



Better homes, stronger services

Asset Management Strategy

2024 - 2028



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Delivering our strategy



Introducing our strategy

Our Asset Management Strategy sets out seven main interrelated priorities and sets of actions for the effective management of the Council's housing assets. The document provides an over-arching framework for how we will carry out all aspects of our work, from day-to-day repairs, to works required to keep our homes safe, to planned programmes of component replacement, through to estate management and regeneration.

In developing the strategy we have sought out, listened to, and acted on customers' views. People's priorities are that they want their homes to be kept in good repair, wind and watertight, to be safe and have up-to-date facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms. We now need to build on this consultation and engagement to grow and increase the contribution of residents across all our activities.

Our arrangements with Qualis Group - a wholly owned multidisciplinary company of the Council - are fundamental to us being able to deliver the range of well designed, expertly informed, high-quality services our residents need and that we want to provide. To be succeed, we will be reconfiguring the services we receive so they are based on a set of shared business objectives that optimise value for money for the Housing Revenue Account, whilst also delivering a sustainable operating model for Qualis.

To build a **better and stronger** approach to asset management, we need to have reference to a set of drivers for change for social housing providers:

- Building safety & compliance – addressing new rules through new roles and new relationships and meeting the requirements of enhanced levels of regulation.
- Zero carbon 2050 – putting in place retrofit programmes that incorporate energy efficiency and renewable technology, supported by new skills & supply chains.

- Increased focus on existing stock quality & desirability – tackling damp & mould, other hazards, disrepair & meeting a set of fit for the future standards.
- Customer excellence – developing a culture of openness and respect, reflecting the tenant 'voice' with genuine involvement and input and effective management of complaints and redress.
- New homes delivery – supporting the delivery of additional homes for affordable/social rent through our asset management work.
- Placemaking – taking a broader view of home & neighbourhood to deliver better opportunity and address physical & mental health (green spaces, walkability, crime & ASB)
- Asset performance - understanding stock condition, using data-driven active asset management practices to evolve the housing portfolio.

Our approach to asset management

'Asset Management' is the term used to describe the range of activities we need in place to make best use of resources to maintain & improve our asset portfolio, support our corporate ambitions & reflect residents' future needs & aspirations.

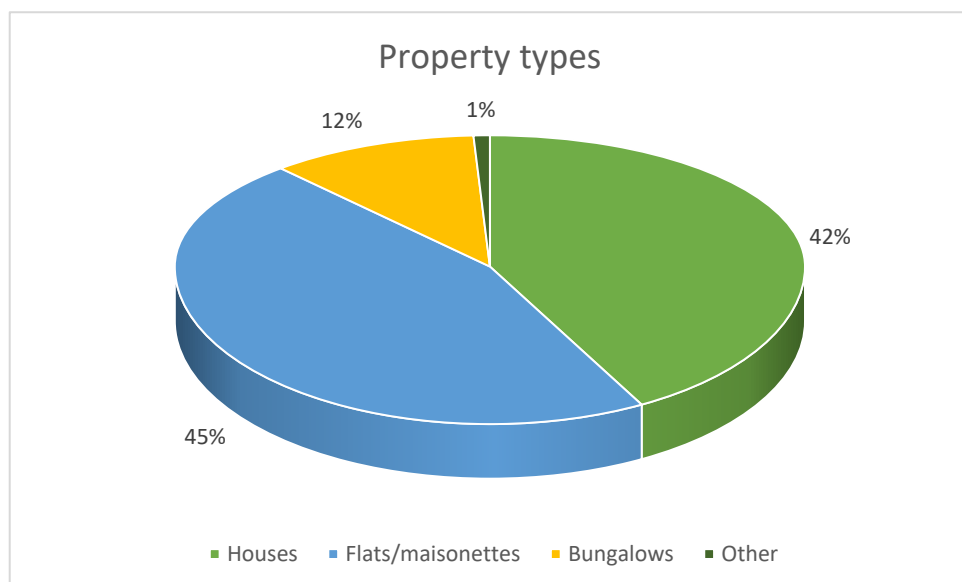
Whilst asset management includes repairs and maintenance, it is about much more than this. It includes updating, improving, and investing in properties and estates so they provide good quality homes in places people want to live.

Our Asset Management Strategy therefore includes a wide range of work and activities including maintaining safe and healthy homes that are in good repair, carrying out energy efficiency works, and modernising and regenerating our properties and estates, all with a focus on the needs of residents.

Key facts about our homes

Our housing portfolio contains around 6,380 social rented homes and we also manage leasehold homes. All homes are within the Epping Forest District Council boundary, and we are the largest landlord in our area.

42% of our homes are houses, 45% are flats or maisonettes, and 12% are bungalows.



We spend around £4.75m each year carrying out day to day responsive repairs and minor works and around a further £2.2m carrying out servicing and checks of heating, electrical, fire safety systems, lifts and other installations.

Every year, we relet around 390 of our properties, equating to a turnover of tenancies of around 6%. We spend around £2.8m a year on revenue works in preparing properties for reletting. This equates to around £7,350 per home.

We have an active development programme that is designed to provide more additional homes. Ideally, this will more than replace the number of homes we lose through Right to Buy so the overall number of homes should increase over time.

The challenges we face

1. Designing a whole organisation approach where Qualis and the Council work together to meet shared objectives

- Developing a shared vision and delivery plan with the Council that maximises the role, benefits, and potential of Qualis as our principal contractor.
- Maximising partnership working within and across all teams to ensure everyone works collaboratively to a set of shared goals.

2. Providing safe homes that meet regulatory requirements

- Meeting the wide range of new and pre-existing legislation, regulation, and practice to ensure residents are safe in their homes, including meeting the current and future Decent Homes Standard.

3. Repairs and investment

- Carrying out repairs more quickly and at lower cost, improving levels of satisfaction with the repairs service, so we meet the needs and expectations of our customers.
- Having better planned and managed, better value programmes of investment work, stretching resources to maximise impact.

4. Improving the quality and suitability of the homes and services we provide

- Maximising the benefits of works on empty properties and improving void standards, reducing expenditure levels so we let homes at a standard that supports sustainable tenancies at a cost we can afford.
- Modernising homes and services, so they better meet the current and future needs and aspirations of residents, including carrying out disabled adaptations.

5. Improving the quality and success of the places and neighbourhoods we manage

- Delivering joined up estate management services so people can live in well managed places about which they feel proud to call home.

- Putting in place effective partnership working with organisations and agencies where together we can secure greater combined outcomes.

6. Effective use of data

- Gathering and optimising the use of the best information and data through property surveys, inspections, and routine activities to develop a 'golden thread' to make properly informed decisions about how, when and where we spend money investing in homes.

7. Energy efficiency

- Fully understanding the range and cost of carrying out works to bring our homes up to Energy Performance Band (EPC) C by 2030.
- Upscaling plans and works programmes for retrofitting homes to raise levels of thermal insulation and to use renewable energy.

8. Dynamic portfolio management

- Understand property performance, effectively using the outputs of ARK ASAP - ensuring a proactive approach to the regeneration and disposal of properties so over time the stock of properties evolves to best meet the needs of residents and the Council.
- Regenerating properties and estates to unlock their potential, including an approach to the future of garage sites and re-acquiring right to buy homes and facilitating the development of new homes.

9. Improving the Customer Experience

- Meeting the needs and expectations of residents for excellent standards of modern service delivery when repairs and investment work is carried out.
- Improving how residents are involved and engaged so views help shape and inform all asset management works and services.

10. Effectively resourcing our work

- Ensuring the optimum team structure with clear roles and responsibilities and the right skills, capabilities, and capacity to deliver all repairs, maintenance, and investment works.
- Having in place or accessing sufficient financial resources to fund all asset management activities.

Our asset management strategy priorities

Our Asset Management Strategy is built around seven priorities. These have been designed to directly address the key challenges we face whilst also addressing the range of wider drivers for change for social housing providers.

By addressing these priorities, it will ensure we meet existing and emerging legislation around providing safe homes, take a solid approach to asset management over the next six years, as well as providing a strong foundation for the years beyond. Our Strategy will help us sustain a portfolio of homes that is **stronger and better**, homes that are *'safe, fit for purpose and fit for the future'*.

The detail within each priority has been designed to ensure we have the right blend of approaches and actions in place, so we target our financial resources and energies where they are most needed and to best effect.

We recognise how our seven priorities are all inter-linked and cannot be seen in isolation. For example, delivering better repair and maintenance programmes should also help drive the delivery of an improved customer experience. Likewise, delivering the best approach to planned investment relies on having an intelligent, data-led approach to asset management, whilst also raising the quality of our homes, places, and neighbourhoods.

Through the delivery of our seven priorities, we will strengthen the role and purpose of the Council in providing much needed, good quality affordable housing in our area, in places that people want to live and support successful lives. We will also ensure we meet the asset-related elements of the five new Consumer Regulatory Standards.

Our asset management strategy priorities

1. Stronger voices.
2. Better data and decision-making.
3. Better repair and maintenance.
4. Better homes.
5. Better places.
6. Better value for money.
7. Stronger teams, partnerships, and resources.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 received Royal Assent on 20 July 2023. This Act carries through many of the themes identified in Government's 2020 White Paper - The Charter for Social Housing Residents. This will see a strengthening of the Regulator of Social Housing's powers to enforce standards on all housing providers. This will involve a new proactive consumer regulatory regime including powers to inspect. There will be five new Consumer Standards and a Code of Practice.

1. Stronger voices

Listening, then acting on what our residents say

We will listen to our communities and work with them when making decisions, developing policies, and designing services. We will coordinate our consultation and engagement to ensure residents' views shape the services we provide.

It is important that we:

- Communicate effectively with residents about works and plans for their home, listening to what residents tell us about their needs and priorities and acting on what they say.
- Use the Resident and Involvement Strategy to engage with residents on decisions around the design and delivery of our repair service, maintenance and improvement works.
- Have suitable approaches in place to perform well against the 22 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) within the new Regulatory Consumer Standards.
- Develop and enhance our repair and investment activities by inviting and incorporating inputs from key stakeholders, including Qualis, elected members, and other key partners.

In developing the Asset Management Strategy, we have sought the views and opinions of residents on their priorities for repair and investment over the next five years. The message is clear, that we need to focus on the basics of getting repairs done, keeping people safe in their home, the importance of key facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms, improving the energy efficiency of homes so they are more comfortable and less expensive to run, and improving external areas. We now need to act on people's priorities and deliver against them.



Our actions for delivering stronger voices in asset management:

1. Build on the work carried out with residents to help shape and inform the Asset Management Strategy, developing and refining our understanding of customers' needs and expectations for repairing, maintaining, and improving their home.
2. Take an active role in working with the resident engagement team to devise and coordinate our consultation and engagement to ensure residents' views shape the services we provide, including working with the Tenant & Leaseholders Panel, Community Champions and block and court ambassadors.
3. Measure and monitor performance and progress against the 22 TSMs, with a target of securing upper quartile performance.
4. Use the Asset Management Strategy to put in place improved structures and arrangements for Qualis, elected members and key partners to help inform and influence our repair service and investment planning work.

2. Better data and decision-making

Improving the quality and use of data

We will continue to improve the quality of our data & use data to produce 'business intelligence' to inform how we design and deliver services. We will use our systems and data to capture and share learning across the Council to drive continuous improvement in what & how we do things.

It is important that we:

- Improve how we go about collecting and using data from our day-to-day operational activities to inform our performance management information and asset investment planning.
- Develop our knowledge and understanding on the condition of properties, including reference to the scope and cost of meeting future requirements and standards.
- Develop and embed a governance culture where data-led intelligence helps shape and inform both our day-to-day and longer-term decisions, ensuring data integrity and visibility in areas of activity.

Our actions for delivering better data and decision making:

1. Ensure we have suitable systems and processes in place for recording and analysing data and on our performance in carrying out day-to-day repairs and on void works/expenditure, so we can inform decisions on service improvements and asset planning.
2. Build on our Scorecard and Dashboard to implement our new Compliance 365 system for recording, monitoring, and reporting on our performance in meeting our statutory compliance work.
3. Continue to build up a full picture of our stock condition survey data through the carrying out of further surveys in 2024.
4. Work with our specialist consultants to develop and put in place a Strategic Asset Performance Tool (ASAP) to allow us to make informed decisions on future investment through robust option appraisals.
5. Use the analysis and reporting on energy performance and prospects from Parity Projects to help inform our strategic decisions around energy efficiency and wider retrofit works.
6. Establish a multi-disciplinary Strategic Asset Management Group who can support the delivery of the Asset Management Strategy, with membership drawn from across the Council, including elected members.

3. Better repair and maintenance

Repairs as a critical component of asset management

The delivery of well designed, reliable, customer focussed services must underpin all our asset management work.

It is important that we:

- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the repair service with an emphasis on meeting the needs and expectations of residents.
- Keep homes safe and free from significant hazards by ensuring we meet all statutory obligations and regulatory requirements.
- Let properties at a suitable standard to help sustain successful tenancies, containing costs to around the benchmark median.
- Have suitable processes and funding in place for carrying out adaptations in homes to meet people's needs.
- Have in place well designed programmes of planned investment that optimise the life and durability of building components.

Our actions for delivering better repair and maintenance:

1. Put in place a new Repairs & Maintenance Policy covering all key aspects of the repairs and maintenance service, including day to day works, statutory compliance areas, and undertaking disabled adaptations.
2. Develop a suite of standard specifications for works that optimises quality and durability of work outcomes whilst minimising costs.
3. Agree and put in place a revised suite of key performance indicators (KPIs) focused on the outcomes we want to achieve, with a range of secondary indicators also monitored.
4. Have in place robust and regular reporting of landlord compliance performance (target 100%).
5. Embed the new Void Standard, process, and pricing to minimise the time homes are empty, contain the scope and cost of works to that required to meet agreed quality standards and let a sustainable tenancy.
6. Put in place a rolling 1 and 5 year programme of planned component replacement works to provide surety for budget profiling, whilst maintaining flexibility for extending component life where appropriate.
7. Commission planned programmes through for 2024/25 onwards through an appropriate combination of Qualis managed works and independently procured contracts.

4. Better homes

Meeting current standards and future expectations

We must make sure all homes meet all current standards and requirements. In addition, the quality of properties must improve over time to meet and respond to the range of future facing issues and priorities.

It is important that we:

- Ensure all homes meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard, the Regulatory Home Standard, are free from significant hazards, with a clear and transparent approach to tackling damp and mould.
- Improve the energy efficiency of the poorest insulated homes to at least Energy Performance Band C by 2030.
- Work with customers to continually develop our understanding of residents' needs and requirements for homes that are modern and 'fit for the future', with reference to fixtures, fittings, and facilities.

Our actions for delivering better homes:

1. Have in place robust survey records and management information on how our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard and the Home Standard, including clear and transparent processes for proactively remedying non-decency and for dealing effectively with significant hazards, most notably on damp and disrepair issues.
2. Develop and put in place a Retrofit Energy Efficiency Strategy designed to meet our EPC and other related targets, prioritising a combination of 'easy wins' and the worst performing properties so all homes meet EPC C by 2030, with a plan for meeting 'net zero' by 2050.
3. Set up a 'Future Homes' group to consider and devise future-facing property/home standards for the EFDC portfolio, comprising officers, residents, Qualis, other contractors, and elected members.

5. Stronger places

Improving the quality and success of our estates

We know that health and other inequalities are focussed on our estates. We will therefore help drive stronger shared collaboration between Council services and other stakeholders to deliver a range of asset focussed initiatives.

It is important that we:

- Provide estates and neighbourhoods where people feel proud to live and that help support healthy lifestyles and wellbeing, so we meet the regulatory Neighbourhood and Community Standard and people can lead successful lives where they thrive and prosper.
- Regenerate properties and estates that suffer from poorer quality design, property conditions and neighbourhood management issues.
- Use our existing asset based to help support the delivery of new and additional good quality social and affordable rented homes across our area.
- Work effectively with teams from across the Council and with external stakeholders to improve existing spaces and create new places for people to live, play, gain skills and do business.

Our actions for delivering stronger places:

1. Use our place on the Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership with Essex Police, County Council, Fire and Rescue, and community groups, to deal with emerging local threats and issues.
2. Work actively with colleagues in the development team and external partners to provide new affordable homes by increasing density within sustainable developments, served by transport, leisure, health, and other infrastructure to meet our residents' needs.
3. Put in place agreed neighbourhood standards, including well-specified and managed grounds maintenance arrangements, incorporating landscaping and environmental improvement works where we can, to help protect and enhance our green spaces for future generations while providing decent, safe homes to meet all our needs.

6. Better value for money

Optimising the impact our of expenditure

To maximise the contribution and impact of our work it is crucial we extract as much value as we can from all our expenditure.

It is important that we:

- Use our scarce resources well to help reduce costs and make our expenditure go further.
- Make the best use possible of data and insight about the performance of our properties and services to help identify and drive the optimum outcomes for the money we spend.
- Leverage in as much external funding as we can to help support delivery of our retrofit and energy efficiency works programmes.

Benchmarking is important in demonstrating that our services represent good value for money. Our most recent benchmarking data shows that in many areas, services are not performing sufficiently well with some high 'outlier' benchmark costs that we need to understand further and reduce.

How we work with Qualis and other contractor partners will be important in delivering value for money services. We will work in partnership with them to procure effective delivery arrangements and to continuously improve performance through best practice contract management – based on a 'right first time' approach.

Our actions for delivering better value for money:

1. Restructure the Service Level Agreement between the Council and Qualis so it is designed to deliver top quartile performance across all work streams at costs that are no higher than the benchmark average.
2. Put in place an option appraisal process for 'high cost' and 'high value' voids to evaluate the relative merits of ongoing investment versus market sale with recycling of the capital receipt.
3. Act on the outputs from our Strategic Asset Performance Tool by actively bring forward poorly performing or unsustainable properties for option appraisal.
4. Ensure we have plans and programmes drawn up and in place for our retrofit energy efficiency works so we are 'funding and finance ready' for securing external resources to supplement our own monies, supported by having long term delivery partners in place.
5. Develop and put in place an HRA Procurement Strategy that looks holistically at obtaining best value, leveraging efficiencies to secure the optimum blend of price/quality, supported by effective contract management.

7. Stronger teams, partnerships, and resources

Working better together to pool our resources

The quality of our people, the organisations we work with, and our access to finance and funding must all be channelled into tackling the challenges we face and seizing the opportunities for maximising the impact of our work.

It is important that we:

- Are a strong, efficient, and effective organisation with a culture that supports continuous learning and development and where our leaders motivate and support staff to be accountable for their decisions.
- Are a partner and employer of choice, where we can attract, retain, and develop people with the skills and knowledge we need for the future, working as One Council to deliver better shared outcomes.
- Maximise the potential and opportunities of Qualis as our principal contractor partner through the delivery of shared business objectives, supported by a range of complementary and supplementary contractor arrangements.
- Ensure our Asset Management Strategy supports - and is supported by - a strong Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan so we have the funding and capacity to deliver our objectives and priorities.

We will strive to be a 'strategic client', meaning that we are forward thinking and proactive in fulfilling our commissioning role and responsibilities for all our repair and investment work.

Our actions for delivering stronger teams, partnerships, and resources:

1. Put in place a new team, appropriately sized structure for the Council's Assets Team that maximises the contribution and value of individuals to meeting the wide range of shared objectives involved in delivering our repairs, maintenance, and asset management service.
2. Develop the role of the Council as a strategic client to Qualis and our pool of other contractors, with a new style of partnership working designed to support mature relationships where we provide mutual support, share successes, manage risks & learn from problems.
3. Ensure effective communication and co-ordination and sharing of knowledge between teams and with our key partners so there are no 'blurred areas' of responsibility.

