

STANDING PANELS

1. HOUSING STANDING PANEL

Introduction by the Chairman:

"This is my third year as Chairman of the Housing Standing Panel and yet again we have had a busy year, carrying out the important role of scrutinising the Housing Services of Epping Forest District.

As always I would like to thank the members and officers who have put in time and energy to help make this Scrutiny Panel run smoothly. My special thanks to Mrs Molly Carter, the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholder Federation who also attends our meetings as a member of the Panel."

***Councillor Stephen Murray
April 2008***

The Housing Standing Panel consisted of the following members:

Councillor S Murray (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs R Gadsby (Vice Chairman)
Councillors K Angold-Stephens, Mrs P Brooks, K Chana, Mrs H Harding, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs P K Rush and J Wyatt.

The Lead Officer was Alan Hall, Director of Housing Services. The Panel also appreciated the Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor D Stallan, attending the meetings to help them with their deliberations.

Mrs Molly Carter, the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholder Federation, who attends the meetings as a non-voting co-opted member to provide the views of residents and stakeholders, assisted the Panel.

Terms of Reference

The Housing Standing Panel is tasked to undertake reviews of a number of the Council's public and private sector housing policies and to make recommendations arising from such reviews to the Housing Portfolio Holder or cabinet as appropriate. They also undertake specific projects related to public and private sector housing issues, as directed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Panel scrutinised a number of important issues over the last year, which included:

- i) The Choice Based Letting Scheme – the Panel were kept abreast of the latest developments in this scheme during the year.
- ii) The Panel received a presentation on the implementation and action plans of private sector housing and empty property strategies.

iii) The Panel reviewed the Housing Service Strategy on Rent Arrears. The Panel considered this strategy on the Council's approach to the recovery of rent arrears. The control of rent arrears is considered by the Housing Services as one of the key elements of its performance. This strategy sets out how this element of the service is delivered. The Panel asked that the proposed three day notification period be reconsidered and extended appropriately; with this comment the Panel endorsed the strategy.

iv) The Panel considered and endorsed the Housing Service Strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour. This set out the Council's approach to the policies and procedures in relation to anti-social behaviour on housing estates. The strategy sets out how this element of the service is delivered by Housing Services and includes links with other services both internally and externally by Housing Services and includes links with other services both internally and externally.

v) Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency – the Panel considered and endorsed the strategy on energy efficiency. They noted that the government is committed to energy efficiency in housing and so is the Council and that Council homes must meet the thermal comfort and heating criteria in the Decent Homes Standards by 2010. Currently the Council is focusing on the following improvements: low energy lights; increase in loft insulation; cavity wall insulation; boilers changed to Grade 'A' rated ones and to install double glazing for all windows.

vi) Housing Strategies on Tenant Participation and Housing Information – the Panel reviewed and agreed these strategies. These replaced the existing strategies and would take the Council to 2010.

vii) The Panel reviewed and agreed the Housing Service Standards for 2007/08 – this brought together for the first time all the Housing Service Standards relating to the service it provides to its customers (tenants, leaseholders and housing applicants).

viii) Review of the Allocations Scheme – the Panel noted that the Council is legally required to have an allocations scheme, setting out the procedures for allocating its housing accommodation and making nominations to Registered Social Landlords. The Panel endorsed the scheme but requested that the scheme be expanded to enable it to be offered to anyone who wished to downsize to any size property, providing the downsized property is in accordance with their needs.