee at least 14 days notice of its date, time and venue.
- i) Members of the Federation's Executive Committee will endeavour to obtain the views of tenants through their tenants and leaseholder associations. The views of all tenants will be sought on particularly important housing issues, through 'Housing News' or the Federation's Tenants News sheet.
- j) The Federation will endeavour, and take positive steps, to ensure that tenants with special interests are adequately represented, including:
  - (i) older people;
  - (ii) families and younger tenants;
  - (iii) people with disabilities;
  - (iv) tenants with other special needs and;
  - (v) tenants from other diverse groups within the District in accordance with the Equality Bill 2009.

- k) Representatives of the Federation attending Council committees will report back to each meeting of the Federation on;
  - (i) the matters discussed at the meeting; and
  - (ii) the views expressed by the Federation's representatives.
- l) With the assistance of the Council, the Federation will produce a regular Federation News sheet that will be distributed to all tenants and leaseholders informing them of the work of the Federation.
- m) The Federation will keep under review the possibility of the Federation supporting a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO).

## 9.2 Executive Committee - Meeting Arrangements:

- a) Meetings of the Federation's Executive Committee will be held at least every three months.
- b) The Federation's Executive Committee will endeavour to ensure that meetings are adequately accessible for the majority of the members of the Executive Committee, in terms of physical access and geographical convenience.
- c) Meetings of the Executive Committee will be conducted in a fair way, ensuring every member has a reasonable opportunity to speak.
- d) The Federation's Chairman will ensure that meetings consider appropriate issues and give sufficient time to important issues, with an appropriately drafted agenda, and that the majority of time at meetings is spent on important issues, with individual cases/complaints only discussed if they illustrate a general point.
- e) All meetings of the Executive Committee will have clear objectives, a written agenda, a clear action plan to deal with agreed matters and arrangements for reporting back to future meetings on matters arising.

## 10. Monitoring and Review of the Agreement

- 10.1 In accordance with the 'National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts', the Council and the Federation will undertake a review of the Council's Housing Directorate Strategy on Tenant Participation, every three years to;
- a) identify and investigate failure to meet service standards and targets on tenant participation;
  - b) monitor and evaluate different approaches to tenant participation, looking particularly at the scope for changing the approach taken by the Council and the Federation to ensure that it remains effective and efficient;
  - c) monitor tenant representatives and groups to ensure they continue to carry out their roles effectively;
  - d) monitor equality of opportunity and levels of involvement by all groups, including ethnic minorities;
  - e) assess performance against what other housing organisations are achieving; and

- f) check that the Council consults with, and involve, tenants from all parts of the community effectively.
- 10.2 In conjunction with the Federation, the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and Housing Portfolio Holder will undertake a review of the Council's Housing Directorate Strategy on Tenant Participation to;
- a) assess the results of this Agreement and estate-based Agreements against the Council's and the Federation's original expectations;
  - b) review the Council's tenant participation policies, practice and performance;
  - c) assess whether the Council's policies are still relevant and meet tenants' hopes and needs;
  - d) measure against national and local performance indicators, including a comparison with performance achieved by other councils or registered social landlords; and
  - e) set performance measures and targets for tenants' satisfaction in the following year in respect of;
    - i) participation arrangements;
    - ii) services, including value for money; and
    - iii) their local area.
- 10.3 The Council and the Federation will undertake a formal review of the success of this Agreement six months before its expiry date.

#### **11. Equal Opportunities Statement**

The Federation will represent all sections of the community. All members should actively seek to represent the various needs of the district and not discriminate on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marital status (including civil partnerships), pregnancy/maternity, race, religious opinion, sex, sexuality orientation.

#### **12. Signatures**

Housing Portfolio Holder

Chairman of the Epping Forest  
Tenants and Leaseholders Federation



## Housing Directorate

Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ  
Phone: 01992 564000 [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing)

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2014**

**Portfolio: Housing – Cllr David Stallan**

**Subject: Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Information**

**Officer contact for further information: Chris Sobey (01992 56 4292)**

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

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



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

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers and endorses the Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Information, attached as an appendix, and provides any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder for incorporation.

### **Report:**

1. The Housing Directorate's Service Strategies were originally produced around 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 and 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 sets 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 Housing Related Support (formerly Supporting People) funding under the conditions of the contract.

3. The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and endorse the updated Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Information attached as an appendix to the report, and provide any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder for incorporation.

**Reason for decision:**

The Housing Scrutiny Panel reviews all Housing Directorate Service Strategies on a three-yearly basis. They have assisted the Housing Directorate in achieving the Customer Service Excellence award and ISO 9001:2008 Quality Accreditation, and have been important to meeting the minimum requirement for Housing Related Support funding under the conditions of the contract.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to review the Housing Directorate's Service Strategy on Information.

**Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation will be consulted on the Strategy at their meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014 and their comments will be incorporated into the document.

**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 Strategy

Background papers: N/A

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: As set out in the Strategy

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A None



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

## **1. Introduction**

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

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

- 2.1 The availability of clear and easily understood information on housing is an essential part of good customer care. The main recipients of such information are:
  - a) Council tenants and leaseholders;
  - b) Applicants for social housing;
  - c) Homeless people and people at risk of becoming homeless;
  - d) Homeowners, private tenants and landlords seeking advice on housing issues;
  - e) Older people and others with special housing needs;
  - f) Council staff and members; and
  - g) Housing associations, other partners and agencies.
- 2.2 In addition to disseminating information on housing services, the Council seeks information to assist in the strategic planning process.
- 2.3 There is also a duty to inform Council tenants, leaseholders and social housing applicants on Council policy, and their rights and responsibilities.
- 2.4 Feedback on services is sought through tenant involvement, surveys and other consultation methods.
- 2.5 There is a statutory duty to inform in certain cases. The Council is required to inform tenants of their rights with respect to housing allocations, repairs, the Right to Buy and other key issues. In addition, any changes to legislation or Council policy must be reported to tenants, leaseholders, homeseekers and residents in privately-owned accommodation. In some cases the Council may be required by law to consult with the client group on prospective changes, such as new Tenancy Conditions. Accurate information and statistics must be provided to the

Government by set deadlines for the annual Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS) return and other statistical returns. The Directorate is expected to provide statistics and information to the Council's Performance Improvement Unit. A number of housing performance indicators are collected for continuous improvement monitoring and for tenant scrutiny. Those who receive information, or share information of this kind with the Council, include;

- a) the Director of Housing, Assistant Directors and managers;
  - b) tenants and specifically the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;
  - c) the Government;
  - d) other Council Directorates;
  - e) other local authorities; and
  - h) other agencies such as housing associations and research bodies.
- 2.6 Key performance indicators are set for the Housing Directorate in consultation with Council members. Performance and cost data is also required for the Housemark online benchmarking system which provides comparative data for local authorities and housing associations, on a national and regional basis. Other information and statistics are required by senior housing managers to monitor performance through the Continuous Improvement Plan, and to assist in the development of housing policy and strategies.
- 2.7 The Housing Directorate has established a number of service standards in compliance with the regulatory framework of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The Housing Service Standards and Housing Charter set out the Council's promises to customers, and give details of the services they can expect to receive.
- 2.8 The Council's staff and Council members are provided with information on housing services, events, performance, strategy and policy issues to assist in service provision and client communication.
- 2.9 The Housing Information and Strategy Team consists of the Principal Housing Officer (Information and Strategy) and a part-time Housing Assistant. The Team also includes the Tenant Participation Officer and a part-time Senior Housing Officer (Quality and Performance). It is based within the Housing Resources Section of the Housing Directorate, reporting to the Housing Resources Manager. Housing information is sourced from the Director and Assistant Directors of Housing, Housing Managers, staff with specialist knowledge, other Council services, the Government, other housing organisations and outside agencies.
- 2.10 The Team is responsible for the annual Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS) return and other Government returns. These involve the provision of statistical data which also supports the Council's housing strategies, the HRA Business Plan and the Private Sector Housing Business Plan. Housing's Business Plans follow the Council's key corporate aims, and analyse the Council's current service. The HRA Business Plan lists the Council's strategies and includes a 30 year financial plan. Assessments of the District's future housing needs may be required from time to time in the form of Housing Needs Surveys and/or Strategic Housing Market Assessments. The Information and Strategy Team provides statistics and assistance in the production of these documents, and the housing element of other corporate plans.

- 2.11 Information on complaints and compliments received, and any appeals and reviews carried out by Housing officers, are reported corporately and as part of Housing's Continuous Improvement Plan. The objective is to monitor types of complaint and identify any learning points.
- 2.12 The Housing Directorate provides written information to tenants and other residents mainly through the publication of its own literature and contributions to corporate publications. These currently include;
- a) "Housing News" and "Tenants Voice" - newsletters for all tenants (approximately 6,500 at April 2013).
  - b) "The Forester" - a newspaper delivered periodically to all residents of the District;
  - c) "District Lines" – a regular newsletter for Council staff;
  - d) "In House" - a regular newsletter for staff within the Housing Directorate;
  - e) The Tenant Participation Officer works with residents' groups and assists in the production of newsletters directed towards the target area.
- 2.13 Every new tenant is given a copy of a *Tenants Handbook* produced by the Housing Information and Strategy team. This publication is in the form of a binder containing a set of leaflets. These cover Housing's service standards and Tenants Charter; rents and housing management; joint tenancies; maintenance and repairs; advice on moving home; services for older tenants; succession to a tenancy; the right to buy; appeals, complaints and reviews; and other general information.
- 2.14 A range of leaflets produced by the Housing Information and Strategy team provide information on specific issues, such as advice on homelessness, anti-social behaviour and services provided by the Private Sector Housing teams.
- 2.15 Housing applicants are given relevant information including a leaflet on moving home, information on the HomeOption online application service, and information on choice based lettings.
- 2.16 Under the regulatory framework of the HCA, housing providers (including local authorities) are required to produce an Annual Report to Tenants. This assesses how the Housing Directorate is currently meeting its own standards and measuring compliance, particularly in relation to housing repairs. The Council is required to share the Report with tenants.
- 2.17 The Council has an area dedicated to Housing on its website. The Strategy and Information Team is responsible for publishing and updating any housing information relevant to tenants, leaseholders, applicants, owner-occupiers, private tenants and other members of the general public. Such information could include events, news and facilities to apply for services and report faults. Leaflets are available in downloadable form and there are links to other sources of information.
- 2.18 An intranet information system can be accessed by all council staff. The Housing Information and Strategy Team publishes and updates information on housing for Housing staff and for all Council employees. This can include general housing information, policies and strategies, risk assessments, quality management system documents, equality data and publications.

- 2.19 News items, events and issues relating to new Council policy are reported to the media in conjunction with the Council's Public Relations and Marketing Section.
- 2.20 Housing applicants, tenants, leaseholders and other residents are given information verbally through interviews at the office, home visits and day-to-day telephone contact with housing officers. Occupants of sheltered housing are given information through their contacts with Scheme Managers.
- 2.21 Council tenants and leaseholders are given information, and consulted on Council policy, through the District-wide Tenants' and Leaseholders Federation, Tenant Scrutiny Panel, estate-based tenants' associations, the Leaseholders Association, the Sheltered Housing Forum, and other formal and informal residents groups.
- 2.22 The Council has formalised its approach to tenant participation, and the provision of information to tenants, in a Tenant Participation Agreement signed by the Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.
- 2.23 Estate-based residents' associations are encouraged to have Local Tenant Participation Agreements setting out their approach to involving residents and providing information.
- 2.24 Older people and otherwise vulnerable residents (disabled people and families on low incomes) in privately-owned homes can access help through Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest (C.A.R.E.), the Council's in-house Home Improvement Agency. C.A.R.E. has a Service Users Forum through which potential C.A.R.E. customers can access information on services appropriate to them.
- 2.25 Consultation on special issues is carried out through surveys, special editions of 'Housing News', public meetings, individual consultations or other means as appropriate.
- 2.26 Equalities monitoring is conducted for strategic profiling purposes, and to help tailor the provision of services to clients, through the use of profiling questions which are included in application forms and surveys.
- 2.27 Detailed information on the Council's housing stock is maintained by the Team to produce an annual analysis of stock changes. This is required for the HRA Business Plan, financial controls and Government statistics.
- 2.28 Statistical data on housing stock, social housing lettings, housebuilding and homelessness is provided to the Government in conjunction with the Housing IT Team and is submitted using Interform and CORE electronic systems.

### **3. Coverage**

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

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

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

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

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

- 5.1 The aim of this strategy is:
  - "To provide relevant, timely, clear and accurate information for the Council's tenants, leaseholders, housing applicants, other residents of the District, Council staff, the Government and other individuals or bodies with an interest in the Housing Directorate".
- 5.2 This aim will be met by;
  - a) producing publications for the Council's client groups on its housing services, policies and performance;
  - b) ensuring that all such published information is well presented and easy to understand;
  - c) developing and maintaining the Housing areas of the Council's website and intranet;
  - d) making provision for people who may have difficulty accessing information, and those who need information provided in another format or language;
  - e) ensuring that housing applicants, tenants and leaseholders are given up-to-date information on Council policies and conditions, and on their rights;
  - f) publishing Business Plans, Housing Allocations Schemes, tenancy strategies and other key documents;
  - g) providing statistical returns to the Government;
  - h) providing information for the Council's corporate plans as required;
  - i) maintaining systems to monitor and report housing performance;

- j) measuring performance against Housing's Service Standards where possible;
- k) developing the Council's approach to the way information is provided by;
  - ensuring its publications are consistent in quality of presentation and readability;
  - continually increasing the flow of information to the target groups;
  - providing information in a form that is suitable for all our customers;
  - making the best use of all types of media available for the dissemination of information.

## **6. Statutory requirements**

6.1 The provision of information is good practice, and in some areas is covered by statutory requirements.

- a) Housing Act 1985:
  - Provision of information about tenancies (Section 104);
  - Consultation on matters of housing management (Section 105); and
  - Information about housing allocation (Section 106).
- b) Housing Act 1996:
  - Duty of local housing authority to provide advisory services in relation to homelessness (Section 179).
- c) Housing Act 2004:
  - Duty of local housing authority to provide information to help tenants decide whether to exercise the Right to Buy (Section 189).
- d) Local Government Act 1999:
  - Under the directives on Best Value the Secretary of State may order the Council to provide performance indicators (Section 4a), [the provision of performance indicators to the Government is not currently a requirement].
- e) The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012
  - Under the Regulatory Framework, registered housing providers should issue timely and relevant performance information to support effective scrutiny by tenants of their landlord's performance, in a form agreed with tenants.
  - Registered housing providers are required to publish an annual report for tenants, to be shared with tenants.
  - The 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard' is one of the four consumer standards for housing providers within the Framework. Under this standard, housing providers are required to provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards.
- f) Equality Act 2010

- Requirement of public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Equality Duty, and to set equality objectives.

g) Freedom of Information Act 2000

- Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled:
  - (a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and
  - (b) if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him/her.

h) Data Protection Act

- The Data Protection Act requires fair and lawful processing of personal data.

The Council must:

- (a) have legitimate grounds for collecting and using the personal data;
- (b) not use the data in ways that have unjustified adverse effects on the individuals concerned;
- (c) be transparent about how it intends to use the data, and give individuals appropriate privacy notices when collecting their personal data;
- (d) handle people's personal data only in ways they would reasonably expect; and
- (e) make sure it does not do anything unlawful with the data.

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

7.1 Residents are involved and consulted on the Council's arrangements for the provision of information through:

- consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and other tenants' groups on service delivery and any proposed policy changes;
- tenant satisfaction surveys providing opinions on the overall landlord service and on satisfaction with specific areas such as contact with the Council;
- feedback forms included in Council publications and on the website; and
- occasional exit surveys following interviews with housing officers.

7.2 The District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement sets out the Council's commitment to tenant participation and states that the Council will enable its tenants to participate in the delivery of their housing service through:

- the receipt of good quality information;
- adequate and appropriate consultation on relevant housing issues; and,
- opportunities to provide feedback.

## **8. General principles**

*a) Information for client groups*

- 8.1 All the information published by the Housing Directorate should be well presented, accurate and written in plain English.
  - 8.2 The needs of all the Directorate's customers will be taken into account in the preparation of information.
  - 8.3 *Housing News*, the Council's newsletter for all tenants and leaseholders, will be published at least three times a year to include items on Council policy, Council services, application criteria, opportunities for participation, housing performance, and general items of information. Information for applicants will be included in *Housing News* or special publications as required and distributed to that client group.
  - 8.4 An *Annual Report to Tenants* will be published and a copy sent to every tenant, including relevant performance information, details of repair and maintenance budgets, and performance in relation to the standards set out in the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing.
  - 8.5 *Information Leaflets* for Council tenants, applicants, homeless people and owner-occupiers will be published and updated as necessary to ensure all residents are fully informed of their rights and responsibilities, and the housing services available to them from the Council and other organisations.
  - 8.6 A *Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan* will be made available to tenants annually, incorporating a *Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan*. A *Private Sector Housing Business Plan* will be published annually.
  - 8.7 The Council's *Housing Allocation Scheme* will provide information for homeseekers on housing eligibility criteria and the 'banding scheme'. Once registered, homeseekers will be kept informed on available properties through the HomeOption online system, maintained for the Council by Locata.
    - 8.7.1 Information in the *Tenants Handbook* will be updated as necessary and the Council's *Tenancy Policy* will be made available to tenants.
  - 8.8 The Housing area of the Council's website will be kept up to date to provide news and information that may be sought by tenants, leaseholders, applicants, private rental tenants and residents in privately owned homes.
  - 8.9 The Housing area of Council's intranet will be kept up to date for staff, and information on housing matters will be published periodically in *In House*.
  - 8.10 Housing news items, information on major projects or significant policy changes will be reported to the public through the media and on the Council website.
  - 8.11 Where issues will affect a defined group of residents, the necessary information may be provided through public meetings, through residents' groups or by individual consultation.
- b) *Information required by the Government*
- 8.12 Housing Information will be collected for the production of the annual *Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS)* return according to the Government's guidelines and timetable. This generally includes statistics on housing stock, council house sales and transfers, allocations, lettings, vacant properties, stock condition, capital expenditure, rent arrears, housing management and affordable housing supply.



8.13 The Council will obtain accurate information and complete any statistical returns requested by the Government or its agencies, including quarterly and annual *Housing Activity Returns (P Forms)* and *Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales in Social Housing in England (CORE)* by the dates given.

8.14 The Council will carry out an annual housing stock reconciliation as required for financial audit and for the *LAHS* stock breakdown.

c) *Performance Management*

8.15 The Housing Directorate will meet its obligations to provide statistics required by the Council. Such statistics include the provision of key performance indicator figures and data on compliments and complaints. Details of consultation exercises will be continuously recorded and held on an annual return. Requests for information will be met within the timetables set by the Council (normally on a quarterly basis).

8.16 Under the Regulatory Framework, social housing providers are required to provide information to council tenants on performance against standards, and monitor improvement. The Housing Strategy and Information Team will work with housing managers and other Council services to assist in the benchmarking of individual services for this purpose. Performance against a set of tenant selected indicators is monitored quarterly by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and reported in the Annual Report to Tenants.

## 9. Future Developments

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

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Knowledgeable and committed staff</li> <li>❖ Customer Service Excellence Award</li> <li>❖ All tenants, leaseholders and applicants receive up to date news and housing information via tenants newsletter</li> <li>❖ All tenants receive a Tenants Handbook</li> <li>❖ All housing applicants receive HomeOption user information</li> <li>❖ Welcome packs for sheltered housing residents and Careline users</li> <li>❖ Information on all housing services available online</li> <li>❖ Staff are regularly updated on housing matters through in-house magazine</li> <li>❖ Information procedures reviewed as part of Quality Management System ISO 9001:2008</li> <li>❖ Feedback on housing information services through Tenants Satisfaction Survey and other mechanisms</li> <li>❖ Tenants’ groups including the District-wide federation are consulted on information issues</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Council website does not have full interactive functionality, for example customers can report faults to the Housing Repairs Section by email, but there is no facility to identify and report defects online</li> <li>❖ Some diversity profiling has been conducted but a comprehensive profile of the client group is lacking</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Action plan to improve the housing information service</li> <li>❖ More involvement of customers in reviewing the provision of housing information</li> <li>❖ Provide information in different formats for customers with special needs where required</li> <li>❖ Take advantage of new technology as appropriate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Major changes in legislation</li> <li>❖ Major changes in government requirements for statistics and/or information</li> <li>❖ Failure of IT or communications systems</li> </ul>

## 10. Action Plan

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>RESOURCES REQUIRED</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>ACTIONED BY</b>
<b>General provision of information</b>			
Maintain and update the Tenants Handbook, and other publications providing information required by the client group.	Within existing resources	Ongoing	Principal Housing Officer (Information) and all Housing Managers
<b>Annual Report</b>			
Produce an annual report including relevant performance information and details of maintenance budgets	Within existing resources	Annual October	PHO (Info)
<b>Website</b>			
Maintain the website to ensure accuracy of information and working links	Within existing resources	Monthly	PHO (Info)
Provide more online functionality to the website, including fraud reporting and repairs reporting	Within existing resources	March 2014	PHO (Info) and Housing Repairs Manager
<b>Tenant participation</b>			
Review and update the District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement setting out the ways in which information will be provided	Within existing resources	November 2014	Tenant Participation Officer (TPO)
Use tenant 'Website and publicity focus group' to discuss improvements to the website	Within existing resources	March 2014	PHO (Info) and TPO
Provide timely information and statistics to the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and Tenants and Leaseholders Federation	Within existing resources	As required	PHO (Info)
<b>Equality and diversity</b>			
Conduct a tenant 'census' and publish a report on the profile of council tenants to inform service provision	Within existing resources	March 2014	PHO (Inf)
Produce an annual equality information report detailing work carried out by Housing that assists in meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010	Within existing resources	June 2014	PHO (Inf)

<b>Tenant satisfaction</b>			
Conduct a bi-ennial tenant satisfaction survey using Housemark STAR methodology	Within existing resources	July 2014	Director of Housing
Seek comments on satisfaction with the Council's newsletter and website.	Within existing resources	June 2014	Principal Housing Officer (Information)

## 11. Funding the Strategy

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

	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>
<b>Av no. staff to provide service (FTE p/a)</b>	1.9	1.9	1.9

Staff Resource Breakdown – 2013/14	
Post(s)	FTE
Principal Housing Officer (Information)	1.0
Housing Assistant (Info/Strategy)	0.5
Tenant Participation Officer	0.2
Senior Quality and Performance Officer	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.9</b>

## 12. Key Targets and Performance Monitoring

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

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

- a) requests for feedback and comments from the client group;
- b) feedback from the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, Tenant Scrutiny Panel and C.A.R.E. Service Users Forum;
- c) timely submission of returns to the Government;
- d) perception of LAHS submissions by the Government;
- e) feedback from officers;

- f) the results of tenant satisfaction surveys;
- g) feedback from the website.

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

- 13.1 Officers will review this Strategy annually. They will consider the feedback received from the groups listed at 12.2.
- 13.2 The whole strategy will be reviewed by the Housing Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in April 2016 for renewal September 2016. Individual elements may be reviewed earlier if this should prove necessary.

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## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 January 2014**

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

**Subject: Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan  
Quarterly Progress Report**

**Officer contact for further information:**

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

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



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### **Recommendations:**

- (1) That the position with the latest Quarterly Progress Report on the Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan, as at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 be noted; and**
- (2) That no further progress reports be made to the Scrutiny Panel until such time as preparations need to be made for the Government's introduction of Universal Credit and Direct Payments.**

### **Background**

1. As previously reported to the Scrutiny Panel, a Welfare Reform Mitigation Project Team was formed in September 2012, chaired by the Director of Housing and comprising officers from across the Housing Directorate and the Benefits Division, to consider and implement ways that the effects of the Government's Welfare Reforms could be minimised – or at least reduced.
2. The Project Team formulated a Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan, which was adopted by the Cabinet in October 2012. The Action Plan identified around 60 separate actions, with lead officers and target dates provided for each action, under 7 themes.
3. In addition to progress with the Action Plan being monitored at officer level by the Project Team, the Cabinet also asked the Housing Scrutiny Panel to monitor progress with the delivery of the Action Plan at its quarterly meetings, which it has done since January 2013.

### **Progress to date**

4. As reported to the Scrutiny Panel at its last two meetings, and as expected, after a period of intense activity by the Project Team and individual officers, there has been very little further progress with the Action Plan over the last six months. This is because most of the remaining actions relate to issues on which the Government still needs to make decisions, or issues which the Government needs to implement – particularly the proposed introduction of Universal Credit and the direct payment of housing benefit to Council tenants.
5. For this reason, the latest Quarterly Progress Report (as at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014), has again not been attached, since there is little difference from the Progress Report considered by the Scrutiny Panel in June 2013.
6. However, the table below gives the usual summary of the overall progress to date with the delivery of the Mitigation Action Plan, compared with the position reported to the Housing

Scrutiny Panel at its last meeting in October 2013.

<b>Summary of Progress</b>				
<b>Progress</b>	<b>Position reported to Housing Scrutiny Panel – Oct 2013</b>		<b>Current Position</b>	
	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Achieved	38	64 %	41	70 %
Almost Achieved	0	-	0	-
Good progress made	3	5 %	1	2 %
Limited progress made	0	-	0	-
Actions not yet required	11	19 %	10	17 %
Actions no longer required	7	12 %	7	12 %
<b>Totals</b>	<b>59</b>		<b>59</b>	

7. As can be seen:

- A further 3 tasks have been achieved since the last report;
- 70% of all the tasks have been achieved; and
- Only 1 task that is able to be undertaken now, has not yet been achieved

8. The outstanding task relates to a longer-term ambition to work with the Council's Preferred Housing Association Partners to secure and provide private-rented housing as part of the non-affordable housing provision on new developments or through acquisition from the open market.

9. Although the Director of Housing has raised this issue with the Council's Preferred Partners, due to the long lead-in times for such projects, it will be some time until this task will be able to be achieved.

#### **Future reporting arrangements**

10. As explained above, most of the remaining actions relate to issues on which the Government still needs to make decisions or issues which the Government needs to implement – particularly the proposed introduction of Universal Credit and the direct payment of housing benefit to Council tenants. Therefore, there is little more the Council can do in terms of delivering the Action Plan, until the Government implements these proposed elements.

11. Consequently, the Officer Project Team has decided not to meet any more, until such time as the remaining actions can be undertaken. Similarly, it is suggested that no further progress reports be made to the Scrutiny Panel, until such time as preparations need to be made by the Council for the introduction of Universal Credit and Direct Payments, when quarterly reports would resume.