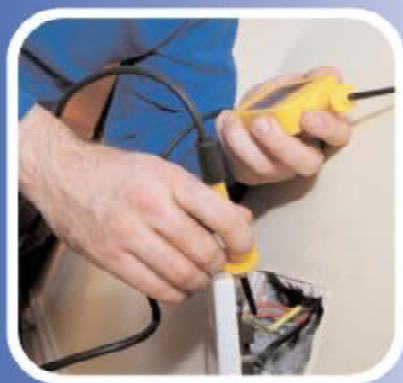


Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2010 - 2011



Director of Housing
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Epping Forest
District Council

March 2010

Copies of this Business Plan are available in Large print.

Please ring 01992 564292 for a large print copy.

Contents

Page

Plain English Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 "Fit for Purpose" Standard
- 1.3 Links with the Council's Housing Strategy
- 1.4 Purpose of the Business Plan
- 1.5 Development of the Business Plan in 2010
- 1.6 HRA Commercial Properties
- 1.7 Management Structure – Policy and Priority Setting
- 1.8 Comments of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation

2. Strategic Context and Linkage to Other Plans

- 2.1 The Epping Forest District
- 2.2 Housing Service Planning Matrix
- 2.3 Capital Strategy 2009/13 - Housing as a Corporate Priority for Investment

3. Business Plan Objectives

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Medium Term Aims
- 3.2 Hierarchy of Objectives
- 3.3 Corporate Housing Objectives
- 3.4 Specific Housing Objectives
- 3.5 Summary of Key Activities and Achievements in 2009/10
- 3.6 Key Housing Priorities and Action Plan to Meet the Objectives

4. Business Plan Analysis

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Information Sources
- 4.3 The Council's Housing Stock
- 4.4 Stock Valuation
- 4.5 Overview of the Management of the Council's Housing Stock
- 4.6 Delivery of Housing Services
- 4.7 Partnership Working
- 4.8 Tenant and Leaseholder Participation and Consultation
- 4.9 Supporting People
- 4.10 Fees and Charges
- 4.11 Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements
- 4.12 Right to Buy and Rent to Mortgage Sales
- 4.13 The District's Housing Needs Relevant to the HRA Business Plan
- 4.14 Staff Training and Development
- 4.15 The External Environment

5. Provision of Quality Housing Services

- 5.1 Charter Mark – Housing Directorate
- 5.2 ISO 9001:2000 Quality Accreditation – Housing Directorate
- 5.3 Tenant Satisfaction
- 5.4 Customer Perspective Programme
- 5.5 Investors in People
- 5.6 Project Management
- 5.7 Performance Indicator Targets – 2010/11

6. Value for Money

- 6.1 Corporate Approach to Value for Money and Use of Resources
- 6.2 Corporate Value for Money Strategy and Value for Money Review
- 6.3 Performance Management
- 6.4 Value for Money Analysis – Corporate
- 6.5 Benchmarking Housing Performance and Costs
- 6.6 Housing Value for Money Strategy and Achieving Efficiencies

7. Diversity and Equality in the Provision of Housing Services

- 7.1 Corporate Approach to Diversity and Equality
- 7.2 The Council's Approach to the Equality Framework for Local Government
- 7.3 External Assessment and Peer Challenge Against the Equality Framework
- 7.4 The Housing Directorate's Approach to Diversity and Equality
- 7.5 Diversity Profile of the Council's Tenants
- 7.6 Ethnicity Profile of the Council's Housing Applicants and Applicants Accommodated

8. Rents Strategy

- 8.1 Background
- 8.2 Valuation
- 8.3 Implementation
- 8.4 Strategic Approach
- 8.5 Service Charges
- 8.6 Support Charges

9. Housing Stock Options Appraisals

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Housing Stock Options Appraisal 2002/4
- 9.3 Findings and Conclusions of the Initial Stock Options Report (Stages 1 and 2)
- 9.4 Summary of the Findings of the Further Tenant Consultation by Insights
- 9.5 Update Report by BWNL
- 9.6 Council decision on the Preferred Option
- 9.7 Small Scale Voluntary Transfers

10. Risk Management

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Corporate Risk Register
- 10.3 Housing Risk Register
- 10.4 Key Housing Operational Risks and Housing Risk Matrix
- 10.5 Housing Business Continuity Plan
- 10.6 Housing Emergency Plan

11. Financial Plan

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 The CLG's Reform of Housing Finance
- 11.3 The 30-Year Financial Plan – Whole of the HRA
- 11.4 Underlying Assumptions
- 11.5 Sensitivities

12. Reviewing the Business Plan

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Financial Monitoring
- 12.3 Monitoring the Business Plan's Action Plan
- 12.4 The HRA Business Plan Review Process

13. Action Plan

Plain English Summary

1. Introduction

This is a Plain English Summary of the tenth Housing Revenue Account Business Plan that we have produced. It is provided, as a “stand-alone” document to all the Council’s Housing staff, on an annual basis. This is to ensure that they are aware of the main points of the Business Plan, how well the Council’s Housing Service is performing and what our main objectives and priorities are for the coming year. It is also useful for our tenants to read, for the same reason.

In very simple terms, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is the “bank account” that we keep to record income and expenditure on our Council homes. It is different from the “bank account” that we keep to record our income and expenditure on other Council services, which is called the General Fund. There are strict rules that say councils cannot pass money between the two accounts.

The main Business Plan provides a helpful “Glossary of Terms” as an appendix, which explains all of the technical words that we refer to. Another appendix gives a “Key Contact List”, to enable readers to speak to someone to get more information about specific issues referred to in the Business Plan.

In the Business Plan, we:

- cover all of the important issues relating to the way we manage and maintain the Council’s homes;
- set out our aims and objectives for the housing service that we provide, and explain our priorities;
- explain the current position and our performance as landlord in previous years;
- estimate the money that we need over the next 30 years to manage our tenants’ homes and ensure that they are properly maintained; and
- compare how much money we need with the amount that will probably be available.

The Government requires all councils to produce HRA Business Plans – but we find it very useful to have a Business Plan anyway, because we think it’s important to plan for the future.

We have talked to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation about the Business Plan, who have confirmed their support for the objectives and proposals

2. Who makes the decisions ?

We have a “Cabinet” of senior elected councillors who make most of the Council’s important decisions. They are guided by the “Housing Portfolio Holder”, who is a member of the Cabinet with special responsibility for housing matters. He/she makes most of the decisions on housing.

Council officers are professional people who advise councillors on housing matters, carry out their decisions, and manage the Council on their behalf. The most senior officer is the Chief Executive. The Director of Housing is responsible for managing and maintaining the Council’s homes. The Director of Finance/ICT is responsible for managing the Council’s finances.

3. Our housing objectives

We have five main objectives for housing. Each one has a number of more detailed objectives, that are explained in the main Business Plan. The main ones can be summarised as follows:

- Manage our homes efficiently and effectively;
- Provide a high quality housing service, having due regard to the cost of providing the service.
- Ensure that all our tenants live in a decent home, and that we properly maintain our homes;
- Help tenants and leaseholders get involved with decisions about their housing. Provide them with clear information, and consult them on things that affect them;
- Manage the Council’s money effectively and efficiently.

4. About the Council's housing

In April 2009, we owned around 6,515 homes, excluding our Homeless Persons Hostel and some other homes not counted. Some interesting information about these is given below:

- Around 2,175 are in Loughton, and about 1,600 are in Waltham Abbey. Around 490 Council homes are in "sheltered housing", receiving a support service and having an alarm system;
- Around 6,150 Council homes have been sold since 1977, most under the Right to Buy. We have around 930 flats and maisonettes that have been leased, again, mainly under the Right to Buy. We still have certain responsibilities for these homes, including certain repairs and housing services, which the leaseholders pay for; and
- In April 2009, we had 75 empty homes, 10% less than the previous year
- The value of the Council's housing stock in April 2008 was £633 million

In November 2007, we completely changed how we allocate Council homes, by giving housing applicants much more choice about which home is let to them, using an approach called "choice based lettings". We work with our five neighbouring councils and the housing associations that work in our area to operate the scheme jointly. This reduces the costs of the scheme.

We have a computer system that covers all of the main housing services. This gives a lot of information to housing managers, to help them monitor how our housing services are being provided and see where there are problems that need to be dealt with. Many housing services can now be obtained from our housing website, including reporting repairs and paying rent. In 2010/11, we will be introducing an electronic records and document management system in our Housing Directorate. This will mean that all of our housing files will be computerised, so that our staff can easily look at files, and receive and respond to post, electronically from their desks.

5. Our Achievements Last Year

In 2009/10, our key housing achievements as a landlord were:

- We made very good progress with our Repairs Refresh Programme. This is our project to improve our Housing Repairs Service. We expect to achieve all 4 of our key targets for response repairs by the end of 2009/10
- We restructured our Housing Repairs Service to provide a more streamlined and efficient approach, putting the tenant at the heart of the our service
- We achieved our objective of having **no** non-decent homes by the end of March 2010. This was earlier than when the Government expects all councils to have no non-decent homes
- We completed a major £4m improvement scheme at Springfields, Waltham Abbey
- We introduced a number of new "Tenant Talkback Panels". These are to find out what tenants think about different housing services

6. Involving tenants and leaseholders

We have worked hard to enable tenants to become involved with decisions about their housing, and things that affect them, if they want to. We have a Tenant Participation Officer, who has set up a number of tenants associations around the District – there are currently 5 recognised tenants associations, but more are being developed. We have written "Tenant Participation Agreements" with these tenants associations, that explain the help we will give them. It also explains how we will consult the tenants in their areas about housing issues that affect them.

We have also set up a Leaseholders Association that represents all of the Council's leaseholders, a Sheltered Housing Forum comprising representatives from the Council's sheltered housing schemes, and a Rural Tenants Forum to represent the views of tenants in the villages of the District. They all meet regularly with Council officers.

A district-wide Tenants and Leaseholders Federation has been formed, that has a committee to which two representatives from each of the tenants associations, the Leaseholders Association, the Sheltered Housing Forum and the Rural Tenants Forum are invited. The Federation meets every six weeks with the Housing Portfolio Holder and senior housing officers. The Federation is asked their views on possible changes to housing policies and procedures, and tells us what they think about the housing service. We also have a Tenant Participation Agreement with the Federation.

7. Ensuring all tenants live in a “decent home”

Probably the most important part of the HRA Business Plan, is the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan. This is one of the appendices and includes a detailed section that explains how we will ensure that all our tenants continue to live in a “decent home”.

The Government has set a “Decent Home Standard”. They say that tenants’ homes are decent if they:

- meet the *legal* standard of condition; **and**
- are in reasonable condition. This means that it must not have:
 - Ø any important parts of the building in an old or poor condition
 - or*
 - Ø two or more other parts of the building that are old and need to be replaced or repaired; **and**
- have reasonably modern facilities. This means that the home must not lack more than two things you would expect to see in a modern home (e.g. modern kitchens and bathrooms); **and**
- keep people warm enough. This means it must have effective insulation and heating.

The Government has set all councils and housing associations a target. They was to make sure that all of our homes are decent by December 2010. We achieved this target 9 months early, in April 2010.

We will plan and ensure that we never have any non-decent homes. We will do this by improving and repairing properties before they become non-decent.

8. Supporting People

In April 2003, the Government introduced a new “supporting people” budget. This brought together all the money that was previously spent by councils, housing associations and others on “supported housing” into one “pot” covering the whole county. Supported housing is where the tenants need help - for example, sheltered housing for the elderly or housing for physically disabled people.

Previously, most of the costs of this help was included within individual tenants’ rents. However, from April 2003, tenants living in supported housing have had to pay a separate charge for this help. Tenants receiving housing benefit do not have to pay anything, and there are safeguards to make sure that tenants in supported housing before March 2003 do not pay any more for the help they get than they did previously.

We provide our own Careline Service to all of our sheltered housing schemes, and to 2,384 older people living in non-sheltered housing. Many of these are not Council tenants, and own their own homes. Careline provides a 24-hour speech alarm monitoring service to deal with any emergencies. We also provide a “Telecare” Service. This uses technology to monitor older people in a number of ways. For example, it can detect if an older person has not moved in their home for a long time, or if they have fallen over.

9. Working with other organisations

We work with many other organisations to properly manage and maintain our homes and provide housing services to our tenants. These include the Essex Social Care, Essex Police, health organisations and the citizens advice bureau in the District.

10. People needing housing

In early 2010, we completed a new “Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)”, which helps us assess how many new homes are required in the District, including affordable homes

The SHMA found that:

- The population of our District rose by 8.5% between 2001 and 2006
- Around 7,100 households in Epping Forest are considered to be unsuitably housed
- There are around 1,300 households in housing need in Epping Forest
- There will be a projected shortfall of 5,700 affordable homes in Epping Forest between 2007 and 2021

There are around 450 new affordable homes currently with outline or detailed planning permission. Over 200 of these new homes are currently being built. A further 255 new affordable homes are currently being considered by developers, although it is unlikely that all of these will receive planning permission.

There were around 4,600 applicants on the Council's Housing Register in March 2009. This was an increase of around 630 households over the previous year.

Last year (2008/9), we let around 530 Council properties to housing applicants. This was less than the previous year. A further 60 applicants were housed by housing associations. This was also less than the previous year.

11. Providing a Quality Housing Service

We do a number of things to make sure that we provide a high quality housing service. This has been recognised in a number of ways:

- The whole of our Housing Service (apart from our Private Sector Housing Service) has been awarded the important Charter Mark Award. This is a national award that confirms that we provide an excellent service to our customers. It is judged by an independent assessor.
- The whole of our Housing Service has been awarded the ISO 9001:2000 "quality assurance accreditation". This confirms that we provide a consistently high quality housing service. This is also judged by an independent assessor
- The whole Council has the Investors in People award. This confirms that our staff know what our plans are, and that we help our staff to improve themselves.

We have 9 "Key Performance Indicators" for monitoring the performance of the Council as a landlord. At the beginning of the year, we set ourselves performance targets to meet. Based on our performance in the first 9 months of the current year, we expect to achieve all the targets, except one.

12. Tenant satisfaction

We carry out a very detailed Tenant Satisfaction Survey every 2 years. We last undertook our Satisfaction Survey in 2008. This is to find out what tenants think about the housing service we provide. It was done by an independent market research company. A good response was received, with over half of all tenants surveyed responding. We found that:

- 84% of tenants are generally satisfied with the overall housing service provided by the Council - this compares with 85% two years earlier (although the latest survey had to exclude sheltered housing tenants, who historically have high levels of satisfaction).
- 86% of tenants are satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service (12% higher than similar councils surveyed). The Council ranked a strong first in its group of similar councils, for all 6 aspects of the repairs and maintenance service measured.
- 12% more of the Council's tenants said that it was easy to get hold of the right person to discuss a housing issue, compared to the group of similar councils.
- 75% of the Council's tenants were satisfied with the final outcome of their contact with the Housing Directorate - 10% higher than the rest of the group of similar councils.
- 62% of tenants were satisfied that their views are being taken into account by the Council as their landlord - an improvement of 14% since 2006 .

The consultants undertaking the survey concluded that overall tenant satisfaction with the landlord service provided by the Council remains high - and significantly above that reported by most other landlords. The high level of tenant satisfaction with Councils' repairs service and the customer service provided by its staff underpins the unusually high level of overall satisfaction amongst the Council's tenants.

13. Providing Value for Money and comparing the Council with other landlords

Earlier this year, the Audit Commission (the Government Agency that, amongst other things, checks the Council's finances) carried out an assessment of the way the Council uses its resources. They told the Council that, overall, it meets minimum requirements and performs adequately in the way that it uses its resources.

"Value for Money" looks at an organisation's performance and costs, compared with similar organisations. In simple terms, high performance and low costs usually suggest that an organisation gives good value for money. Low performance and high costs usually suggest that poor value for money is being given.

We regularly compare our performance and costs with other organisations, in a number of ways. The most useful way is through a "benchmarking" club, called HouseMark.

In February 2010, HouseMark produced a Benchmarking Report on how well we compare with 37 other councils throughout England. These were all councils that still have their own housing stock. This Report told us that, for 4 out of 5 important areas of housing, our costs are amongst the 25% of councils with the lowest costs. It also told us that, for 6 out of 9 important areas of housing, our performance was amongst the 25% of councils with the best performance.

Over the a 4-year period, our Housing Service has saved around £1.15 million by working even more efficiently.

14. Equality and Diversity

We know that we live in a diverse community and want to ensure that we provide services that do not discriminate against groups of people. As well as generally promoting equality in the way we provide our services, the Council has a number of corporate policies relating to race, disability and gender equalities.

We have two particular strategies to ensure diversity and equality in the way we provide the housing service, and to deal with harassment in housing. We have also looked in detail at our policies relating to specific housing services, and produced "Equality Impact Assessments" for each housing service.

Last year, we carried out a survey of all our tenants. Amongst other things, we asked them a number of questions to find out how diverse and different the people who live in our homes are. We asked them questions about their ethnic group, disabilities, gender (sex) and if English is their main language. We now have useful information, which is included in the main HRA Business Plan.

We comply with the Human Rights Commission's Racial Equality Code of Practice in Rented Housing and have an Equal Opportunities Statement in the Provision of Housing Services.

15. Setting tenants' rents

The Government has told all councils that the rents they charge for their homes should be almost the same as the same types of homes owned by housing associations, in the same area by a certain date. However, the Government keeps changing this "target date". They have also said that everyone's rent should be calculated in a similar way. They should mainly be based on:

- the property's value;
- average local wages; and
- the number of bedrooms.

We started calculating rents in this new way from April 2003. At that time, we produced a "target rent" for each property. This could have been higher or lower than the previous rent. The actual rents that tenants pay have been increased, or decreased, up to this target rent since 2003.

16. The future of Council housing

The Government has said that councils must carefully consider the options open to them to select the most appropriate ownership and management of their homes, in order to get the most money to maintain them.

This could include transferring council homes to a housing association (called “large scale voluntary transfer” - LSVT), or it could involve councils setting up their own company to manage and maintain their homes (called an “arms length management organisation”) - some councils that do this can get extra money from the Government. Either of these options would need to be agreed by the majority of tenants. Or, it may be that it is best for the Council to keep its homes.

In 2002, we appointed consultants to look into this for us. This is called a “housing stock options appraisal”. We asked them to do four things:

- Look at the available options;
- Work out how much could be spent on managing and maintaining tenants’ homes for each option;
- Talk to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and our tenants to get their views on the options;
- Send information to all of our tenants and leaseholders about the options, and ask them to fill in a survey form telling us what they think.

The consultants completed their work in 2004. They told us that, bearing in mind tenants’ views, the best option for the Council was to keep the housing stock and not to transfer it to a housing association, or set up an arms length management organisation. The Council’s Cabinet agreed with this view, and decided that the Council should keep its housing stock for the time being. Nothing has changed since that time to suggest that the Council should follow a different course of action.

However, we have transferred two sheltered housing schemes (Robert Daniels Court, Theydon Bois and Wickfields, Chigwell) to a housing association. This is because both schemes were in need of major improvements, and we worked out that the overall cost to the Council would be less if the housing associations carried out the improvements.

17. Risk Management

Risk management is the process of looking at risks to an organisation, and working out what bad things could happen as a result of doing things in a certain way. It also considers how likely these bad things are to occur and, if they do, what the effects would be.

The Council takes risk management very seriously. We have a group of officers that meets regularly to assess and record risks. This record is called the Risk Register. The Housing Directorate has its own Risk Register. We have identified many risks in our Risk Register. This includes 10 **Key** Housing Risks, which are the most serious. For each of these we have considered, firstly, how likely the risk is to happen and, secondly, if it does, the impact that it will have.

We have looked more carefully at those risks that are more likely and/or will have a higher impact. We have drawn up an action plan to reduce these risks as much as possible.

We also have a “Housing Business Continuity Plan” which explains what we would do if something serious happened to the Housing Service. For example, if the Civic Offices or housing offices were badly damaged, or if we lost a lot of staff, perhaps through serious sickness levels.

We also have a Housing Emergency Plan, which explains what we would do in either a routine or major emergency. For example, if lots of people lost their homes and needed somewhere to stay temporarily.

18. The overall financial picture

We have worked out how much we will get from rent and other money over the next 30 years. We have compared this with how much we need to spend on running the housing service over the same period.

This has shown us that, although there may not be enough money available over the whole of the next 30 years, there should be enough money to run the housing service for at least the next 28 years – 8 years later than predicted last year. Since this is a long time for councils, there is nothing for us to worry about at the moment.

19. Action Plan

The Business Plan has an “Action Plan” which explains what we will be doing, and when, over the next year:

- to meet our objectives;
- improve our housing services; and
- to make the changes we have to deal with because of new laws or Government policies.

20. Key housing priorities

Section 3 above says what our housing objectives are. But we can never do everything we want to. So, we have to decide which things are the most important, that will help us the most to meet our housing objectives. These are called our “Key Housing Priorities”.

Our “Key Housing Priorities” for the next year (2010/11) are to:

- Continue to manage and maintain our homes effectively and efficiently
- Respond effectively to the requirements of the Tenant Services Authority’s new “Housing Regulatory Framework”
- Complete our “Repairs Refresh Programme”. This includes appointing a private contractor to manage the way that our Housing Repairs Service is provided
- Carry out a review of our sheltered accommodation for older people
- Start building new Council houses - This needs the Government to change accounting regulations to make it worthwhile
- Further improve our HomeOption Scheme – our “choice based lettings scheme”.
- Try to get the Government’s new Customer Service Standard Award (which replaces the Charter Mark that we have at the moment)

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is the tenth annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan that the Council has produced. It complies with the requirements of the Government's financial framework for the HRA.

This Business Plan has been produced in accordance with both the "Guidance on Business Plans" and the guidance on "Effective Housing Strategies and Plans" issued by the predecessor to the Department for Communities and Local Government in June 2000 and April 2002. The Plan has been developed by a corporate team of officers from Housing and Finance/ICT. The Plan was adopted by the Council's Housing Portfolio Holder after consultation with the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

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

It is a requirement of the Council's Audit and Governance Committee that all of the Council's Business Plans are completed and published by 31 March each year - before the start of the following financial year.

In order to assist readers, a comprehensive Glossary of Terms is provided at Appendix 2. A Key Contact List is given at Appendix 3.

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

1.2 Fit for Purpose Standard

In May 2003, the Council's HRA Business Plan was assessed as being fully "fit for purpose" by the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East). For the HRA Business Plan to be designated as "fit for purpose", it had to meet stringent "fit for purpose" criteria laid down by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG). There were 33 separate criteria against which HRA Business Plans were assessed. Councils had to meet every criterion, in full, to be designated as fit for purpose.

Having an HRA Business Plan that is assessed as fit for purpose also brings a number of other benefits for the Council. For example, it is not necessary for the Council to submit copies of the Business Plan to the Government Office for assessment each year.

1.3 Links with the Council's Housing Strategy

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

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

1.4 Purpose of the Business Plan

The purpose of this Business Plan is to:

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

1.5 Development of the Business Plan in 2010

The Council has consistently developed and updated its Business Plan, since the time the first one was produced in 2001. All the statistics and information within this latest Business Plan referred to as the "last financial year" - and the most up to date information - relates to 2008/9, which is the last year that full year statistics are available.

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

- Updated statistics for 2008/9
- General updated information throughout the Business Plan to ensure that it remains current
- Updated summary of key activities and achievements in 2009/10 (Section 3.5)
- Updated Key Housing Priorities (Section 3.6)
- New Section on Benchmarking Performance and Costs (including Housemark's Summary Benchmarking Report) (Section 6.5)
- Substantially updated Chapter on Diversity and Equality in the provision of Housing Services, including the Diversity Profile of the Council's Tenants and an Ethnicity Profile of the Council's Housing Applicants and Applicants Accommodated (Chapter 7)
- Updated Housing Risk Register (Section 10.4)
- Revised Financial Plan (Chapter 11)
- New Action Plan (Chapter 13)
- An updated Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan (Appendix 1)
- An updated Plain English Summary, incorporating the above changes

It should be noted that the approach taken to the production of the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan has changed this year. Instead of providing detailed information on the overall approach taken repairs and maintenance, the document has been reduced in size and now primarily reports on the previous year, proposals for next year and the Action Plan.

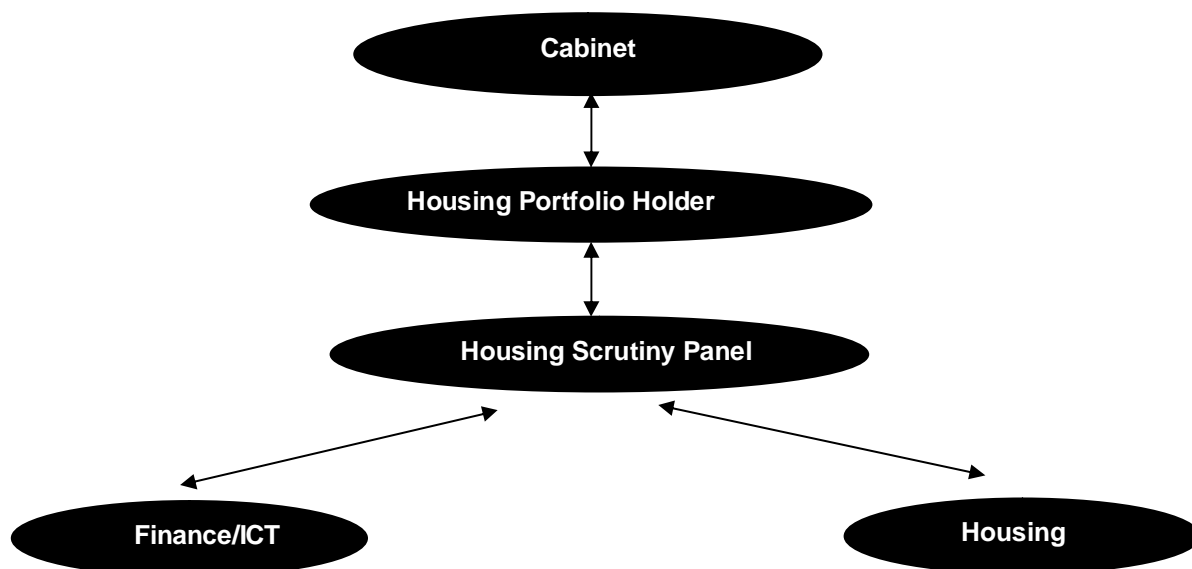
The other information, which rarely changes significantly, will be formulated into a Housing Service Strategy on Repairs and Maintenance, in a similar way to all the other ongoing housing services strategies, during 2010/11.

1.6 HRA Commercial Properties

The Council owns a number of freehold commercial properties that are accounted for within the HRA, since they are held under Housing Act powers. However, since the planning and development proposals for the management and maintenance of these commercial properties are included within the Council's Asset Management Plan, which is produced separately, they have not been included within this HRA Business Plan.

1.7 Management Structure – Policy and Priority Setting

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



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

1.8 Comments of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation

Section 4.8 explains the role of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The Federation has been consulted on this latest version of the Business Plan. Having considered the Business Plan, the Federation said:

[To be inserted - The Federation's comments on last year's HRA Business Plan were -

- Once again, the Business Plan is comprehensive, well thought out, interesting and well written;
- It is clear and easy to read, especially the Plain English Summary, which helps to put the detailed Business Plan in context;
- We agree and support the objectives, the key housing priorities and the action plan;
- We noted that the revised Financial Plan does not identify a deficit on the Housing Revenue Account for 20 years, and accepted that this situation is likely to change based on the variety of financial assumptions, particularly in this current economic climate;
- We are pleased to see that the Council are on target to meet the Decent Homes Standards in the coming year (by April 2010), and recognise from the financial plan that programmes of work are focused on this target;

2. Strategic Context and Linkage to Other Plans

2.1 The Epping Forest District

The Epping Forest District comprises a mix of rural and urban character, covering an area of 131 square miles, with a population of around 120,000. There is no major centre of the District. There are around 12 towns and larger villages, ranging in population size from 2,000 to 30,000. It is an attractive Metropolitan Green Belt area, with good road and rail links to London, so is popular with commuters.

The southern parts of the District border Greater London and are more populous and urbanised, including Loughton, Chigwell, Buckhurst Hill and Waltham Abbey. There was a total of 53,525 dwellings in the District as at April 2009, of which 12% were Council-owned.

The District falls within the East of England and the Secretary of State's East of England Plan (Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) 14) sets out the proposed number of additional homes that should be provided within the Region and the District. The Secretary of State has declared that an additional 3,500 homes should be provided within the District by 2021, together with an unspecified additional number of homes within the District to assist with the planned growth of neighbouring Harlow.

2.2 Housing Service Planning Matrix

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

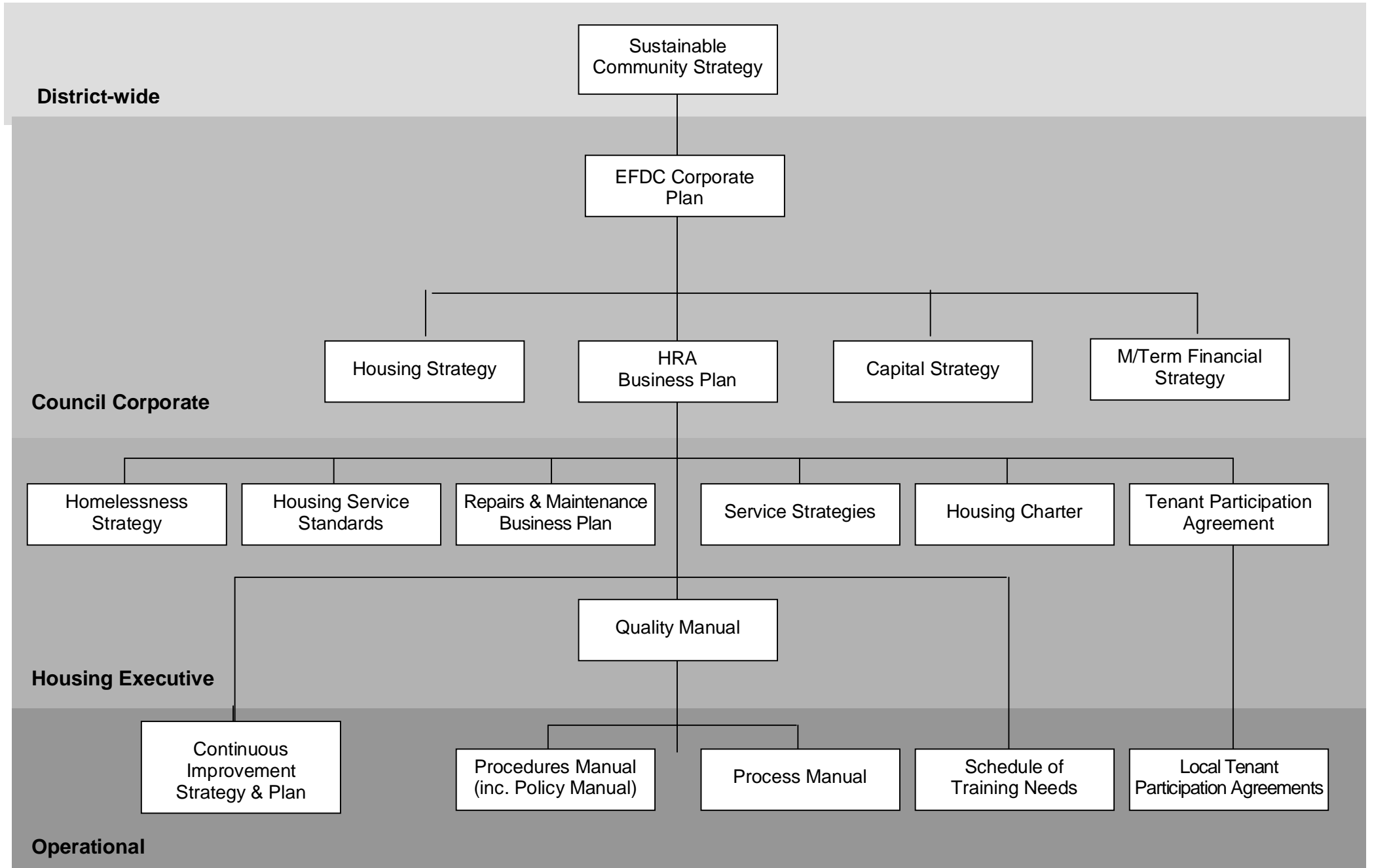
The Housing Planning Matrix reproduced on the next page illustrates, in graphical form, how the Council's housing services are planned and delivered.

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

<i>Sustainable Community Strategy</i>	The long term vision for the District, produced by the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership. The LSP comprises all of the statutory agencies working in the District, including the Council, together with representatives of the voluntary sector. The LSP is currently producing a new Sustainable Community Strategy, which is expected to be adopted around June 2010.
<i>Council / Corporate Plan</i>	The Council's prime strategic document, that sets out the Council's strategic direction for the planning and delivery of all its services over a four-year period. This current Council Plan expires in 2010, and a new Corporate Plan is currently being drafted, which is expected to be adopted around June 2010.
<i>Housing Strategy</i>	See Section 1.3 above.
<i>Capital Strategy</i>	Provides the Council's strategies on how capital projects will be planned, funded, delivered and monitored, together with details of the Council's HRA and General Fund Capital Programmes. The Strategy is updated annually.
<i>Medium Term Financial Strategy</i>	Sets out the approach the Council intends to take in relation to revenue and capital expenditure, income and fees and charges, for both the HRA and the General Fund.
<i>Homelessness Strategy</i>	The Council's statutory strategy, last updated in 2009, which reviews the Council's approach to homelessness, and sets out the Council's plans for dealing with homelessness.
<i>Housing Service Standards</i>	A set of housing standards that clients of the Housing Directorate can expect in relation to the delivery of their housing service.

Housing Directorate

Service Planning Matrix



Housing Service Strategies	A series of separate documents, produced to a common format, that set out how individual housing services and strategies are delivered in detail (eg. rent arrears, tenant participation, empty properties). They provide detailed objectives, policies, targets, performance information and financial/staffing resource availability.
Housing Charter	Sets out the principles by which housing services will be delivered from the clients' point of view and what clients can expect.
Tenant Participation Agreement	An agreement (compact) between the Council (as landlord) and the Epping Forest District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation (on behalf of the Council's tenants and leaseholders), first signed in March 2000 and updated in 2002, 2006 and, most recently, January 2009 for a three year period. It sets out the approach the Council and the Federation will take to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are able to participate in the delivery of their housing services, receive good quality information and are consulted on housing issues. The Council has also entered into six Local Tenant Participation Agreements with individual recognised tenants associations on how tenant participation will be delivered locally (see Section 4.8).

2.3 Capital Strategy 2009/13 - Housing as a Corporate Priority for Investment

The Council's Capital Strategy 2009/12, last updated in September 2009, sets out the Council's eight key strategic priorities for capital investment, in a ranked priority order. Since its introduction, "Improving the Council's housing stock" has been ranked as one of the highest key strategic priorities for investment.

3. Business Plan Objectives

3.1 The Council's Corporate Medium Term Aims

The Council has three medium term aims and priorities, which are set out in the Council Plan 2006-2010. They are:

(1) The District is a safe, healthy and attractive place

- (a) Maintain the special character and advantage of the District, and address local environmental issues
- (b) Address housing need
- (c) Create safe communities
- (d) Encourage sustainable economic development
- (e) Address leisure need

(2) The Council is an organisation that listens and leads, to resolve local issues

- (a) Political leaders give clear direction
- (b) Communicate with the public
- (c) Prioritise objectives and services
- (d) Co-operate and plan with partners

(3) The Council provides affordable improving services

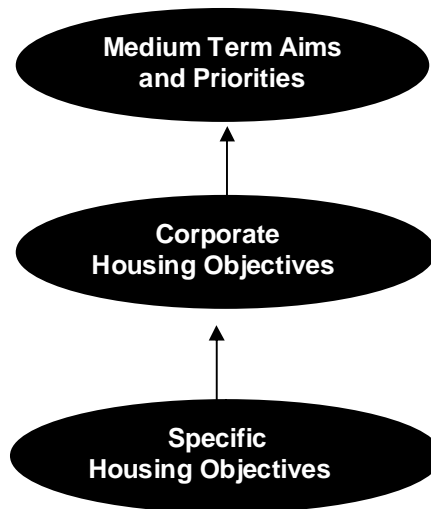
- (a) Identify and target resources: realise capacity and manage performance
- (b) Procure services in the most beneficial and cost effective way
- (c) Develop services, staff and the working environment

These are currently being reviewed for the Council's proposed new Corporate Plan 2010-14.

3.2 Hierarchy of Objectives

In order to make the best use of its housing assets and deliver an effective housing service, in consultation with representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation where appropriate, the Council has set

Business Plan Objectives at various levels within the organisation, from the high level medium term aims and priorities to individual housing objectives. The hierarchy of objectives can be summarised as follows:



3.3 Corporate Housing Objectives

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

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

3.4 Specific Housing Objectives

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

(a) *Value for Money:*

- (a) Provide consistent quality housing services
- (b) Understand the relationship between housing performance and the cost of service provision
- (c) Involve representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in consideration of housing performance and new policy development.

- (d) Seek to continuously reduce costs, whilst maintaining or improving performance

(b) *Housing Management:*

- (a) Provide a decentralised housing management service through two area housing offices based in Epping and Loughton and an Estate Office at Limes Farm, Chigwell.
- (b) Ensure that the Council's housing estates provide an attractive environment for local residents.
- (c) Review the Council's *Housing Allocations Scheme* annually to ensure it continues to be appropriate and gives choice to applicants, following consultation with registered social landlords, local councils and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.
- (d) Keep the number of empty Council properties, the period they are left empty, and the associated rental loss to a minimum.
- (e) Keep underoccupation of the Council's housing stock to a minimum.
- (f) Minimise the extent of breaches of tenancy conditions.
- (g) Take firm action against anti social behaviour, through notification, mediation or legal action as necessary.
- (h) Ensure that current rent arrears do not exceed 2.0% of the annual debit.

(c) *Repairs and Maintenance:*

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

(d) *Tenant Participation:*

- (a) Consult individuals, groups and organisations on important matters relating to the provision of housing services, particularly on issues where clients have an element of choice or where decisions will have a major effect on them.
- (b) Comply with the Council's *Housing Charter* relating to the approach and philosophy towards the provision of housing services.
- (c) Comply with the commitments set out in the *Epping Forest Tenant Participation Agreement*.
- (d) Provide information to tenants that is timely, in plain English, of good quality and tailored to both the general and individual needs of tenants.
- (e) Recognise the special needs of certain tenants and respond positively to those needs.
- (f) Obtain feedback from tenants, in a variety of ways, on the Council's performance in the delivery of housing services.
- (g) Encourage, support and develop tenants associations within the District.
- (h) Keep the Council's tenant participation structure under review.
- (i) Consult tenants on major improvement schemes, housing initiatives and matters of general housing management to ensure full awareness of proposals and to obtain their views.
- (j) Encourage, support, consult and develop the District Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and work in partnership with the Federation to maximise the benefits that can be achieved from tenant participation to improve the delivery of housing services.
- (l) Consult the Federation on the Council's housing services and policies in accordance with the District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement.
- (m) Ensure that appropriate training is made available for tenants.

(f) *Housing Finance:*

- (a) Manage the Council's financial housing resources effectively, efficiently and prudently.
- (b) Maximise the Council's entitlement to Government grants and subsidies.
- (c) Keep under review housing management and maintenance expenditure to ensure that expenditure within the Housing Revenue Account does not exceed income.
- (d) Plan to ensure that the HRA remains in surplus, each year, for a period of at least 20 years.
- (e) Consider the level of fees and charges to be made for housing services on an annual basis.
- (f) Ensure that working balances for the Housing Revenue Account are not forecast to fall below £3m or to exceed £4m at the end of any five-year forecast period.

3.5 Summary of Key Activities and Achievements in 2009/10

The key housing achievements and activities in 2009/10, relating to this Business Plan, can be summarised as follows:

- Very good progress was made with the Repairs Refresh Programme, to improve the Council's Housing Repairs Service, resulting in all 4 key targets for response repairs expected to be achieved by the end of 2009/10
- The Council's Housing Repairs Service was re-structured to provide a more streamlined, customer-focussed and co-ordinated approach
- The Government's, and the Council's objective of having no non-decent homes was achieved
- A major £4m improvement scheme at Springfields, Waltham Abbey was completed
- A number of new Tenant Talkback Panels were introduced

3.6 Key Housing Priorities and Action Plan to Meet the Objectives

The Council's Key Housing Priorities for the next year (2010/11) are set out below.

- Continue to manage and maintain our homes effectively and efficiently
- Respond effectively to the requirements of the Tenant Services Authority's new Housing Regulatory Framework
- Complete the implementation of the Repairs Refresh Programme, including the appointment of a private repairs management contractor to deliver the Housing Repairs Service, through an innovative "in-sourcing" approach
- Undertake a Strategic Review of the Council's Older People's Accommodation
- Commence a new Council House-building Programme (subject to the Government changing accounting regulations to make it viable for the Council)
- Further develop HomeOption, the Council's choice based lettings scheme.
- Respond to the expected Government's offer to leave the Housing Subsidy System, in return for taking on other local authorities housing debt
- Seek the Government's new Customer Service Standard Award (which replaces the Charter Mark)

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

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

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

The Action Plan to meet the Council's objectives is set out in Chapter 13.

4. Business Plan Analysis

4.1 Introduction

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

4.2 Information Sources

In order to formulate this Business Plan, a number of data sources have been studied. Some of the more relevant data has been included within the Business Plan itself; other data has been used for reference. The main sources of information are as follows:

(a) *Internal:*

- Housing Strategy
- Property attributes database
- Stock Condition Survey
- District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement
- Historical HRA data
- EFDC Council Plan
- EFDC Risk Register
- Housing stock information
- Council house sales statistics
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Local Tenant Participation Agreements
- Tenants and Leaseholders Federation
- Housing Service Plans/Strategies

(b) *External:*

- Government Comprehensive Spending Review
- Halifax House Price Index
- CLG Guidance on HRA Accounts
- CLG "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future"
- CLG Guidance on Business Plans
- CLG Guidance on Stock Options Appraisals
- Housing Green Paper
- The Council's Use of Resources Assessment
- Housing & Regeneration Act 2008

4.3 The Council's Housing Stock

The Council owned the following HRA stock as at 31st March 2009, for which the Council's Housing Directorate is responsible for management and maintenance:

- 6,514 residential properties ^(*)
- 932 leasehold properties
- 2,918 garages
- 1 Homeless Persons Hostel comprising 38 rooms and 10 chalets

A number of these properties were transferred to the Council from the former Greater London Council (GLC) in 1980. The housing stock continues to decline due to the effects of the Right to Buy; 6,147 properties have been sold since 1977 (See [Section 4.12](#) below).

An analysis of the Council's housing stock as at April 2009 (excluding the 48 rooms at the Council's Hostel, 6 residential scheme managers' properties and 23 properties "out of charge") is detailed below.

COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK BY TYPE AND YEAR (Excluding Homeless Persons Hostel)					
	April 2009	April 2008	April 2007	April 2006	April 2005
Houses	2,740	2,743	2,755	2,765	2,789
Flats	2,464	2,471	2,476	2,507	2,538
Maisonettes	519	520	525	521	525
Bungalows	791	791	793	789	790
TOTAL	6,514	6,525	6,549	6,582	6,642

COMPARISON OF PRE AND POST WAR COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK BY TYPE (As at 1st April 2009)					
	Pre-1944		Post 1945		TOTAL
	No.	%	No.	%	
Houses	355	5 %	2,385	37 %	2,740
Flats	13	< 1 %	2,451	38 %	2,464
Maisonettes	0	0	519	8 %	519
Bungalows	12	< 1 %	779	12 %	791
TOTAL	380		6,134		6,514

PROPERTY MIX OF COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK BY BEDROOM SIZE (As at 1st April 2009)		
	No.	%
Bedsits	324	5 %
1 Bedroom	2,323	36 %
2 Bedroom	1,814	28 %
3 Bedroom	1,891	29 %
4/5 Bedroom	162	2 %
TOTAL	6,514	

GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK (As at 1st April 2009)								
	Buckhurst Hill / Chigwell		Loughton		Waltham Abbey		Epping / Ongar / Rural Areas	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Houses	189	7 %	936	34 %	602	22 %	1,013	37 %
Flats	315	13 %	904	37 %	782	32 %	463	19 %
Maisonettes	254	49 %	189	36 %	64	12 %	12	2 %
Bungalows	15	2 %	146	19 %	145	18 %	485	61 %
TOTAL	773		2,175		1593		1,973	
% of Total		12 %		33 %		24 %		30 %

4.4 Stock Valuation

Under CLG guidelines, the valuation of residential properties is based on Social Housing - Existing Use (SH-EH) value. In 2001, the Council first commissioned the Valuation Office to undertake a formal valuation of the Council's housing stock, as at April 2000. Following desk-top revaluations being undertaken between 2002 and 2005, in 2006, the Valuation Office undertook a full revaluation as at 1 April 2005. Further desk-top valuations have been undertaken since 2006.

The HRA Stock Valuation for residential dwellings as at 1st April 2008 was £633 million.

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

(a) Introduction

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

(b) Housing Directorate

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

The permanent Staff Establishment of the Housing Directorate comprises 211 full and part-time members of staff. Of these, only 11 private sector housing staff are involved in non-HRA activities. Appendix 4 sets out the Staffing Structure of the senior management of Housing, together with the main responsibilities of each of the nine sections.

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

Area Housing Office (South) Based in the heart of The Broadway Shopping Centre, Loughton, the office provides a comprehensive housing and estate management service to tenants in the south of the District (See [Section 4.6\(a\)](#) below).

Limes Farm Estate Office Based on the Limes Farm Estate, Chigwell, the Estate Office provides a localised housing and estate management service to the tenants of the Estate. The office is open every morning during the week, managed by the Assistant Area Housing Manager.

Careline Control The Council provides an older peoples alarm network, Careline, which is managed from Careline Control based at Parsonage Court, Loughton. The service is managed by the Housing Manager (Older People's Services), based at Careline Control (See [Section 4.6\(k\)](#) below).

Sheltered Housing The Council has 13 sheltered housing schemes for older and frail older people, each managed by a Scheme Manager. In addition, 3 Area Scheme Managers provide a visiting service to older tenants on housing estates (See [Section 4.6\(m\)](#) below).

(c) Corporate Executive Forum

The Corporate Executive Forum (CEF), comprising the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive, is responsible for the overall management of the Authority.

(d) Management Board

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

(e) Support Services

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

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

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

Estates and Valuation	The Estates and Valuations Division manages and co-ordinates the maintenance of HRA commercial properties.
Grounds Maintenance	The Council's grounds maintenance is undertaken by the Environment and Street Scene Directorate. The arboricultural contract is undertaken by a private contractor.
Housing Benefits	Housing Benefits is administered within Finance under the management of the Asst Director of Finance & ICT (Benefits).
Information & Communication Technology (ICT)	Although the database for the integrated housing system is supported by the Housing Directorate, the network is managed by the Finance and ICT Directorate.
Legal	The Corporate Support Directorate provides a comprehensive legal service to Housing including conveyancing, litigation, advocacy, contract administration and legal advice.
Human Resources	The Corporate Support Services Directorate is responsible for strategic HR issues, industrial relations, recruitment and other HR operations.
Performance Management	The Performance Improvement Unit, within the Office of the Deputy Chief Executive, is responsible for the co-ordination of performance management data.
Public Relations & Marketing	Although the Housing Directorate has an in-house housing information service, a corporate public relations service is provided by the Public Relations and Marketing Section within the Office of the Deputy Chief Executive.

4.6 Delivery of Housing Services

(a) Estate Management

Estate management is undertaken by the two Area Housing Offices under the direction of the Area Housing Managers. The Area Housing Office (North), based at the Civic Offices, Epping, manages around 3,580 properties in the north of the District, including the towns of Epping, Waltham Abbey and Ongar. Most of the properties in the rural part of the District are also managed by the Area Housing Office (North). As outlined above, the Area Housing Office (South) is based in The Broadway Shopping Centre, Loughton and manages around 2,970 properties in Loughton, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and the immediately surrounding areas. The office also provides a cash office facility, managed by Finance, for the payment of all Council charges, including rents.

Within the Area Housing Offices, Housing Officers (Management) manage around 800 properties each. They are responsible for dealing with breaches of tenancy conditions, including rent arrears recovery and estate management. In addition to ad-hoc estate inspections, staff in the Area Housing Offices undertake an annual programme of planned estate inspections covering the whole of the District.

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

(b) Rent Collection

The collectable rent debit in 2008/9 was £26.9m (an increase of 3.9% from 2007/8). Rent is collected through a variety of methods. Due to the rural nature of the District, Post Office Giro is extensively used to enable tenants to pay their rent at local post offices. In addition, the Council's rent collection administrator, Allpay, provides a number of rent payment points in convenient locations (e.g. supermarkets, garages etc.) throughout the District. The Council also provides three cash desks based in Epping, Waltham Abbey and Loughton. Direct debit and standing orders are also offered to tenants, as well as a facility for rent payments to be made by debit card, or through the internet, or by text.

The rent collection rate in 2008/9 was 99.24%, slightly lower than the collection rate of 99.41% in 2007/8.

(c) Current and Former Rent Arrears

The Council's approach towards rent arrears recovery is set out in the Housing Service Strategy on Rent Arrears. The Council has a historically good record of rent arrears recovery, especially when compared to the national trend of rent arrears increases. The level of current rent arrears amounted to £429,136 as at 5 April 2009, representing 1.62% of the annual debit – an increase on the 1.52% rent arrears in 2007/8.

Former tenant arrears amounted to £324,992 as at 5 April 2009, of which £106,415 were due to former dwellings arrears (the rest due to former garage, housing benefit, court costs and tolerated trespasser arrears).

During 2008/9, £68,806 of former tenant arrears was written off. Former tenant arrears of £109,094 were collected in 2008/9, an increase of 28.0% on the amount collected in 2007/8.

(d) Anti-Social Behaviour

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

- Repossession – Under the Housing Act 1996, the Council can seek to repossess a property if a tenant, resident or visitor causes (or is likely to cause) a nuisance to other residents in the locality, or if they are convicted of using their property for illegal purposes, or convicted of an arrestable offence in or near the property.
- Demoted Tenancy Orders (DTOs) – The Council can seek from the court a DTO if a tenant is causing anti-social behaviour. If granted, a DTO removes the tenant's security of tenure for a period of one year. If there are further incidences of anti-social behaviour within that period, the Council can obtain return to court and obtain a possession order without having to give any grounds. The Council has resolved to seek DTOs in appropriate cases.
- Introductory Tenancies (ITs) – The Council started to use ITs in 2006, following an extensive consultation exercise with all tenants and partners in 2005. All new tenants are now given an IT (instead of a secure tenancy) for the first year of their tenancy. If the new tenant causes anti-social behaviour, or breaches any other tenancy conditions within that period, the Council can obtain a possession order, without having to give any grounds. If there are no breaches within that year, the tenancy automatically converts to a secure tenancy.
- Injunctions - Also under the Housing Act 1996, the Council can seek an injunction from the courts to prohibit a person from causing a nuisance to other residents in the area, or using premises for illegal purposes. However, these can only be granted if violence is used or threatened, and if there would be a significant risk of harm if an injunction was not granted.
- Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBO's) – Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, the Council or the Police, in consultation with each other, can seek an ASBO from the courts if there is ongoing criminal type behaviour. The person must be over 10 years of age and be acting anti-socially towards others, causing harassment, alarm or distress. The ASBO prohibits the person from continuing with the anti social behaviour. A breach of the order is a criminal offence, with a maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment.

(e) Empty Properties

In order to maximise rental income and effectively meet housing need, it is essential that the number of empty properties, and the associated re-let period, is kept to a minimum. There were 75 empty properties as at 1st April 2009, representing a decrease of 11 properties (13%) over the previous year's number of 86. The rental loss from empty properties in 2007/8 amounted to 0.85% of the annual debit.

(f) Difficult to Let Properties – Low Demand

Generally, the Council does not experience any of the problems faced by many northern authorities of “low demand” and has a high demand for most of its properties. However, some difficulties are experienced in letting certain types of properties in sheltered housing and schemes for frail older people (“Part 2.5”). As at 1st April 2009, there were only 11 vacant properties meeting the “difficult to let” criteria (all flats at the Council’s scheme for frail older people at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey and bedsits in sheltered housing schemes).

(g) Choice Based Lettings (HomeOptions Scheme)

The Government, through the Homelessness Act 2002 and its Five-year Housing Plan, “Homes for All”, is encouraging local authorities to introduce “choice based lettings” by 2010, whereby housing applicants are able to choose the property that is let to them, rather than being “allocated” properties. Offers of accommodation are made to applicants who have expressed in specific vacant properties who are in the highest priority band, in date order.

In November 2007, the Council successfully introduced its HomeOptions Scheme, a choice based lettings scheme operated in partnership with five neighbouring councils (Brentwood, Uttlesford, Chelmsford, East Herts and Broxbourne). The scheme is operated by Locata, a choice based lettings agency. The six councils were successful in obtaining £96,000 funding from the former ODPM in 2005 to jointly commission the scheme.

(h) Review of the Housing Register

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

(i) Homeless Persons Hostel

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

(j) Leasehold Services and Service Charges

The Council had 932 properties leased under the Right to Buy as at 31 March 2009, compared to 928 properties the previous year. 4 properties were leased between 1st April 2008 and 1st April 2009. Leaseholders are charged two main types of service charges; annual charges are made for the provision of ongoing communal services (eg cleaning, grounds maintenance, responsive repairs etc); charges are also made for larger planned repairs and improvements following consultation in accordance with the Housing Act 1985.

(k) Careline Service

The Council operates an alarm network for older people (Careline Service) to the following categories of older people in the District (as at 1 April 2009):

Council tenants	1,231
Private occupiers	1,069
RSL tenants	84
Total	2,384

The number of users receiving the service decreased by around 10% during 2008/9. The monitoring and response service is provided by Careline to private occupiers on a permanent basis, and to other residents when their Scheme Manager goes off duty. The Careline Service is available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year and is based at Parsonage Court, Loughton. Response times are monitored and, in 2008/9, 98.6% of all calls were responded to within 30 seconds (exactly the same as in 2007/8). The average time to respond to calls was 7.2 seconds (again, exactly the same as in 2007/8).

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

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

(l) Telecare

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

(m) Sheltered Housing & “Very Sheltered” Housing

The Council has 487 sheltered housing properties within 12 sheltered and grouped housing schemes throughout the District, with each one managed by a Scheme Manager. From April 2003, sheltered housing tenants have paid a “support charge” that represents the costs of providing them with the sheltered housing service.

The Council also owns and maintains a “Part 2½” scheme for frail older people in Waltham Abbey, which is managed by Essex Adult Social Care under a partnership arrangement.

In addition, three “Area Scheme Managers” visit 310 older people in properties situated within general needs housing estates that have been designated as especially suitable for older people. Visits are made on a “call category” basis, dependent on the assessed level of risk, as follows:

BREAKDOWN OF CALL CATEGORIES FOR PROPERTIES DESIGNATED AS SPECIALLY SUITABLE FOR THE ELDERLY (As at 1st April 2009)		
Category	Frequency of Visits	No.
A	Once every week	22
B	Once every fortnight	34
C	Once every month	254

(n) Housing ICT Strategy

The Housing Directorate has a Housing ICT Strategy that is reviewed bi-annually, and sets out the vision and objectives for developing its information systems to improve further the Council's Housing Service.

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

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

- HomeOptions – the Council's choice based lettings system, enabling housing applicants to express interests in up to three vacant properties every fortnight
- HomeSwapper – the Council's web-based mutual exchange system, enabling tenants to provide details of their property and to both attract and seek mutual exchanges
- “Repairs Reporter” – an on-line repairs reporting facility, enabling tenants to report repairs 24 hours per day, with user friendly graphics of property components.

- "A-Z of Housing Services" – providing a description of each housing service provided (eg "Abandoned Vehicles"), the ability to send an e-mail to the appropriate person dealing with that service and the ability to request any leaflets relating to the service.
- "Contact Us" - listing the main sections and offering the ability to send an e-mail by launching the users' e-mail software with a pre-addressed e-mail.
- "Housing Publications" - enabling users to download certain publications and to request any housing leaflets through the completion of an on-line form.
- "Latest News" - providing regularly updated housing-related press releases and information.
- "Feedback" – enabling tenants and other housing clients to provide feedback on housing services and the housing website.
- "Consultation" - where consultation documents and plans can be viewed and downloaded.
- "Payments" – enabling tenants to pay rent and other housing charges via the internet.

4.7 Partnership Working

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

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

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

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

Essex Police The Council works closely with Essex Police on a number of issues. These are mainly in relation to dealing with anti social behaviour, crime prevention, the management of dangerous offenders, responding to "hate incidents" and the removal of abandoned vehicles. The Council and Essex Police have agreed a joint protocol for the use of anti social behaviour orders, and jointly fund a number of police community support officers.

London Commuter Belt Group In view of the growing importance of working sub-regionally on housing issues, the Council, together with 4 other Essex authorities, all the Hertfordshire authorities and the RSLs that operate within the London Commuter Belt Sub Region have formed a Sub-Regional Housing Group. The Sub-Regional Group has produced its own Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, which includes a detailed Action Plan. The Council also works with local authorities in the eastern area of the Sub-Region on a number of specific initiatives, including choice based lettings and the strategic housing market assessment.

Tenants and Leaseholders Federation The Federation comprises representatives of the five recognised tenants associations within the District, the district-wide Leaseholders Association, Sheltered Forum and Rural Tenants Forum, that meets every six weeks. It is consulted on, and provides feedback on housing issues, and monitors the Council's housing performance (see [Section 4.8](#) below).

Voluntary Action Epping Forest This is the umbrella organisation for voluntary organisations in the District. The Housing Directorate works with VAEF on a number of projects to benefit the Council's tenants, including a scheme to assist older tenants with gardening.

4.8 Tenant and Leaseholder Participation and Consultation

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

The Council has facilitated the formation of seven recognised tenants association and one tenants panel throughout the District, although one association has subsequently been disbanded and another was for a sheltered housing scheme that was transferred under a small-scale stock transfer, leaving five associations and one panel currently in existence. In addition, the Council has established the district-wide Leaseholders Association, which represents the views of the Council's leaseholders and with whom the Council can consult on leasehold issues, including service charges. In 2004, the Council also established the Epping Forest Sheltered Forum, comprising representatives from most of the Council's sheltered housing schemes across the District.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Tenant satisfaction
- New housing policies
- Tenant Participation Agreement
- Stock Options Appraisal

- “Consultation” Section of Housing Website
- Tenants & Leaseholders Federation
- This Business Plan

4.9 Supporting People

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

The main effects on the HRA have been as follows:

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

Decisions on inflationary increases in grant are made by the Commissioning Body each year. Some years, there has been no increase; any increases are usually lower than the cost of inflation.

4.10 Fees and Charges

In addition to rents, the Council makes a number of other charges for housing services, which are reviewed annually in November by members in order to feed into the budget making process. Generally, fees and charges are increased annually in line with inflation. The general increase applied for 2010/11 is 5%. However, each charge is considered on its own merits and variations are made to this approach for strategic reasons.

4.11 Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements

Probably the most important elements of this Business Plan are the:

- analysis of the condition of the Council’s housing stock
- plans to ensure that all the Council’s properties continue to meet the Government’s “Decent Home Standard”
- assessment of the likely availability of funding for repairs, maintenance and improvements
- assessment of priorities for repairs, maintenance and improvements to meet the Government’s Decent Home Targets
- formulation of standards and policies for repairs, maintenance and improvements

In view of this importance, the Council has developed a Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan which, although a free standing document, forms an integral part of the overall HRA Business Plan. The Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan is attached as Appendix 1. During 2010/11, a separate Housing Service Strategy on Repairs and Maintenance will be produced, setting out the Council’s general approach to repairs and maintenance.

4.12 Right to Buy and Rent to Mortgage Sales

Under the Housing Act 1985, the Council is required to sell Council properties to eligible sitting tenants at a discount. Local authorities also have discretion to sell properties on a voluntary basis outside the right to buy provisions. A number of years ago, the Council operated such a voluntary sales policy, but no longer does so. Between 1st April 1977 and 31st March 2009 (32 years), the Council has received 11,555 applications to purchase, resulting in 6,147 sales (53%), of which 4,591 were under the right to buy.

In 2008/9, 29 applications to purchase under the right to buy were received (38 less than in 2007/8), which resulted in 7 sales (compared to 28 sales in 2007/8 and 46 in 2006/7). The average open market valuation in 2008/9 was £174,000 per property, compared to £155,090 in 2007/8. The current maximum right to buy discount for the Council’s region is £34,000, which was the actual discount provided for all sales in 2008/9. The average purchase price was £140,000 per property (compared with £121,411 per property in 2007/8).

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

(a) Introduction

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

(b) Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs)

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

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

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

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

The Epping Forest District Council is within the London Commuter Belt (LCB) Sub Region for housing purposes. Six districts of the Sub Region, including Epping Forest, joined to form the London Commuter Belt (East)/M11 SHMA Area and commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to undertake a comprehensive and integrated SHMA. The other five districts in the SHMA area are Brentwood, Broxbourne, East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford. The research used secondary data from sources such as the UK Census, the former Housing Corporation, HM Land Registry and the Office for National Statistics, along with a qualitative consultation programme with a wide range of stakeholders.

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

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

(c) New Affordable Housing Provision

At the time of writing, the Council's monitoring arrangements for new affordable housing provision identify the following:

- 208 properties on 5 development sites are currently on site
- 231 properties on 7 development sites have detailed planning permission, but have not yet started on site
- An estimated 10 properties on 1 development site has outline planning permission
- Developers are giving active consideration to the development of a further 225 properties on 6 sites in the District, although it is unlikely that all these developments will receive planning permission

(d) Housing Register Data

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

COMPARISON OF HOUSING NEED (2008 – 2009)				
	March 2009	March 2008	Difference (2008 – 2009)	
			(Nos.)	%
1 Bed	2,749	2,464	+ 285	+ 11.5 %
2 bed	1,181	942	+ 239	+ 25.4 %
3 bed	585	500	+ 85	+ 17.0 %
4 Bed	80	55	+ 25	+ 45.5 %
TOTAL	4,595	3,961	+ 634	+ 16.0 %

(e) Social Housing Turnover

Social housing turnover (in both the Council's own stock and that of registered social landlords) has also been taken into account in the preparation of this Business Plan. The following table compares turnover of Housing Register, homeless and other applicants for vacancies in the Council's housing stock over the last two years. As can be seen, turnover reduced by 16 % in 2008/9, compared to the previous year.

HRA HOUSING STOCK TURNOVER (2007/8 and 2008/9)		
	2007/8	2008/9
Housing Register (inc homeless)	502	400
Mutual exchanges	118	121
TOTAL	620	521

In addition, 61 applicants were nominated and accepted in 2008/9 for vacancies in stock owned by registered social landlords, compared with 88 in 2007/8.

(f) Local Housing Market

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

The recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) established that the average property price in Epping Forest in 2008 (Quarter 1) was around £365,000. The average property price rose by 133% between 2000 and 2008 (Quarter 1) – the highest increase in the SHMA Area.

In 2002, the average property price in Epping Forest was 9 times the median full-time earnings of someone working in the District. This rose to 11 times the median earnings by 2007 which is, by far, the highest ratio in the SHMA Area.

4.14 Staff Training and Development

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

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

The training needs of all housing staff are then collated annually into a Schedule of Identified Training Needs, which is then monitored by line managers throughout the year. As training needs are met, a record is kept for each member of staff in the Schedule of Completed Training Needs.

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

4.15 The External Environment

In order to ensure a robust Business Plan, in addition to analysing the “internal environment” within which the Council operates, it is essential to also analyse the “external environment” which, although outside the Council’s control, has an effect on the Council. The following external issues have been identified as having an effect on the Council and have been taken into account in the formulation of this HRA Business Plan:

<i>Housing Regulatory Framework</i>	During 2009/10, the Tenant Services Authority consulted extensively on the introduction of a new Housing Regulatory Framework. The new Framework will be introduced from April 2010. There are a number of new requirements with which the Council will need to comply.
<i>Proposed reforms of the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy System</i>	Following a consultation exercise, the Government intends to issue an “offer” to all stock-holding councils, inviting them to leave the HRA System, in return for taking on housing debt from other local authorities.
<i>Housing Green Paper – “Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable”</i>	Outlines the Government’s plans for delivering more homes, including social housing, backed by ambitious building targets, increased investment, and new ways of identifying and using land for development.
<i>“Ends & Means: The future Roles of Social Housing in England”</i>	Commissioned by the Government, which reported in February 2007. Undertaken by Professor John Hills, it establishes the context and assessed the current state of social housing against criteria such as quality, affordability, social inclusion and opportunities for social and economic mobility.
<i>The “Credit Crunch”</i>	This has a major effect on the Council, both in terms of the Council’s finances (e.g. lower interest rates) and the Council’s tenants and housing applicants
<i>Rent Restructuring</i>	This Government regime has an effect on the level of rents that the Council can charge and the amount of subsidy that is paid to the Government, due to the Council being in “negative subsidy”

5. Provision of Quality Housing Services

5.1 Charter Mark – Housing Directorate

In November 2004, the whole of the Council’s Housing Service was awarded the Cabinet Office’s prestigious Charter Mark Award for a three year period. The Charter Mark was awarded to the Housing Service for a further three years in 2007. The Charter Mark is the national standard for customer service for organisations delivering public services. It is independently and rigorously evaluated and assessed. To meet the standard, organisations must demonstrate that they: listen to their customers; learn what aspects of their

service are most important to them; deliver a service that is tailored to customers' needs; and continuously improve. Very few local authority housing departments nationally have achieved the Charter Mark for the whole of their Housing Service. Having a Charter Mark gives confidence to the Council's tenants, applicants and other clients that the Housing Directorate provides a customer-focused service to them that also strives to continuously improve.

The Charter Mark has now been replaced with the Customer Service Standard Award, which the Housing Directorate will be seeking in 2010, prior to its Charter Mark status lapsing.

5.2 ISO 9001:2000 Quality Accreditation – Housing Directorate

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

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

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

The external assessments of the Housing Directorate were carried out by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance, who undertook a number of visits, audits, inspections and site visits as part of their overall initial assessment. The award lasts for three years, during which time regular audits/inspections are undertaken by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance to ensure that the standards and quality are maintained. The Council was re-accredited with the status for a further three years in May 2008.

The Housing Directorate's Quality Management System comprises:

- A **Process Manual**, that sets out the main processes carried out by the Housing Directorate
- A **Quality Manual**, that sets out the approach taken to ensure consistent quality
- A **Policy Manual** that provides a record of all the agreed Council policies relating to housing
- A **Procedures Manual**, documenting every individual task undertaken by Housing Directorate staff (totalling almost 800 tasks)
- **Regular internal audits** by Council staff, formally trained and certificated to undertake ISO 9001:2000 internal audits.

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

5.3 Tenant Satisfaction

The Council is encouraged by the Government to undertake a detailed Tenants Satisfaction Survey every two years (previously every three years). The Council's first survey was undertaken in 2001, with the latest undertaken in 2008. The next survey will be undertaken during in 2010.

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

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

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

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

Based on their findings, the NHF concluded that:

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

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

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

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

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

5.4 Customer Perspective Programme

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

In continuous pursuit of customer excellence, over the last couple of years, the Housing Directorate has been undertaking a "Customer Perspective Programme". The purpose of the Programme is to look at how the housing service is provided to customers (tenants, housing applicants and others) *from their perspective*.

A group has been set up, chaired by the Director of Housing, comprising staff from each of the sections in the Housing Directorate and the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The group has been considering and analysing all aspects of "interfaces" that individual sections of the Housing Directorate have with customers, and consider where and how the service can be improved further. This may be in relation to leaflets, forms and other information given to customers, procedures that they are expected to follow and policies that the Council operates.

Each meeting of the Customer Perspective Group concentrates on a specific aspect of front line Housing Services. In advance of the meeting, the Housing Manager responsible for the function being challenged is

asked to circulate to the Group copies of documents given to customers. The Housing Manager then attends the meeting and explains all the various customer interfaces in relation to the Section's work.

The Group then discusses with the representative any suggestions for improving the experience of customers. Agreed suggestions are then incorporated within a Customer Perspective Action Plan, the progress of which is regularly monitored.

5.5 Investors in People

Investors in People is a nationally recognised standard for employers, whereby an external assessor analyses the organisation's:

- Approach to planning, ensuring that there are clear aims and objectives which are understood by everyone
- Commitment to developing its people, in order to achieve its aims and objectives
- Development of its staff
- Understanding of the impact its investment in people has on its performance

In 2002/3, the whole of the Council was first awarded "Investors in People" status, including the Housing Directorate. In 2005 and 2008, the "Investors in People" status was awarded for further three-year periods.

5.6 Project Management

All special (i.e. non routine) housing projects are detailed in the Housing Directorate's Special Projects Plan. This is a project management tool (using Microsoft Project software) that, for each project, sets out:

- The task
- The officer responsible
- The baseline period for commencement and completion of the task
- The latest anticipated completion date of the task
- The percentage of the task completed to date
- Critical paths and linkage with other task

Housing Managers provide information on progress with each project for which they are responsible on a quarterly basis. The Project Plan is then updated and reviewed at a quarterly meeting of housing managers, chaired by the Director of Housing.

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

5.7 Performance Indicators and 2010/11 Targets

The Council uses a range of performance indicators to monitor its housing performance. There are three main types:

National Indicators	Defined by the Government, that must be collected by all local authorities - There are 3 related to the Council's HRA landlord services
Local Indicators	Defined and monitored by the Council, as being key indicators related to the Council's business – There are 6 related to the Council's HRA landlord services
Management Indicators	Defined and monitored by the Director of Housing, as being indicators that provide important management information on the service, that are used to identify problem areas and the need for improvement – There are over 100 management indicators related to the Council's HRA landlord services

The Council refers to all the National and Local indicators as "Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). [Appendix 5](#) sets out the Council's KPIs relating to the Council's HRA landlord services for 2010/11, as well the associated targets and performance (up to Quarter 3) for 2009/10. Of the Council's 9 KPIs for HRA landlord services, it is anticipated that only one KPI Target for 2009/10 will not be met.

6. Value for Money

6.1 Corporate Approach to Value for Money and Use of Resources

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

The Audit Commission undertakes an annual Use of Resources (UoR) Assessment, which evaluates how well councils manage and use their financial resources. The assessment focuses on the importance of having sound and strategic financial management, to ensure that resources are available to support the Council's priorities and improve services, covering five themes. One of the five themes is "Value for Money" (VFM).

The Council has set up a Use of Resources (officer) Working Party to oversee improvements in the Council's use of resources, through reference to the latest Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) and Performance Characteristics, and the Council's latest Audit Score Feedback.

In February 2010, the Audit Commission reported on its latest UoR Assessment for the Council. Overall, out of a possible score of 1-4, it gave the Council a score of "2 – Meets minimum requirements and performs adequately".

6.2 Corporate Value for Money Strategy and Value for Money Review

In 2006, the Council's Cabinet adopted a corporate Value for Money Strategy. The Strategy's Policy Statement recognises the Council's responsibilities as a custodian of public funds to strive for value for money in the delivery of services.

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

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

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

In July 2008, the Council undertook a detailed Value for Money Review. The purpose of the VFM Review was to:

- Examine and comment on the Council's costs, as stated in the Audit Commission's Value for Money (VFM) Profile Tool, and how they compare with other local authorities in comparator groups;
- Examine and comment on the Council's performance in respect of the performance data within the Audit Commission's VFM Profile Tool;
- Reach conclusions on the Audit Commission's value for money assessment of the Council
- Consider the nature and limitations of the comparative data, particularly issues that could significantly affect the data and the Council's ranking;
- Assess EFDC's Council Tax levels; consider how they compare with other councils; and consider the value for money provided by the Council from the "citizen's perspective"; and
- Consider the most cost effective future strategy to continuously improve value for money in terms of reduced costs, higher performance, or both.

The VFM Review concluded – for the Council as a whole - that:

“ Although there are examples of both good and poor performance at individual service level, overall, both EFDC’s performance and rate of performance - compared with other local authorities - is average.”

In terms of its focus for VFM in the future, the Council concluded that:

- Although the Council's net costs are comparatively high (using the Audit Commission's VFM Profiles Tool) there is no need to reduce the Council's overall costs, but
- There is a need to improve the Council's overall performance and the performance in specific areas.

Therefore, the Council concluded that although it will continue to seek and implement efficiency gains - and reduce costs at service levels where possible - rather than reduce costs, it will then continue to re-invest the savings, in a targeted way, to help improve performance further.

6.3 Performance Management

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

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

Progress on the achievement of National Indicators and Local Indicators (referred to as “Key Performance Indicators”) are then monitored quarterly by the Council's Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel.

Formal performance management meetings are held at the end of each quarter, between the Director of Housing, the relevant Asst Director of Housing and the Housing Manager responsible for the area of activity. Actual quarterly performance is then compared with the targets for the year and areas of under-performance are identified and discussed with the Housing Manager, with an action plan agreed to improve performance in the following quarter.

From April 2010/11, quarterly performance management reports will be considered by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The Federation has selected around 35 “Tenant-Selected Indicators”, which it considers to be the most important indicators from tenants' perspective. The reports will show performance during the quarter, against the targets set at the beginning of the year.

Performance against these Tenant-Selected Indicators for 2009/10 will also be reported to all tenants around June 2010, in a special issue of the Council's tenants' magazine, “Housing News”. Annual performance reports will be issued thereafter.

6.4 Value for Money Analysis - Corporate

It is important that the Council has information on its costs, and knows how these compare to other organisations and how they relate to the quality of the Council's services. Stated linkages of performance and associated costs with the Council's overall objectives, contained within the Council Plan, are also important.

In order to better understand the Council's unit costs for services and how they relate to the Council's performance and compare with other organisations, since 2006, the Council has developed a unique Value for Money (VFM) Analysis, which in the past the Audit Commission has recommended to other organisations as good practice. The purpose of the VFM Analysis is to provide an initial “indicator” of the relationship between performance and costs for services, to prompt discussion, and to identify areas where further - more detailed and targeted analysis - may be required, which may then lead to a need for some form of corrective action or additional resource allocation.

The VFM Analysis is separated into the nine Council Services that have NIs and LPIs. Most Services are then broken down into distinct areas of activity within the Service, for which NIs, LPIs and cost information are available. When looking at the information for each service, there are three distinct groupings of data, relating to each service area activity, as follows:

- Clutches of NIs, and LPIs
- Clutches of cost information
- A short commentary on the relationship between performance and cost

In accordance with the Council's Value for Money Strategy, the VFM Analysis is considered annually by a member-level scrutiny panel, who then identify if a more detailed service review is required of particular service areas, through a member-level task and finish group or other means.

6.5 Benchmarking Housing Performance and Costs

The Council places great importance on benchmarking its housing performance and costs against other housing providers (both councils and registered social landlords). It benchmarks in two main ways.

Annual Value for Money Review

Each year, the Council compares its performance and costs for all of its main service areas with other groups of local authorities, namely others in the Council's "Nearest Neighbours" Group and other local authorities in Essex, using the Audit Commission's VFM Profile Tool. A Review Report is produced, which sets out:

- The Council's performance or cost for the indicator
- The Council's ranking, for each performance or cost indicator, compared to the other councils
- Details of the best performing authority
- A commentary from the relevant Service Director on each performance and cost indicator, including any proposed action to improve performance or reduce costs.

The Review is reported to the Council's Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel, which considers the relative performance and costs, as well as the Service Director's Commentary, and identifies any further action required – which may include a service review.

Housemark

The Council has been a member of "Housemark" for a number of years. Housemark is a national housing benchmarking organisation, which enables housing organisations to submit detailed information on their performance and costs, and then to compare these with other housing organisations nationally.

Housemark enables member organisations to compare themselves with user-defined data sets. For example, the Council can compare itself with all housing organisations nationally; all district councils; all local authorities; or all housing associations. Housemark can also define the locations (by regions) of those organisations to be included within the comparison, and can restrict the comparison to housing organisations of more or less than a defined number of properties.

In previous years, the Director of Housing has produced an annual Benchmarking Report, based on information obtained from Housemark's web-tool, which compared how well the Council ranked against other local authorities and housing associations. The report was considered in detail by the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel and established that, generally, the Council performed extremely well compared with other housing organisations.

In 2009, all the required performance and cost data for the Housing Directorate relating to 2008/9 was uploaded to the Housemark website. This data was then verified by Housemark. In February 2010, Housemark produced (for the first time) its own independent and detailed Benchmarking Report for the Council for 2008/9. The report compared the Council to 37 other stock-retained councils across England.

In addition, for the first time, and in recognition of the expectation of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) that, in future, landlords will need to benchmark on a cross-sectoral basis, Housemark also provided a cross-sector comparison with 273 other landlords, using the wealth of data that Housemark collects for:

- Local authority landlords
- Arms length management organisations (ALMOs)
- “Traditional” housing associations; and
- Stock transfer housing associations (LSVTs)

In addition to the detailed benchmarking information, Housemark also provides a helpful Value for Money (VFM) Summary. The VFM Summary is organised in a way to illustrate how the Council’s performance – in terms of cost and quality - compares with other stock-retained local authorities, in respect of the four specific service areas of the TSA’s proposed National Standards, covering:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and Community

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

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

Housemark’s VFM Summary for the Council is reproduced below:

HouseMark Value for Money Benchmarking Summary – 2008/9 (Produced January 2010)				
TSA Standard	Cost KPI	EFDC’s Cost KPI Quartile	Quality KPI	EFDC’s Quality KPI Quartile
Tenant Involvement and Empowerment	Direct cost per property of Resident Involvement	Best Quartile	Percentage of tenants satisfied that views are being taken into account	Best Quartile
			Percentage of respondents who felt staff were able to deal with their problem	Best Quartile
			Percentage of tenants satisfied with complaints handling	No Data
Home	Direct cost per property of Responsive Repairs & Void Works	Best Quartile	Percentage of tenants satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service	Best Quartile
			Repairs completed ‘right first time’	No Data
	Direct cost per property of Major Works & Cyclical Maintenance	Best Quartile	Percentage of tenants satisfied with overall quality of home	Best Quartile
			Percentage of dwellings failing to meet the Decent Home Standard	Best Quartile
Tenancy (Including Allocations, Rents & Tenure)	Direct cost per property of Housing Management	Best Quartile	Average time in days to re-let empty properties	Worst Quartile
			Percentage of tenants satisfied with overall service provided	2nd Best Quartile
			Current tenant rent arrears as % of rent due	2nd Best Quartile
Neighbourhood and Community	Direct costs per property of Estate Services	Worst Quartile	Percentage of tenants satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live	Best Quartile
	Direct costs per case of Anti-Social behaviour	No Data	Percentage of respondents satisfied with anti-social behaviour case handling	No Data

The quartile performance, in respect of those cost and quality indicators for which the Council had data, can be summarised as follows:

Summary of EFDC's Quartile Placement KPIs - Cost & Quality		
Quartile	Cost KPIs	Quality KPIs
Best	4	6
2 nd Best	-	2
2 nd Worst	-	-
Worst	1	1

6.6 Housing Value for Money Strategy and Achieving Efficiencies

Although the Council's Housing Service is covered by the Council's Corporate Value for Money Strategy, it has been recognised that it would be helpful for the Housing Directorate to formulate a Housing Value for Money Strategy, setting out the Directorate's approach to achieving Value for Money, and its initiatives for achieving efficiency savings on a continuous basis. It is planned to publish a Housing Value for Money Strategy in early 2010/11.

At the Quarterly Performance Management Meetings held between the Director of Housing, Asst Directors of Housing and individual housing managers (referred to in [Section 6.3](#) above), initiatives for achieving efficiency savings are identified, monitored and calculated.

For the 4-year period 2004/5-2007/8, the Housing Directorate made cumulative efficiency savings of around £1.15m.

7. Diversity & Equality in the Provision of Housing Services

7.1 Corporate Approach to Diversity and Equality

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

The Council promotes equality of provision in Council services, provided either directly by the Council, its contractors, partners or related agencies

Additionally, many individual services produce their own service equality statements, giving details of how their services comply with equal opportunities best practice.

The Council has therefore adopted an Equality Policy covering the "six main strands" of diversity.

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

The Council's progress in delivering equality of opportunity is assessed against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). The EFLG was introduced from 1 April 2009, and replaced the previous Equality Standard for Local Government, which provided a framework for delivering continuous improvement in relation to fair employment outcomes and equal access to services. The new Equality Framework aims to

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

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

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

The Council has set a corporate target to achieve Level 2 (‘Achieving’) of the EFLG in 2010/11.

7.3 External Assessment and Peer Challenge Against the Equality Framework

In January 2009, the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) and Improvement East launched the ‘Meeting The Equality Challenge’ regional support programme, aimed at all local authorities across the region. The aim of the programme is to provide support to local authorities in moving to the new Equality Framework, and to make progress on achieving improvement across the levels of the EFLG. The support programme includes provision for peer support for local authorities, and is fully funded by EERA.. The Council is participating in the regional support programme.

Within the Equality Framework, there is a requirement that local authorities reporting their performance at the ‘Achieving’ or ‘Excellent’ levels, have undertaken an agreed external assessment to validate their achievements. As part of the regional support programme, the Council will be participating in an informal equality and diversity peer challenge during March 2010. It is considered that the peer challenge process is essential to the establishment of the authority’s base-line position, and that the results would enable the development and prioritisation of appropriate action to take the Council forward against the Equality Framework.

The informal peer challenge process will give an opportunity for the identification of the Council’s successes and future challenges as it progresses against the Equality Framework. The process will consider what has been achieved, what the Council’s challenges are, and the barriers that may hinder progress to embed equality and diversity throughout the organisation.

A report on the outcomes of the informal peer challenge will be made to a future meeting of the Council’s Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel.

7.4 The Housing Directorate’s Approach to Diversity and Equality

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

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

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

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

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

- Housing Strategy and Development
- Housing Information and Tenant Participation
- Housing Needs
- Housing Management
- Housing Repairs and Maintenance
- Older People's Housing Services

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

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

7.5 Diversity Profile of the Council's Tenants

In 2008/9, the Housing Directorate undertook a full Census of all its tenants, in order to obtain data on household composition and other information. Part of the Census collected data on a variety of equality and diversity information.

A total of 3,808 returns were received from the 6,552 households occupying Council properties at the time, representing a good response rate of 58%. The returns gave equalities data on 4,607 tenants and other occupants of the Council's properties.

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

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

The Council recognises that the data collected does not cover the "six strands" of diversity covered by the Equalities Bill, currently passing through Parliament. It is therefore intended to undertake a full 100% postal survey of all the Council's tenants and occupants in 2010/11, in order to capture more comprehensive equality and diversity data for the future (see Key Action Plan at Chapter 13).

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

Part of the Council's Policy Statement for Equal Opportunities in the Provision of Housing Services includes a requirement for an annual review of the ethnicity of applicants on the Housing Register, compared with the ethnicity of those allocated accommodation. The reason for the review is to identify whether or not there are any indications to suggest the Council may be discriminating against any one ethnic group. The annual review is undertaken by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, and was last undertaken in July 2009.

The breakdown of the ethnic origin of applicants on the Housing Register for both 2007/8 and 2008/9 is set out below.

Ethic Origin of Housing Applicants		
Ethnic Group	2007/08 (%)	2008/09 (%)
White British/Irish	77.8	78.0
Bangladesh/Pakistan/India	0.8	0.8
African/Caribbean	1.8	3.0
Mixed Race	0.4	1.2
Other	4.2	5.0
Not Stated	15.0	12.0

The breakdown of the ethnic origin of Housing Register applicants allocated Council accommodation in 2007/8 and 2008/9 is set out below:

Ethic Origin of Housing Applicants Accommodated		
Ethnic Group	2007/08 (%)	2008/09 (%)
White British/Irish	76.0	82.0
Bangladesh/Pakistan/India	0.4	0.2
African/Caribbean	2.2	1.0
Mixed Race	0.2	0.8
Other	3.1	3.0
Not Stated	18.1	13.0

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

8. Rents Strategy

8.1 Background

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

The basis of the formula is as follows:

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

The formula also takes account of national average Council and RSL rent levels and produces a target rent for each property, which local authorities originally had to seek to achieve by a specified date. However, this

date has been changed by the Government on a number of occasions. Originally, the date for “convergence” was 2012, in 2008/9, the date was changed to 2023, and in 2009/10, the date was changed again to 2012.

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

8.2 Valuation

The relative property values are based on ‘existing use value’. The valuation base was set at January 1999. The Valuation Office, on behalf of the Council, valued 198 separate “beacon properties” (many of which were used for the resource account valuation) for this rent restructuring exercise. Each beacon property is an example of a main property type owned by the Council in each of the main towns and villages and are representative of the total housing stock. These valuations were then used for all the other similar properties sharing the same characteristics and location.

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

8.3 Implementation

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

8.4 Strategic Approach

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

8.5 Service Charges

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

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

Examples of services not covered include:

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

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

8.6 Support Charges

From April 2003, following the introduction of the Government’s Supporting People programme, the Council has separated out from its rents the revenue costs of providing supported housing (e.g. sheltered housing) and made a separate support charge. Under the Supporting People arrangements, the Council receives reimbursement for these charges, for all tenants in receipt of housing benefit, from Essex County Council as the Supporting People Administering Authority. Tenants not in receipt of housing benefit must pay the

charge themselves, although the Council will meet the cost of “transitional protection” in perpetuity for tenants in occupation prior to 1 March 2003, which amounts to the difference between the former “scheme manager charge” tenants were paying prior to introduction of supporting people and the new support charge.

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

9. Housing Stock Option Appraisals

9.1 Introduction

The Government has previously required all stock-holding local authorities to carefully consider the options open to them for increasing investment in, and improving the quality of, their housing stock, including the possibility of a large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) of their stock to an RSL, or the formation of an arms length management organisation (ALMO). Such a transfer would have to be with the consent of the majority of tenants.

9.2 Housing Stock Options Appraisal 2002/4

In 2002, the Council appointed Beha Williams Norman Ltd (BWNL), specialist housing consultants, to undertake a detailed Housing Stock Options Appraisal. The Options Appraisal was undertaken in two initial stages, as set out below, followed by a third stage of further tenant consultation.

The Housing Stock Options Appraisal 2002/4 considered five main options:

- Large scale stock transfer (LSVT)
- The formation of an arms length management company
- Use of the private finance initiative
- Securitisation (a private sector financing technique which involves the sale of the future rental income in return for finance)
- Retention of the stock

The Council was committed to ensuring that tenants were involved with the appraisal process. Therefore, the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation were fully involved from the outset (including the appointment of consultant). In the first instance, BWNL were asked to undertake a two-stage approach to the Options Appraisal, as set out below, in an attempt to enable a clear picture to emerge not only of the financial effects, but also of the attitudes of tenants and members to the alternative options:

Stage 1 A detailed financial appraisal of the options, which included an indicative valuation of the stock based on cash flow forecasts, stock condition and “catch up repairs”, and an analysis of each of the options.

Stage 2 (a) Postal surveys of all the Council’s tenants and leaseholders, seeking their views on whether they would be interested in considering (without commitment) any of the alternative options to stock retention. This included examples of what benefits could result, and balanced information on the main issues to consider; and

(b) A survey of members to gauge their informal views on the issues.

9.3 Findings and Conclusions of the Initial Stock Options Report (Stages 1 and 2)

BWNL's Initial Report was completed at the end of 2002 and provided a detailed financial appraisal of the options (Stage 1), together with the results of the Stage 2 Tenants and Leaseholders Attitudes Survey. The report also provided detailed conclusions and findings. In summary, at that time, BWNL concluded that although the Council could meet the decent homes standard, it was unlikely to have sufficient resources to be able to bring all of its housing stock into a fully maintained condition in the foreseeable future, and that stock transfer was probably the best financial option. However, the results of the Stage 2 Tenants and

Leaseholders Attitude Survey showed a clear preference for the Council to retain its housing stock. Therefore, BWNL recommended that a further in depth consultation exercise should be undertaken with a selection of tenants to explain the issues relating to stock retention and stock transfer in more detail, and to gauge their subsequent views, through the appointment of an Independent Tenant Adviser (ITA) familiar with this type of exercise. This was agreed by both the Council and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation,

Insights were therefore appointed as Independent Tenant Adviser, in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and undertook the further consultation during 2003 in a number of different ways.

9.4 Summary of the Findings of the Further Tenant Consultation by Insights

The report from Insights on their further consultation was received in February 2004. Their main findings were as follows:

- The most important issue for tenants was keeping rents affordable
- The majority of tenants rated the services as "good" and expressed satisfaction with the Council
- Many tenants expressed a view that they were strongly against any change of landlord.
- Tenants wished the Council to follow the stock retention option.
- Tenants felt they had already told the Council their views and wished the Council to stop asking the same questions

9.5 Update Report by BWNL

In view of the Council's decision to undertake the further consultation of tenants before reaching a decision on the preferred option, BWNL were re-appointed to undertake a further appraisal of the options and produce an "Update Report", taking into account the developments that had occurred over the previous year, both at the national and local level. In particular, BWNL appraised the following developments that had occurred since their Initial Report.

- The Government's policy document, "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future"
- The effects of the Government changes to the local authority housing capital finance regime.
- The implications of the Government's changes to the housing subsidy system and, in particular, the effect of the new way in which management and maintenance allowances are calculated.
- The effects of the Council's debt free status.

BWNL's main conclusions were as follows:

- The Council, under current arrangements, can meet the Government's Decent Homes Target .
- With the additional resources through the new management & maintenance allowances for Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Subsidy (£1.7m per annum), the HRA can sustain itself for the short to medium term future and allow contributions of some £15 million to be made towards capital programmes over the next 20 years.
- The level of resources available for investment in the housing stock has also changed as a result of the Council becoming debt-free (an additional £8.6m over the next three years). Nevertheless, a shortfall of some £12 million remains in the level of resources needed to meet the full investment programme over the next 10 years.
- Since the Council has resources to achieve investment levels well above the basic Decent Homes Standard, it is doubtful whether bids for either the ALMO or PFI programmes could be justified.
- Stock transfer continues to offer some very real benefits
- However, the case from the existing tenants perspective is less convincing and, based on the consultation carried out so far, it is very doubtful that tenants would support a stock transfer proposal.

BWNL therefore recommended that the Council should continue with the existing arrangements for management and ownership of the housing stock, at least for the time being, but review the situation in the light of any further developments in Government housing policy or local circumstances, and in any event in five years time.

9.6 Council Decision on the Preferred Option

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation considered the findings and recommendations of the two consultants' reports and recommended to the Council that the housing stock should be retained. The Options Appraisal and the views of the Federation were considered by one of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the 4 March 2004, when the Committee agreed to recommend the stock retention option to the Cabinet in April 2004. The Cabinet agreed with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's recommendation

The Council's Stock Options Appraisal was signed-off in September 2004.

9.7 Small Scale Voluntary Transfers

(a) Introduction

It is clearly important that the Major Repairs Allowance and other available resources are invested to produce optimum benefit. The ODPM's Guidance on Business Plans therefore emphasises the importance of local authorities carrying out detailed investment appraisals looking at strategic options for a particular group of properties, or in a selected estate or area, for incorporation within the overall Business Plan.

Separate from LSVT, the Council has successfully undertaken four small scale transfers over the years. The first at Green Close, Epping Green and Pancroft / The Mead, Abridge in the 1990's, enabling two former sites of PRC properties to be redeveloped by RSLs. The most recent stock transfers have been of sheltered housing schemes:

(b) Small Scale Voluntary Transfer - Robert Daniels Court, Theydon Bois

In January 2001, following a detailed Options Appraisal, the Council agreed to undertake an extension/conversion scheme at Robert Daniels Court, Theydon Bois (one of the Council's sheltered housing schemes for the elderly) through a small scale voluntary transfer to an RSL.

Robert Daniels Court comprises predominantly bedsits, which had become difficult to let (with vacancies in some cases in excess of a year) since they no longer met the needs and aspirations of the latest generation of elderly people. Moreover, since the elderly residents had combined bedrooms/lounges and had to share communal bathroom facilities, the quality of accommodation was not as high as that provided at other Council sheltered schemes.

A Detailed Feasibility Study was completed in March 2000 to undertake a major improvement scheme, predominantly providing an extension of nine flats and the conversion of the 28 bedsits into 19 self contained flats

A detailed Options Appraisal concluded that the cost to the Council overall of undertaking the scheme through a stock transfer would be around £400,000 less than if the Council undertook the scheme itself. This is because, although the HRA would lose rental income of around £350,000 over the next 30 years through transfer (at net present value), there would be a saving of around £750,000 in the capital cost. As part of the Options Appraisal, the tenants were consulted on the options which established support from the tenants for such an approach.

In view of the significant financial saving to the Council, it was agreed to undertake a small scale voluntary stock transfer. Following a competitive exercise involving three RSLs, a Selection Panel selected Home Housing to work with the Council and tenants to effect the transfer. A formal consultation exercise was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Act 1985, which resulted in a positive ballot. The transfer successfully took place in August 2004.

(c) Small Scale Voluntary Transfer – Wickfields, Chigwell

Following the success of the stock transfer of Robert Daniels Court, in 2005, the Council undertook an options appraisal to assess the most cost effective way of improving another sheltered housing scheme at Wickfields, Chigwell, which comprises 16 bedsits, 8 self contained flats and the former Scheme Manager's house. The options appraisal estimated the costs of the improvement/conversion scheme at £1.67m, excluding professional fees and revenue costs. The options appraisal concluded that the cost to the Council would be far less if the improvement scheme was undertaken through a stock transfer to a housing

association, than if the Council undertook the improvement scheme itself. Not only would the total capital cost to the Council (including fees etc) of £1.1m be £800,000 less, the overall cost to the Council over a 30 year period (expressed as the net present value (NPV)), would also be around £1.4m less.

As a result, all the residents were formally balloted on a stock transfer, again to Home Housing, in order to facilitate the improvements. The majority of tenants were in favour and, accordingly, the stock transfer took place in October 2006. The improvement scheme was completed in late 2007.

10. Risk Management

10.1 Introduction

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

10.2 Corporate Risk Register

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

10.3 Housing Risk Register

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

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

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

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

Risk management is applied to each of the identified risks, through exploring the best options to reduce either likelihood or impact or both. Not all risks can be reduced, but they can be managed. Any new actions than need to be taken are included within the Housing Special Projects Plan. Periodic actions are included within the Housing Annual Events Plan (See Section 8.4)

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

10.4 Key Housing Operational Risks and Housing Risk Matrix

The Housing Risk Register identifies 10 **Key Housing Operational Risks** and a further 11 other housing operational risks. For each risk, the entry in the Risk Register provides information on:

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

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

Likelihood:

A - Very High
B - High
C - Significant

Impact

D - Low
E - Very Low
F - Almost Impossible

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

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

Key Housing Operational Risks 2010/11		
No.	Current Risk Score	Vulnerability / Risk
1	2E	Inability to meet Decent Homes target for Council-owned stock by 2010
2	1E	That the HRA goes into deficit.
3	2D	Lack of suitable temporary accommodation for residents of sheltered schemes and Norway House in the event of an incident.
4	2D	Some services are delivered through decentralised offices.
5	2C	All day-to-day management of the Housing Service is recorded and monitored on the OHMS database, which is provided through one supplier (Northgate) and interfaces with other Council IT systems (e.g. Academy).
6	3D	Some services are provided by contractors and consultants working on the Council's behalf using a variety of forms of contract, sometimes with non-standard conditions inserted.
7	2E	The Council has a duty of care to the health and safety and welfare of staff, tenants and contractors.
8	2C	The Careline Service is provided via the Piper Network Controller (PNC), which is provided by one supplier – Tunstall Telecom. Alarm systems are located in residents' homes where the Council has no control over the security and integrity property
9	2E	Rent, council tax payments etc. are made at cash desks in Broadway Housing Office and Civic Offices.
10	2D	Officers meet with the public, both in interview rooms and at tenants homes.

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

10.5 Housing Business Continuity Plan

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

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

10.6 Housing Emergency Plan

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

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

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

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

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

11. Financial Plan

11.1 Introduction

The Council's consultants Accra Consulting have prepared the Financial Plan on behalf of the Council, which has been based on the revised budgets for the HRA for 2009/10, and the proposed budgets for 2010/11. Where appropriate, updated financial data has been used to ensure that the model is as accurate as possible, including final subsidy determinations and budgets for 2010/11.

11.2 CLG Reforms of HRA Finance

It should be noted that projections for future rent increases and subsidy payments are estimated, since no guidance has been given by the CLG. However, this has become even more uncertain as the subsidy system and HRA Finance has been subject to a thorough review. A consultation exercise was undertaken by the CLG in July 2009. The second round of consultation, which is due in March 2010, should detail the

basis for local authorities to withdraw voluntarily from the subsidy system, potentially for an initial one-off payment, of assessed apportionment of the national housing debt.

Therefore, a review of these projections will be required once the consultation is released. The Council has agreed that its Finance Cabinet Committee should consider the CLG's "offer" in detail when it is received, and to advise the Cabinet and the full Council on whether or not to accept the offer. This will be an important decision, since it will affect the Council's HRA, and its ability to fund the proper and effective management and maintenance of its housing stock.

Since the CLG's "offer" has not been received at the time of formulating this latest HRA Business Plan, the Financial Plan ignores this option, and assumes that the status quo will continue.

11.3 The 30-Year Financial Plan – Whole of the HRA

The Council's 30-Year Financial Plan for the whole of the HRA is shown at [Appendix 6](#). The latest review of the Financial Plan has identified that the HRA should remain in surplus until 2036/37 (Year 28). This is a significant improvement on the position forecast in last year's 30-Year Financial Plan, which assessed that the HRA would only remain in surplus until 2027/28 (Year 20 of last year's Plan).

11.4 Underlying Assumptions

The figures within the Financial Plan have been based on the revised out-turn for the HRA for the financial year 2009/10. Where appropriate, updated financial data has been used to ensure that the Financial Plan is as accurate as possible, including final subsidy determinations and budgets for 2010/11.

Interest Rates

The recommended rate for RPI of 2% has been used throughout the Plan, with the exception of formula rental increases for 2010/11 (-1.4%; RPI for September 2009). The consolidated interest rates have been provided by the Council's Finance and ICT Directorate, at 1.5% and 1.8% for the two years respectively. The rates are predicted to increase to 4.5% over 3 years and are then constant throughout the remainder of the Plan to form a basis of consistency, corresponding with RPI.

Interest on HRA balances is estimated at 2.3%, again constant throughout the Plan.

Average Rents and Increases

The average rent of £74.81 is net of current service charges as at 1st April 2009, based on a 52 week rent year, although 53 weeks are accounted for, where appropriate.

There is little in the way of firm guidance from the Government with regard to the treatment of future rent increases. Existing guidance is that actual rents are to converge with formula rents by 2011/12.

The latest subsidy determination has thrown further doubt on this, since guideline rents have been modelled to converge by 2013/14, later than last year's date of 2023/24. As the determination is for one year only, pending the final conclusion of the ongoing review, this is very much subject to reassessment.

An across-the-board increase of 2.4% has therefore been assumed, giving an average rent in 2010/11 of £76.61.

Future rent increases are protected by a limit of RPI + 0.5% + £2.00, in accordance with Government guidance.

From the latest subsidy determination, the average formula rent for 2010/11 is £83.81, some £7.20 different from the projected average actual rent. The limit rent of £78.84 is not exceeded.

Rent increases have been modelled in the Financial Plan, within the above constraints, from 2011/12 to converge with formula rents by 2016/17, which increase by 0.5% above RPI.

Voids and Bad Debts

The figures relate to those in the 2009/10 budget, which translate to:

Type		
Voids	0.71 %	
Bad Debts	£55,000	then 0.18% from Year 7

These percentages remain consistent throughout the Financial Plan.

Miscellaneous Income

The following are additional sources of income for the HRA:

Source of Income	Amount (2009/10)	Assumed Increases (Future Years)
Business Premises	1,584,000	1% for years 1 to 5 then RPI less 1%
Garages	825,000	RPI Only
Miscellaneous income	1,447,470	RPI Only
Rent/Wayleaves	9,000	RPI Only
Mortgage Interest	2,600	Reducing to Nil in 9 years
Sheltered charges	472,540	Cash limied
Contributions from General Fund	298,000	RPI Only

Due to leap years and calendar timings, the Plan accounts for the additional week's rental income within this section, that will be generated every six years, the first being 2012/13.

Right To Buy

The following levels of Right to Buy per annum have been projected:

Year/s	Sales / annum
1 – 2	7
3 – 4	10
5 – 10	15
11 – 15	10
16 – 20	8
21 – 25	4
26 - 30	2

This will leave the Council with 97% of its existing stock at the conclusion of the Plan.

Other Stock Changes

There are no further stock reductions in the Plan.

Subsidy

Management and Maintenance Allowances

With the review of management and maintenance allowances concluded and identified in the latest determinations, the 2010/11 final allowances have been included. The position is as follows:

Allowance	Actual Allowance (p/property)	Target Allowance (p/property)
Management & Maintenance - Repairs	£1,091.56	£1,090.48
Management & Maintenance - Management	£536.61	£532.89

Both allowances are now lower than target, and convergence has been modelled over the next 8 years.

Target allowances have been forecast to increase by RPI only.

Rent Restructuring

The formula rent real increase has been included at 0.5%, in accordance with Government guidance. Both the limit rent and the guideline rent have been modelled to converge with the formula rent by 2016/17.

The subsidy determination continues the “Caps and Limits” adjustment to the guideline rent. In effect, this looks to address the restrictions that have been placed on the Council, such that it was not able to increase rents to achieve formula rent convergence.

A reduction of £1.57 against guideline rent has been modelled, reducing up to 2016/17.

Supported Borrowing Approvals

These are not included, due to the Council’s debt free status.

Major Repairs Allowance

The 2010/11 MRA of £735.44 has been used in these projections and will increase by RPI only.

Supervision and Management Costs

The costs identified in the Plan for general and special management costs reflect those in the 2009/10 projections and 2010/11 budgets.

Costs are projected to increase by RPI + 0.5%, to reflect probable pay awards and other service cost increases above the standard rate of inflation. This is higher than provided for in increases to subsidy allowances. This is at a future cost to the Council, but offers a form of contingency, especially as related income through service charges increases by RPI only.

Rent Rebates

There are no current or future costs projected.

Responsive Repair Costs

The Council currently operates a Housing Repairs Fund, which is funded by fixed contributions from the HRA and accounts for all revenue repairs expenditure. The Financial Plan assumes HRA contributions of £5.6m per annum until 2015/16, after which they are increased to around £6.6m per annum.

Catch and Major Works and Improvements

The Council’s Stock Condition Survey was undertaken in June 2002, by market leaders Savills, based on 7,132 properties. This has been since updated by officers where possible and recorded on an asset management database.

In addition, the costs submitted to the Cabinet for Years 1 to 5 for the Council’s Capital Programme have been used, which will cover more than the cost of continuing to achieve the Government’s Decent Homes Standard.

From Year 6 onwards, 75% of the Stock Condition Survey has been used, as an assumed level of expenditure to continue to meet the Decent Homes Standard, having uplifted the June 2009 costs by 2.5%, as the basis of projecting forward from 2014/15.

Where appropriate, these figures have been amended for stock sensitivities. Fees of 3% have been added from Year 6 to reflect current levels of procurement and Disabled Adaptations are provided for at £400,000 per year.

Major Repair costs have assumed to increase by RPI only, matching projected MRA increases.

11.5 Sensitivities

The following chart shows how the projected outcomes change, while applying sensitivities which are considered to be appropriate:

Sensitivity	HRA Balanced to:	Decent Homes Funded to:
Base	Yr 28	Yr 20
Rents and Subsidy Converge by 2023/24	Yr 28	Yr 19
Rents Converge by 2023/24 but Subsidy 2016/17	Yr 28	Yr 20
Revenue Repairs Reduced by £50 per Property From Year 8	Yr 30	Yr 25
RPI of 2.5% From Year 3	Yr 30	Yr 25
RPI of 3.5% From Year 3	Yr 30	Yr 18
Management Costs and Service Charges Increase by RPI Only	Yr 30	Yr 24
Capital Repairs Real Inflation 0.5% Year 6 Onwards	Yr 28	Yr 18
Capital Repairs Real Inflation 1% Year 6 Onwards	Yr 28	Yr 16

12. Reviewing the Business Plan

12.1 Introduction

The HRA Business Plan is a dynamic, working document. Consequently, it is essential that it is reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

In addition, it is very important that progress on the Action Plan and the achievement of performance targets are reviewed throughout the year.

12.2 Financial Monitoring

The Financial Plans for 2010/11 will be monitored throughout the year by officers, the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Cabinet as appropriate.

12.3 Monitoring the Business Plan's Action Plan

Chapter 13 of this Business Plan sets out a detailed Action Plan. It is important that progress with the Action Plan is monitored. This is done at two levels.

At officer level, the actions are incorporated within the Housing Directorate's Special Project Plan referred to in [Section 5.6](#) above. At member level, the Housing Scrutiny Panel receives and considers a six-month progress report on the Action Plan, in October and March each year.

12.4 The HRA Business Plan Review process

The review process will commence in January 2010, which will result in the production of a draft HRA Business Plan and Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan 2011/12, on which the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and Housing Scrutiny Panel will be consulted, prior to the final version being approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder around the end of March 2010.

13. Action Plan

13.1 Introduction

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

**HRA Business Plan 2010/11
ACTION PLAN**

Action	Corporate Housing Objectives	Responsibility for Achievement	Target Date	Expected Outcome
Housing General				
1) Undertake a survey of all tenants and leaseholders to collect and record details on their diversity profile, covering the “six strands of diversity”	HO 2	Principal Housing Officer (Information/Strategy)	March 2011	Up to date diversity information on tenants of Council properties
2) Seek the Government’s new Customer Excellence Award for the whole of the Housing Directorate, to replace the Council’s existing Charter Mark Award	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	Sept 2010	Receipt of the Customer Excellence Award.
3) Respond to the CLG’s “offer” to withdraw from the housing subsidy system in return for taking on a proportion of the national housing debt	HO 1 / 5	Director of Housing	Sept 2010	An assessment on whether or not the CLG’s offer is favourable to the Council.
4) Produce a Housing Value for Money Strategy, to complement the Council’s corporate Value for Money Strategy	HO 1	Asst. Director of Housing (Property)	Sept 2010	A document that clearly and succinctly sets out the Housing Directorate’s approach to achieving value for money for it’s tenants and other customers
5) Produce a Continuous Housing Improvement Strategy and Action Plan, setting out the approach the Council takes to continuously improving its services for tenants and other housing customers	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5	Director of Housing	Sept 2010	A document that clearly and succinctly sets out the Housing Directorate’s approach to continuously improving its services for tenants and other housing customers
6) Formulate and implement a Housing Excellence Plan, assessing how well the Housing Service compares with an “excellent housing service”, and identifying required actions to achieve excellence, all be reference to the current and new Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) produced by the Tenant Services Authority and the Audit Commission	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations)	July 2010	A clear assessment of what actions need to be undertaken to achieve “excellence”, as advocated by the Tenant Services Authority and the Audit Commission

7) Introduce an electronic records and document management system (Information@Work) for housing files	HO 1 / 2 / 3		March 2011	A fully electronic filing system, enabling officers to access housing customers' records more easily and quickly, and to provide a more responsive service. Also to lay the foundations for mobile working..
Housing Management				
8) Continue the Home Ownership Grants Scheme in 2010/11, enabling 612 tenants to purchase their own home and vacate their Council property for occupation by a housing applicant	HO 1	Housing Resources Manager	March 2011	Provision of a further 6-12 home ownership grants in 2010/11.
9) Investigate the potential for enhancing the Council's HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme (in partnership with the Council's five local authority partners), including: (a) Production of a common application form for all HomeOption local authority partners; (b) Introduction of a facility for tenants to apply for the housing on-line; (c) Advertising vacant properties available for private rent.	HO 2	Housing Options Manager	March 2011	Additional and more convenient way for housing applicants to register for housing and to access the private rented sector
10) Undertake a 1-year pilot scheme to identify and tackle "social housing fraud, through the creation of a new post of Housing Officer (Fraud), part-funded from funding provided by the CLG	HO 2	Director of Housing	March 2011	The repossession of a number of properties being occupied by unauthorised people, that can be let to bona fide housing applicants
11) Transfer the lease of land and properties at Marden Close, Chigwell Row, to one of the Council's Preferred RSL Partners – following a competitive exercise – for the 20 existing bedsits to be converted into 10 one bedroom flats	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Director of Housing	Dec 2010	Transfer of the lease and a start on site of the conversion scheme.
12) Undertake a feasibility exercise – in partnership with an appointed development agent - for the development of Council-owned land by the Council, to provide additional affordable housing (subject to the Government changing the housing finance accounting regulations, to avoid the General Fund having to meet loan costs)	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Director of Housing	March 2011	A conclusion on whether or not the development of a number of Council-owned sites is viable

Tenant Participation

<p>13) Comply with the various requirements of the Tenant Services Authority's new Housing Regulatory Framework from April 2010, including:</p> <p>(a) Provision of a new Annual Report to all tenants, including performance against tenant-selected indicators in 2009/10</p> <p>(b) Details of how the Council will meet the new National Housing Standards and proposed changes to the Council's existing Housing Service Standards</p>	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4	Director of Housing	Sept 2010	Production of a document that tenants find easy to read and understand.
<p>14) Provide quarterly performance reports to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation on performance indicators selected by the Federation</p>	HO 1 / 2 / 3 / 4	Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Information)	May 2010	Provision of information to the Federation that enables them to properly assess the performance of the Council's Housing Service.
<p>15) Introduce and maintain four "Tenant Talkback Panels", providing fora to provide qualitative feedback on the following housing services:</p> <p>(a) Disabilities (b) Repairs and maintenance (c) Housing information (d) Housing allocations</p>	HO 2 / 3 / 4	Tenant Participation Officer	Sept 2010	Establishment and operation of all four Tenant Talkback Panels.
<p>16) Produce a Tenant Participation Impact Assessment, documenting how tenants have participated in decision-making in 2009/10, and the impact of their participation, and proposals for tenants to participate in 2010/11</p>	HO 4	Tenant Participation Officer	June 2010	Production of the Impact Assessment
<p>17) Train tenants of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and recognised tenants associations to undertake periodic "mystery shopping" exercises on the Council's housing services, and for other social housing providers</p>	HO 2 / 3 / 4	Tenant Participation Officer	Dec 2010	A team of trained mystery shoppers, able to properly and objectively assess how well housing officers deal with enquiries from telephone and, possibly, personal enquirers

Supporting People and Supported Housing

18) Submit a competitive tender for the provision of the Council's Careline Service to neighbouring Harlow DC	HO 1 / 2	Asst Director of Housing (Operations)	Sept 2010	Increase the use and viability of Careline.
19) Utilise the 24-hour staffing facility at Careline to actively monitor CCTV cameras around the District	HO 2	Housing Manager (Older People's Services)	March 2011	Improved monitoring of CCTV cameras around the District, to reduce and tackle anti-social behaviour and other crime.
20) Seek accreditation of the Council's Careline Service from the Association of Social Alarm Providers (ASAP)	HO 2	Housing Manager (Older People's Services)	Dec 2010	Accreditation of ASAP.
21) Undertake a Strategic Review of the Council's Older People's Accommodation	HO 1 / 2 / 3	Asst Director of Housing (Operations)	Dec 2010	A clear strategic plan for the future provision of accommodation for older people within the District
22) Work in partnership with Essex County Council to assess the outline business case for the provision of a new Extra Care Housing Scheme in the District, on Council-owned land, through the Private Finance Initiative funded by the Department of Health	HO 1 / 2	Asst Director of Housing (Operations)	March 2010	An understanding of whether or not it is viable to development an Extra Care Scheme through the Private Finance Initiative.

Housing Repairs and Maintenance

See Action Plan within the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan at Appendix 1

Key to Corporate Housing Objectives

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| HO 1 - Value for Money | HO 4 - Tenant Participation |
| HO 2 - Housing Management | HO 5 - Housing Finance |
| HO 3 - Repairs and Maintenance | |

15. Appendices

Appendix 1	Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan
Appendix 2	Glossary of Terms
Appendix 3	Key Contact List
Appendix 4	Senior Staff Structure – Housing Directorate
Appendix 5	National and Local Indicator Targets 2010/11 – Related to HRA landlord services
Appendix 6	30 Year Financial Plan

Appendices



Epping Forest District Council

Director of Housing
Alan Hall FCIH MCMI



Housing Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan

2010 - 2011

April 2010

Page



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Contents

Page	
4	1. Purpose of the Plan
5	2. Introduction to the Maintenance & Repairs Business Plan
	2.1 Housing Directorate within the context of other strategic plans
	2.2 Housing Directorate
	a) Private Sector Housing & Resources
	b) Property
	c) Operations
7	3. Repairs & Maintenance
	3.1 Repairs Refresh Programme
	3.1.1 Repairs Advisory Group
	3.1.2 Restructure of the Housing Repairs Service
	3.1.3 External Repairs Management Contractor
10	3.2 Housing Assets
	3.2.1 Legislative requirements and working practices
	3.2.2 Improvements to the Council's Housing Stock – 2008/9
12	4. Quality Repairs & Maintenance Service
	4.1 Tenant Satisfaction – NHF Status Survey
	4.2 Tenant Satisfaction – Tenant Response to Repairs and Maintenance
	4.3 Customer Perspective Programme
	4.4 Housing Excellence Plan
	4.5 Avoidable Contact – National Indicator 14 (NI14)
	4.6 Repairs and Maintenance Focus Group
15	5. Performance
18	6. Expected trends
	6.1 Expenditure
	6.2 Investment needs
22	7. Decent Homes
	7.1 Background
	7.2 Quantifying the level of potential non decent homes
	7.3 Investment Strategy
	7.4 Measuring progress
24	8. Resources & Expenditure Proposals
	8.1 Financial
	8.1.1 Expenditure Strategy – 5 years
	8.1.2 Expenditure Strategy – 30 years
	8.1.3 Maximising Value
	8.1.4 Efficiency Savings
	8.2 Partnering – The Egan Approach
	8.3 Value For Money
	8.3.1 Essex Hub – Essex wide Procurement
	8.3.2 Benchmarking
28	9. Risk Management
	9.1 Introduction
	9.2 Corporate Risk Register
	9.3 Housing Risk Register
	9.4 Key Housing Operation Risks – Repairs and Maintenance

29 **10. Strategies**

32 **11. Action plan**

Appendices

34 Appendix A - Investment Needs - 5 Year Programme
35 Appendix B - Investment Needs – 30 year Programme
36 Appendix C - Numbers of Non Decent Homes

1. Purpose of the Plan

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

This year sees the deadline set by the Government for all social housing to meet the Decent Homes Standard. Previous plans have included a detailed analysis of the Authority's response to the Government's decent homes initiative, which was then updated annually. Our latest position is included in this version, with the Council continuing to be on target to meet the Decent Homes target by December 2010. An updated Housing Services Risk Register, which identifies the strategic and operations risks, including a section which discusses the risks and how these are managed through risk management is also included in this year's plan.

This version of the Plan also covers the way in which efficiency gains are being made in line with the Council's Value for Money Strategy, which seeks to achieve value for money savings through better procurement in order to release resources to support the key policy objectives of the Council. Once again, over the last 12 months, significant changes to the Housing Directorate have occurred, particularly in relation to the Repairs Refresh Programme, which followed the merger of the Housing Repairs Section with the Building Maintenance Works Unit. This is covered in more detail later in the plan.

In pursuit of excellence, the Housing Directorate is currently reviewing all of its front line services, including looking at the service we provide from a customer perspective and using the TSA and Audit Commission Key Lines Of Enquiries (KLOEs), which prompts us to differentiate between what is a "fair" service and what is an "excellent" service, to produce a "Housing Excellence Plan". The Housing Excellence Plan will set out a number of actions, which will focus attention and activity on areas where there is room for improvement.

A new section has been added to this plan, which looks specifically at our ability to meet performance targets. Any actions for improvement are recorded in the action plan in section 10 of this Business Plan.

In preparing this Plan, the Council's Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have been consulted in the same way as with the main HRA Business Plan and they have approved both Plans. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation [were particularly pleased with the Council improving its target for the completion of non urgent responsive repairs from 8 weeks to 6 weeks, and that the Council was on target to meet the Decent Homes Target by the end of March 2010. They supported the aims and objectives of the plan and agreed with the financial plan as set out in the 5 and 30 year budget forecasts. The Tenant and Leaseholder Federation also sought to include the notion of seeking to include local contractors on all future tender lists wherever possible, not just during this current economic downturn. This has been included in the action plan in Section 10 of this Business Plan.]

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

2. Introduction to the Repairs & Maintenance Business Plan

Epping Forest District Council is a major provider of housing. As at 1st April 2009, the Council owned and managed 6514 properties, 2813 garages, 1 homeless hostel and leased 932 properties. A number of these properties were transferred to the Council from the former Greater London Council (GLC) in 1980. There has been a general rate of decline in the number of properties owned by the Council over the years due to tenants purchasing their homes under the Right to Buy scheme. Since 1977, 6147 properties have been sold. The rate at which properties have been sold has varied over the years. However, over the last five years, an average of 36 properties per annum have been sold, which equates to approximately 0.55% of the stock.

2.1 The Housing Directorate within the context of other strategic Plans

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

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

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

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

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

Home Energy Conservation Act and Fuel Poverty Strategies – Strategies designed to conserve energy use particularly for those on low incomes. This has for some time been targeting energy saving measures to those on low incomes through the Warm Front Scheme (previously known as the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES)).

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

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

Housing Directorate Risk Strategy – A Risk Register, which identifies the strategic and operations risks affecting the Housing Directorate.

Housing Strategy 2009-2012 - The Housing Strategy assesses the overall housing needs of the District, and sets out the Council's objectives and plans for meeting those needs. It also provides details of how the Council is meeting the Decent Homes Standard and the Decent Homes Targets.

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

for implementing that improvement.

2.2 Housing Directorate

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

(a) Private Sector and Resources

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

(b) Property

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

(c) Operations

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

3. Repairs & Maintenance

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

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

In previous years, this Business Plan has set out in detail the work of the Housing Assets Team and the Housing Repairs Service, including how the work is identified, recorded, managed and monitored. Much of this detail remains the same each year, or only requires reviewing on a three-yearly basis similar to other Service Strategies. Therefore, this Business Plan has been streamlined to include a look back at what was achieved during the previous year, including the performance levels that were reached, and a look forward to our plans and targets for the next 1, 5 and 30 years in line with the HRA Business Planning regime. In order to retain the important aspects of work of the Housing Repairs Service and the Housing Assets Section, it is planned that a separate Repairs and Maintenance Service Strategy will be prepared in 2010/11.

3.1 Repairs Refresh Programme

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

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

The main objectives of the Repairs Refresh Programme are:

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

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

- To relocate the Repairs Section to the Epping Depot site
- To improve overall performance in response times
- To avoid duplication in working practices
- To streamline administrative functions
- To improve tenant liaison
- To reduce risk
- To move towards a more area based Repairs Service in line with other housing management functions

- To increase supervision of repairs
- To introduce Generic Working by combining the duties of the Repairs and Voids Officers
- To achieve savings if possible, which will be reinvested in the Repairs Service

3.1.1 Repairs Advisory Group

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

- Provide advice and feedback to officers and the Housing Portfolio Holder on the proposed specification for the Repairs Management Contract;
- Interview short-listed companies and recommend to the Housing Portfolio Holder which company should be appointed; and
- Meet periodically (probably quarterly) to monitor the performance of the repairs management contractor and the repairs service generally.

3.1.2 Restructure of Housing Repairs Service

In order to create a new structure for the combined Repairs and Building Maintenance Works Unit (to be called the Housing Repairs Section), it has been necessary to understand the weaknesses that currently exist. Officers and the Advisory Group have identified the weaknesses, some of which have been observed in recent Audits of the Works Unit. Many of the weaknesses can easily be attributed to the fact that there are currently only 2 Supervisors posts compared to 46 craft worker positions. However, other issues such as Customer Care, performance monitoring, management of the stores, ordering and invoicing of goods and services and Council image each need to be addressed.

Following a detailed staff consultation process, a new structure was been agreed by the Repairs Advisory Group, and Members. The fundamental change is to separate the works and administration functions, thus;

- a. Creating one team that concentrates on receiving and registering the requests for repairs, manages the stores, procurement, invoicing and generally supports the works functions. This team would also monitor performance, monitor the budgets and act as tenant liaison, including dealing with complaints.
- b. Splitting both the technical and trade roles into two distinct geographical areas in the same way other housing management roles are managed. There are a number of advantages to this, not least of which it creates greater control over the supervision of the works and makes it easier to respond to repairs requests. Each area would have a Manager and an Assistant Manager, along with Technical Officers and a number of Craft workers from all trades.

The cost of resourcing the existing structure, taking into account filled and vacant posts, but excluding Craft Worker posts is £571,898. The cost of resourcing the new proposed structure, is £511,281. This is an overall saving of £60,617, which is 10.6% of the existing budget.

3.1.3 External Repairs Management Contractor

The Cabinet agreed to appoint an for a period up to 3-years for the service of a manager or management team combined Repairs and Building Maintenance Section.

The appointment on an Interim External Management Contractor to manage the Council's own Housing Repairs Service will be subject to EU procurement competition, and as such, a detailed strategy and specification has been prepared, along with placing an advertisement in the EU Journal. Short listing applicants is subject to a Pre-qualification Questionnaire. Once a tender list is

prepared, the Council will be seeking tenders, evaluating the tenders and reporting the outcome. The tender would be based on a range of issues such as experience, performance, quality, continuity of service, management support as well as terms and conditions and cost.

In order to assist the Council through the four stages of the procurement process, from developing the procurement strategy through to the appointment of the External Management Team, Cameron Consulting who are specialists with extensive and relevant experience in innovative procurement practices, particularly in Partnering and In-Sourcing services within the public sector construction industry have been appointed.

The four stages of their appointment are:

Stage 1 – To develop the Procurement Strategy. This includes a review of current systems, processes, performance and evidence based data, holding Member, Resident and Staff workshops to understand and define the future service.

Stage 2 - Pre-Qualification Stage. This includes placing the EU advertisement, preparing the evaluation criteria and evaluating the expressions of interest and recommending to the Council the short list of tenderers.

Stage 3 – Tender Activity. This will include further workshops to agree the tender criteria, prepare specifications, Service Level Agreements, Management Fee Structures and Performance Targets. This stage also includes issuing tenders, evaluating the returns, facilitating interviews and recommending an appointment.

Stage 4 – Appointment of Construction Management Team. This includes facilitating the pre-contract meeting and the preparation and execution of contract documents.

A Procurement Strategy has been prepared by Cameron Consulting for the appointment of the External Repairs Contractor, which was presented to and agreed by the Repairs Advisory Group. The strategy sets out the summary of the issues identified from a series of 1-2-1 meetings with various staff across the Council, and includes sections on “Where do we want to be?” and “How do we get there?”. Below is the timetable we are working to, including the key milestones.

Activity	Date
Post OJEU Contract Notice Inviting Expressions of Interest	08/01/10
Return of Expressions of Interest	17/02/10
Shortlist Bidders for Tender (Portfolio Holder Approval)	07/04/10
Issue Invitation to Tender (ITT)	13/04/10
Return of Tenders	25/05/10
Interviews	09/06/10 - 15/06/10
Recommendations/Cabinet Approvals	05/08/10
Expiry of Alcatel Period	19/08/10
Appointment of RMC	19/08/10
Prepare and Execute Contracts	26/08/10
Lead in and mobilisation	20/08/10 - 02/09/10
Commence Contract	06/09/10

Since tenders will be sought not only on price but on economic, financial and technical capacity, it is a requirement of EU public procurement rules that the Council advises all prospective bidders the basis of which their submissions will be evaluated. Therefore an evaluation methodology has been agreed by the Repairs Advisory Group that will be used for this purpose. This document sets out guidance on how the evaluation will be undertaken in a fair and auditable fashion.

The information gathered during Stage 1 – Developing the Procurement Strategy is to be captured in the tender documentation as a number of ‘Key Deliverable’ that the Repairs Management Contractor will be expected to contribute towards achieving in collaboration with the Council. Based on the initial work carried out, the following key areas will need to be developed into ‘Key Deliverables’ forming part of the Services Specification:-

- a. Supply Chain Development** – Developing better supply chain arrangements with suppliers and sub-contractors to ensure that value for money is being achieved. This includes a complete overview of how the stores is operated and managed;
- b. Development of Pricing Models** – Developing better financial models to be used in how the HRS is reimbursed for works undertaken, including how supply chain partners are also reimbursed for works carried out. This should also include better ways of financial reporting to the Council;
- c. Building the Team** – Implement excellent HR practices that build a high performance team that is motivated, skilled and customer focused;
- d. Develop Effective IT systems** – Introduce or integrate better IT systems for delivering an effective R&M service from the point of order through to completion and post completion actions;
- e. Deliver a Quality Service** – Work with EFDC in implementing quality processes that accord with the requirements of ISO9001, Charter Mark, Investors in People (IIP) and the Tenant Services Authority Regulatory Framework including designing new processes and procedures that are efficient and deliver value for money;
- f. Sustained Business Growth** – Develop sufficient competencies and resources to take on new work streams in the future and become commercially able to market services outside the District Council;
- g. Customer Focussed Service** – Implementation of a full appointment system, extended opening hours and the provision of a discretionary service to undertake tenant responsible repairs.

3.2 Housing Assets

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

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

3.2.1 Legislative requirements and working practices

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

a. Legislation

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

b. Housing Policies

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

c. Working Practices

As a local authority, the Council is required to undertake its duties and conduct itself in a manner that is both fair and proper. Accountability in working practices is therefore important. In order to

ensure this, Officers must also work in accordance with Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and CIPFA Guidelines.

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

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

Since 2002, Housing Services has been accredited the ISO 9001/2000 Quality Award for all services. Housing Assets was one of the first two sections to be awarded ISO 9001/2000 status in May 2002. An intensive re-assessment was carried out by an external auditor in June 2008, which resulted in the ISO 9001/2000 status being renewed for a further 3 years. A further re-assessment is due to take place in 2011.

3.2.2 Improvements to Council Stock – 2008/9

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

	2009/10 Actuals		2010/11 Target	
	No Properties	Cost (£,000)	No Properties	Cost (£,000)
Springfields Improvement Scheme	96	1,670	96	1,548
Kitchen replacements	158	851	390	2,110
New heating installations, new boilers or heating upgrades	338	808	315	760
Welfare heating installations	75	65	50	50
Electrical testing, electrical upgrades	600	435	650	300
Rewires	71	280	50	195
Re-roofing	78	435	90	522
Structural repairs	202	266	200	250
Disabled adaptations (Major)	114	362	166	534
Disabled adaptations (Minor)	231	49	150	32
New front entrance doors, new uPVC double-glazing	337	214	260	150
External repairs and redecorations	691	620	700	620
Door entry Installations	0	0	0	0
Asbestos removal	44	110	25	52
Digital TV upgrades	528	70	250	35
Communal and individual cold water storage tanks	73	25	350	120
Internal re-decorations for the elderly	53	25	85	40
Energy Performance Certificates produced	181	9	500	25
Energy efficiency measures	690	184	600	160
Stock condition surveys	696	0	650	0

4. Quality Repairs and Maintenance Service

4.1 Tenant Satisfaction – NHF Status Survey

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

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

4.2 Tenant Satisfaction – Tenant Response to Repairs and Maintenance

Service	Indicator	Performance 2008/09	Target 2009/10	Perf -Q3 2009/10
Housing Repairs Service	Quality of repair - good or satisfactory	99%	96%	98%
Housing Repairs Service	Polite/cooperative workmen - good or satisfactory	99%	96%	100%
Housing Repairs Service	Home left clean & tidy - good or satisfactory	99%	96%	99%
Housing Repairs Service	Works completed on time	98%	96%	99%
Housing Repairs Service	General standard of service - good or satisfactory	98%	98%	99%
Housing Repairs Service	Total number where tenants express "poor" satisfaction	45	no target	12 (3122 jobs)
Housing Repairs Service	Complaints upheld (exc. Minor)			2 upheld (0.38%)
Gas Breakdowns	South of the District	100% good 0% poor	96%	94% good 1% poor
Gas Breakdowns	North of the District	100% good 0% poor	96%	100% good 0% poor
Internal redecoration	Average time from application to acceptance (including checking process)	5	7 cal days	7.9 avg
Internal redecoration	Average time from application to completion	6.5	6 weeks	5.4 avg
Internal redecoration	No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time	0	none	0
Internal redecoration	Overall satisfaction	95% good 0% poor	96%	93% good 7% poor
Kitchen & Bathroom Programme	Overall satisfaction	93% good 2%poor	96%	93% good 1%poor
Digital tv upgrade	Overall satisfaction	new for 09/10	none	0% poor
Structural repairs	Overall satisfaction	new for 09/10	none	94% good 6%poor

4.3 Customer Perspective Programme

In pursuit of customer excellence, in spring 2007, Housing Services initiated a “Customer Perspective Programme”, which looks at how housing services are provided to customers from a customer perspective. This includes the repairs and maintenance service. A group of Officers from each section of the Housing Directorate, along with tenant representatives will analyse all aspects of the “interface” that Housing Services have with customers with a view to finding out how services can be improved further.

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

4.4 Housing Excellence Plan

As a result of the 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) was created, which increases the TSA’s powers over the regulation of social housing. The TSA is developing a set of standards for the future regulation of the sector, which are due to be published after consultation with key stakeholders.

In April 2010, the TSA will commission inspections from the Audit Commission to assess the quality of housing services delivered by registered providers, which includes Local Authority’s that have retained their housing stock. Until these standards are launched, the repairs and maintenance service (along with all other aspects of the Housing Directorate) will continue to draw up its Housing Excellence Plan, based on the Audit Commission key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) relating to the provision of housing services, which represent a set of questions and statements around our approach to assessing and measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of our housing services.

4.5 Avoidable Contact – National Indicator 14 (NI14)

The national indicator 14, which is one of the 198 indicators against which local government is assessed within the new performance management framework, aims to reduce ‘avoidable contact’ between residents and local authorities. Examples of ‘avoidable contact’ include calls from residents to chase progress on repairs requests. Since the national indicator for avoidable contact has been introduced, a review has taken place to identify ways in which the Repairs and Maintenance teams can provide clearer advice on the service it provides so that residents do not have the need to make such frequent contact. That review identified the following areas for improvement:

- The need to improve the type and quality of information provided to residents
- Since the repairs counter is no longer available at the civic offices, provide computer facilities in reception areas so that visitors can use the “Repairs On-line” service to report their repairs.
- To introduce a better appointments system for responsive repairs
- To add all planned maintenance programmed work onto OHMS against the individual property database, giving contact details, estimated installation dates etc so that the Repairs call-center staff are able to give more efficient advice at the first point of contact.
- For less reliance on the use of telephone answering machines in the planned maintenance office so that queries can be answered straight away.
- For gas servicing contractors to provide a sticker in each property, in an obvious location so that tenants know who to call for gas servicing queries, giving contact details of who to call.
- To provide a short, but glossy leaflet for each of the planned maintenance works categories, such as disabled adaptations, kitchen renewal, front entrance doors, uPVC windows and French doors, heating installations, rewiring and energy efficiency works. The leaflet will set out the targets, contact details, tenants choice, details of what the Council will do and also what the tenants is expected to

do for themselves.

4.6 Repairs & Maintenance Focus Group

A Repairs Focus Group has been established, consisting of a large group of tenant volunteers, who have previously indicated that they would be interested in influencing how the Council's Repairs and Maintenance Service is provided. The Housing Directorate is keen to involve tenants and leaseholders in shaping the future of the Housing Service and this is our tenants opportunity to have a real say in how we move forward. The first meeting is scheduled for March 2010.

5. Performance

The Council monitors its performance to deliver a whole range of services to its customers. These are captured and monitored as either national indicators, local indicators, management indicators or tenants indicators. The full set of indicators showing the overall performance achieved in 2008/9, the target for 2009/10 and the performance recorded at the end of quarter 3 of 2009/10.

Service	Indicator	Performance 08/09	Target 2009/10	Perf -Q3 09/10
Adaptations (Minor)	Acknowledgement time	1.3 days	7 days	1.3 avg
Adaptations (General)	Acknowledgement time	1.9 days	7 days	1.9 avg
Adaptations (Minor)	Time from decision to completion of work	22.3 days	28 days	21.8 avg
Adaptations (General)	Time from decision to completion of work	227 days	90 days	264 avg
Adaptations (General)	Time from works order to completion	48	n/a	47 avg
Adaptations (Minor)	No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time	8	none	
Adaptations (General)	No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time	66	none	39
Gas servicing	Graceland and Kinetics - No. of CP12 lapsed (over 12 months)	46 Graceland	none	Graceland 4
		111 TA Horn	none	TA Horn 14
Gas servicing	Graceland and Kinetics - % of properties where servicing not complete within 12 months: non-access	1.27 Graceland	0.50	Graceland 0.13
		3.08 Kinetics	0.50	Kinetics 0.5
Gas servicing	Percentage of Gas Safety Certificates outstanding at the end of period	new 09/10	none	0.30%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns attended within Fast Track (1 hour) - Gracelands	100%	100%	100%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns attended within Fast Track (1 hour) - Kinetics		100%	95.65%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Emergency attended (within 1 hour) and left correct - Gracelands	93.90%	none	100%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Emergency attended (within 1 hour) and left correct - Kinetics	94.80%	none	95.65%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Completed within 24 hours and left correct - Gracelands	75.40%	85%	83.57%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Completed within 24 hours and left correct - Kinetics	77.02%	85%	81.02%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Completed within 5 days - Gracelands	100%	95%	100%
Gas Breakdowns	Breakdowns - Completed within 5 days - Gracelands	98.40%	95%	99.9
Internal redecoration	Average time from application to acceptance (including checking process)	5	7 cal days	7.9 avg

Internal redecoration	Average time from application to completion	6.5	6 weeks	5.4 avg
Internal redecoration	No. outstanding at end of period, not completed within target time	0	none	0
Decent Homes	Proportion of homes which are non decent	new fpr 09/10	0%	0.65% (43)
Repairs	% of appointments kept	95%	95%	97%
Repairs	Average time to complete urgent repairs	6	5 wrkg days	4
Repairs	Average time to complete non-urgent repairs	30 days	42 days	17.7 days
Repairs	% of emergency repairs completed within target time (24 hours)	99%	99%	98%
Repairs	% of repairs undertaken within target time: Priority within 3 days (priority code 3)	100%	95%	98%
Repairs	% of urgent repairs completed within target time of 5 working days	86%	95%	94%
Repairs	% of routine repairs completed within target time of 6 weeks	86%	90%	97.00%
				E / U / R
Repairs	% of all repairs received emergency / urgent / routine	new	10/20/70 %	34.4/12.81/29.82
Voids	Time between keys from needs & keys to DSO (working days)	3.09	1.5 days	2.53
Voids	Time for Works Unit to complete repairs	18.65	20 days	9.29
Voids	% rent loss through voids	0.85	2%	0.77
Voids	Average time taken to re-let (overall void period)	50	no target	46
Voids	Average overall void period (excluding difficult to let)	new 09/10	40 days	30
Voids	Average period with Housing Repairs after initial void works	5.24	4 days	1.52
Voids	No of voids with Works on 1st day of period	24	no target	16
Voids	Total number of voids	new 09/10	no target	133
Voids	Voids with Works > 6 weeks	20	no target	5

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

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

- 1 The time it takes for the Council from the point a decision is made to undertake a major disabled adaptation to the completion of that work. The main reason for this poor performance is due to the demand for adaptations outstripping the budget available. It is very difficult to address this problem based on the current procedures, since Essex County Council Social Care are responsible for assessing the need and making the recommendation to the Council for processing and funding. Closer partnership working with ECC Social Care Occupational Therapists is essential, which is a target in this years Action Plan.
- 2 The ratio between emergency, urgent and routine responsive repairs needs to be addressed, with a much higher percentage of jobs being allocated as emergency and urgent than routine. However, this management indicator is new, and was established as part of the Repairs Refresh Programme. The target to reduce the ratio to 10:20:70 has been incorporated in the action plan for the External Repairs Management Contractor.
- 3 Overall void periods continue to be an area that the Council need to improve on. Much work has been done to improve this during 2008/9. Some of the void period is in relation to difficult to let properties,

and in particular bed-sit and sheltered accommodation. The Council is looking at alternative redevelopment options in conjunction with Partner RSL's to convert the accommodation into larger self contained 1-bed accommodation where possible.

6. Expected trends

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

6.1 Expenditure

Expected expenditure trends over can be summarised as follows:

Decent Homes – Whilst the Government's Decent Homes initiative reaches its conclusion in December 2010, preventing properties from becoming non-decent is an on-going challenge. This is now the key factor in planning the investment programme for the Council's stock. Based on the current strategies employed to deal with the prevention of properties becoming non-decent, the Council can maintain all of its stock to the current decent homes standard until 2028/29. A separate section of this Business Plan is devoted to how the Council will meet the challenge.

Declining levels of stock by approximately 1.4% per annum – The Council has sold just 7 houses and flats during 2008/9. However, this has been much higher in previous years with an average of 36 properties sold each year over the last 5 years. This has the effect of reducing the need for maintenance expenditure (although for leasehold properties the Council retains responsibility for structural issues) and reducing income into the HRA.

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

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

It is clear that the voids service has seen a significant increase in expenditure over the last 5-years from £473,532 in 2004/5 to £890,977 in 2008/9. This increase in expenditure mirrors an increase in the amount of work that has been necessary due to the poor condition that tenants have left the property when they move out. In response, the Council has introduced a pre-vacation inspection procedure, whereby a Generic Repairs Officer will visit the tenant in advance of them moving out and giving the tenant advice on what the Council expects the condition of the property to be in based on the terms of the tenancy agreement, to avoid the Council having to recharge for works at a later date when the tenant has moved out.

Continued demand for structural repairs – Expenditure on structural repairs has increased significantly in recent years. A number of Council properties were constructed using non-traditional building methods during the 1960's and now require additional levels of maintenance above traditional properties. Another contributing factor is the underlying soil type and geology, which is predominantly London Clay. Therefore, buildings located within 30m of trees are at risk of subsidence if left unchecked. Since tenants are able to plant trees in their gardens, this is presenting a problem when maintaining the structural integrity of the properties. A number of structural repairs have been completed and there are likely to be other parts of the Council's stock also requiring similar levels of investment. The Council is not insured for subsidence, heave and landslip as estimates showed that premiums were likely to be higher than expenditure.

Increasing costs for servicing and improvement/replacement of existing central heating – All Council tenants requesting central heating now have heating installed. Likely resultant trends include: increasing servicing and repair costs; increased costs to replace existing systems when beyond repair; the need to upgrade partial central heating systems; reduction in demand for welfare heating; and the ongoing need to replace warm air heating systems with 'wet' central heating systems.

Continued demand for planned maintenance expenditure – An ageing stock will require increased levels of repairs although this can be offset by a planned maintenance programme. Nationally there is a trend for higher standards in social housing (as demonstrated by the decent homes initiative) and the Council must ensure that the requirements of decent homes are balanced against the need for ongoing investment in its stock to protect its value and long-term let-ability.

Repairs Refresh Programme – This is an opportunity to re-think the way in which the Council provides a repairs and maintenance service for our tenants. The appointment of an External Contract Repairs Manager is an innovative approach to injecting the benefits of the commercial private sector into our existing in-house repairs service. Due to the innovative approach there is little market intelligence available to predict the cost of this appointment, especially as the cost of changes that we would expect the External Contract Repairs Manager to introduce would need to be identified and then calculated. However, it is anticipated that any efficiency savings are set out as measurable targets, which will help offset any additional costs.

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

Recruitment of skilled craft workers – With the Olympics coming to East London in 2012, there is a real possibility that contractors and sub-contractors will be pulling resources to more lucrative development sites in and around London in the years leading up to the London Olympics. This could lead to higher building costs and a shortage of skilled labour.

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

6.2 Investment Needs

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

6.2.1 Future Planned Maintenance

There are a number of major works that can be identified from the stock condition survey, other major improvement schemes or development opportunities. These have been prioritised taking into account the decent homes criteria and Appendix A details the investment strategy over the next five years. Appendix B shows this same information over the next 30 years.

One aspect of the Repairs Refresh Programme has seen a significant shift in the allocation of work from the responsive repairs service to the planned maintenance programme to be undertaken via larger more specialized framework agreements. This includes replacement kitchens, replacement front entrance doors, rewiring, replacement mains storage tanks and flat or pitched roof repairs, which would have previously been carried out in-house by the Building Maintenance Works Unit. Financially, this work is now falling on the capital programme rather than on the Housing Repairs Fund, which will require a greater revenue contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) in future years. The level of RCCO will need to be gauged on historical data rather than a predictable sum, since these are all relating to responsive repairs.

6.2.2 Cyclical Maintenance

In order to prolong the useful life of components, it is necessary to carry out regular inspections,

instigate repairs and undertake preventative maintenance on sub-components e.g. replacement boiler parts.

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

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

6.2.3 Responsive Repairs

The current ratio of maintenance to repair expenditure is 69:31 (taking account of HRF and Capital expenditure). However, the Audit Commission's recommended balance is 70:30 (based on HRF expenditure only).

This is maintained by monitoring the expenditure for day-to-day repairs by types of work and then developing maintenance programmes which would obtain better value for money. This process is currently being carried out at 6 monthly intervals, in September and March each year.

The Housing Repairs Fund makes allowance for around £7.05 million per year for the next four years, taking into account a 5% increase per annum in Building Cost Indices and a reduction of 0.8% for the rate of decline in stock numbers as a result of the Right to Buy scheme. The Capital programme includes around £1.8 million over the next 5 years for small capital repairs.

6.2.4 Voids Refurbishment

This area of expenditure is also mainly funded from revenue and as such the comments regarding the split between capital and revenue apply. It is expected that the authority will spend approximately £8.27 million over the next five years on void refurbishment.

6.2.5 Cost Reflective Improvements

Until the introduction of the Repairs and Maintenance Business Plan "Cost reflective" improvements had not previously been considered a separate category of works, since the Council's rent structure was not based on a points system which takes account of individual attributes. Cost reflective improvements, such as kitchen and bathroom modernisations, have in the past not previously been considered as essential.

Feedback from tenants has established that they feel the Council should make its properties more attractive and desirable by introducing programmes such as kitchen and bathroom replacements. This has since been supported by the decent homes guidance, which requires authorities to have reasonable modern kitchen and bathroom facilities. In order to meet the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard, substantial investment is required in this area. The Council is using this opportunity to offer tenants a choice on the type and layout to suit individuals' tastes and needs.

6.2.6 Non-Cost Reflective Improvements

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

The table in Appendix A makes allowances for £2.64 million over the next 5 years. This has been allocated towards improvements to estate footpaths, communal refuse facilities, off street parking and new and enhanced external lighting.

6.2.7 Disabled Adaptations

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

The Council's previous commitment was to spend at least £300,000 per annum over the next 5-years on disabled adaptations. However, this was recently reviewed to take account of the likely needs of the ageing local authority tenancy profiles, which led to a 5% increase in the budget provision year on year. In 2008/9, the Council's Cabinet agreed to an additional £300,000 lump sum towards the backlog of demand for disabled adaptations. Appendix A shows a budget of £582,000 in 2009/10

6.2.8 Other Maintenance and Repairs

Other types of maintenance and repairs include: decoration allowances for new tenants when they move into a home; internal decorations for elderly and disabled tenants; internal decorations to the common areas within the Council's sheltered housing schemes; and compensation payments to tenants who undertake improvements to their homes themselves and subsequently move out leaving behind the improvements they have carried out.

7. Decent Homes

7.1 Background

In July 2000, following its spending review the Government announced a significant increase in resources for housing, especially social housing. This was on top of substantial increases announced in 1998. As part of its desire to link increased spending to better outcomes, the Government has established a target to:

“ensure that all social housing meets standards of decency by 2010, by reducing the number of households living in social housing that does not meet these standards by a third between 2001 and 2004 with most of the improvement taking place in the most deprived local authority areas.”

Under the Government's Decent homes initiative a decent home meets the following criteria:

a) Any residential premises should have a safe and healthy environment for any potential occupier or visitor (Formally the statutory minimum standard for housing)

b) It is in a reasonable state of repair

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

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

c) It has reasonable modern facilities and services

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

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

d) It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

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

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

7.2 Quantifying the level of potential non-decent homes

In 2004, the number of non-decent homes had decreased to 590, which represented 8.6% of the housing stock. This meant that between 2001 and 2004, the percentage change in the number of non-decent homes was a reduced by 64%, which was well within the government's target of a one third reduction within this timeframe at that time. The level of non-decent homes as at 1 April 2009 is 1.48% of the Council's housing stock, which amounts to 97 homes.

One area, which requires significant investment to prevent homes from becoming non-decent relates to kitchens and bathrooms under the 'Reasonably Modern Facilities' category. Since 2002, the Council has already invested £3.75 million to improve the quality and layout of bathrooms and kitchens in properties where facilities are seen as being in the worst condition, and around £5.7 million is planned to be invested

over the next 5-years.

Another significant area for investment arising from the decent homes standard concerns the Reasonable State of Repair category. Properties failing under the Reasonable State of Repair criteria will generally be addressed as part of the existing cyclical maintenance programme which already covers most of the repairs identified, such as re-pointing, repairs to chimneystacks, doors and windows etc. However, there is a significant requirement to invest in replacement heating systems and electrical re-wiring, where around £5.2 million has been spent on replacement heating and boiler replacement, and around £3.4 million on electrical rewiring since 2002.

The Council also acknowledges that the thermal comfort of some properties needs to be addressed, not only to prevent a home from becoming non-decent but also to prevent the tenant from falling into fuel poverty. Generally, the Council has a good track record in improving heating in properties and 5,911 already have gas central heating installed. There are however, some properties (particularly in the rural areas) which do not have access to mains gas and which require heating and insulation improvements. Alternative fuel sources for heating are being trailed, such as modern electric boilers and solar panels. Appendix C of this Business Plan sets out the Council's position regarding the Decent Homes Targets.

7.3 Investment Strategy

The stock condition database can be interrogated in such a way that lists of all the properties that fail or potentially fail the criteria can be produced. Using this information a programme of work has been developed without having to undertake additional survey work.

The key strategy which has been employed to develop programmes of work is to look at where properties are failing and then only undertake work which will ensure that they are not caught by the criteria. For example, where properties fail on three or more categories under the Reasonably Modern Facilities heading just one category of work will be improved so that they no longer become non-decent. Under this heading the standard says that properties must fail on three or more of the categories listed to become non-decent. In this way, although additional investment would still be required, the number of homes that are non-decent or could become non-decent can be reduced.

Using this approach, as of 2001 a total of £14 million was required to eliminate non-decent homes by 2010. However, this does not include the resources necessary to prevent properties becoming non-decent, although Appendix C shows the expenditure required taking into account properties likely to fail the standard before 2010. The first column in the table shows all the failures against the standard in 2001. Some properties may fail on several different criteria and as such totals cannot be cross-referenced with the total number of non-decent homes, because properties can only fail the standard once. The final column of Appendix C shows where expenditure will be programmed to meet decent homes target and this expenditure is contained within Appendix B.

Again, using this approach, together with current funding forecasts, it is expected that the decent homes targets can be reached through the capital investment already available. (See the next section for details of the Council's short and longer-term investment plans.) The next section also discusses the funding gap between the full level of maintenance work required under the stock condition survey and the Council's ability to fund improvements.

7.4 Measuring progress

The on-going stock condition surveys are updated on the Council stock attribute database. This data is also amended to include work already undertaken to the Council's stock as and when contracts are completed.

8. Resources & Expenditure Proposals

8.1 Financial

As highlighted earlier, there are a number of uncertainties over future projections of the financial resources likely to be made available. Repairs and Maintenance expenditure is currently funded through;

- Contributions from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to the Housing Repairs Fund (HRF)
- Transitional Capital Receipts
- Revenue Contributions to Capital Outlay (RCCO).
- Major Repairs Reserve (MRR)

The following issues are worthy of note at this stage:

The contribution from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has been set at approximately £6.00 million for 2008/9 and £5.6 million each year after that next 4-years.

Funding is provided from the MRR at £5.265 million for 2009/10, although this varies for the next 5 years as laid out in the table below.

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

FUNDING SOURCE	2009/10 £000's	2010/11 £000's	2011/12 £000's	2012/13 £000's	2013/14 £000's
MRR	5,265	3,608	3,921	4,373	4,321
RCCO	1,525	1,763	1,450	700	750
Leaseholder Contributions	50	50	50	50	50
Total	6,840	5,421	5,421	5,123	5,121

At the conclusion of the five-year period that the Council is forecast to have balances of approximately £8.8 million on the Major Repairs Reserve, which are not being allocated at this stage.

8.1.1 Overall Investment Strategy – 5 Year

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

- a) Achievement of government targets to reduce the number of non decent homes;
- b) To prevent homes from becoming non-decent; and
- c) The need to invest in the stock to improve its condition as determined by the on-going stock condition survey.

Appendix A adds together all anticipated capital expenditure for a 5-year period up to and including 2014/15.

SUMMARY OF THE HOUSING CAPITAL FIVE YEAR PROGRAMME

Detail	FORECAST SPENDING				
	2009/10 £000's	2010/11 £000's	2011/12 £000's	2012/13 £000's	2013/14 £000's
Future Planned Maintenance	2,473	2,410	2,410	2,410	2,410
Structural Schemes	405	635	635	635	635
Cyclical Maintenance	23	5	5	5	5
Small Capital Repairs (inc voids)	400	350	350	350	350
Cost Reflective Repairs	2,067	878	878	878	878
Non-cost Reflective Repairs	919	628	628	330	328
Disabled Adaptations	430	450	450	450	450
Others, including contingencies	123	65	65	65	65
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	6,840	5,421	5,421	5,123	5,121
TOTAL FUNDING, including M.R.R and Capital Receipts (excluding carry forwards)	6,840	5,421	5,421	5,123	5,121

The table compares the planned expenditure against the anticipated funding position and does not include the total expenditure or investment which is required for the stock, it simply shows how much can be funded. The achievement of decent homes targets, the priorities established by the stock condition survey and existing expenditure already approved and contained within housing budgets would require capital funding of approximately £40 million in total over the next five years. Current estimates show that around £29.5 million is likely to become available over the same time period through capital funding.

Revenue expenditure covering repairs, voids, cyclical maintenance and disabled adaptations is estimated at £5.8 million per annum. HRA contributions to the HRF will be able to support this expenditure.

8.1.2 Overall Investment Strategy – 30 years

Appendix B provides an analysis of capital, or investment expenditure, over a 30-year period. There are a considerable number of doubts over the validity of some of the projected figures over this period of time but nonetheless this table provides the best estimate given the information currently available. Using this information the available funding will not meet all requirements identified in the stock condition survey by approximately £28.2 million over the 30-year period. Five years ago, the Business Plan identified a funding gap of approximately £60m. This has reduced as a result of anticipated increased investment through capital receipts and the MRA. Again the funding gap is discussed more in the HRA Business Plan, which refers to the Stock Options Appraisal exercise.

The current revenue expenditure on repairs and maintenance can be maintained for a further 22 years before the HRA falls into deficit. This is covered within the HRA Business Plan.

8.1.3 Maximising Value

It is essential that the Council adopts a value for money approach so that resources can be used to maximum efficiency. To this end a strategy has been adopted which seeks the replacement of building components just before they break down. This is known as a 'just in time' strategy and is based on industry standard assessments for the lifetime of components. At the same time the lifespan of building components such as heating appliances are extended by the replacement of sub components where possible. The investment requirements outlined in this section are based in part on these strategies.

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

8.1.4 Efficiency Savings

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

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

8.2 Partnering – The Egan Approach

One difficulty experienced by the Council was finding reliable consultants to support the work of the Housing Assets Section. New methods of appointment were explored and the Council has approved the use of a partnering arrangement following the principles of the Egan Report.

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

8.3 Value for Money

8.3.1 Essex Hub – Essex wide procurement

In October 2006, the Council joined the "Essex Procurement Hub", which brings new opportunities to deliver greater value for money for the procurement of goods and services. The Hub works in two ways, one by combining the buying power of many Local Authorities across Essex to get lower costs through the economies of scale, and another by utilizing the expert knowledge and skills of the procurement team who prepare contracts, mainly as framework agreements and tender the works on behalf of the Council. This is a corporate initiative, which is now integrated into the Council's Contact Standing Orders. Housing Services consults the Procurement Hub whenever future contracts are to be let.

8.3.2 Benchmarking

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

It was clear that of the 20 Local Authorities that were compared, only 2 undertake the majority of their responsive repairs through a Building Maintenance Works Unit, whereas 5 operate their own Building Maintenance Works Unit alongside external contractors. There were 8 Local Authorities that outsourced their whole contracting element of the repairs service

Based on the Schedule of Rates comparison, it was suggested that on average, the Building

Maintenance Works Unit were securing keen material prices. However, on average the Schedule of rates were 1.64% higher than average. It was suggested that this was due to the relatively small scale of the Building Maintenance Works Unit in comparison to the other organisations included in the study.

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

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

Further benchmarking exercise of the whole of the Housing Service was undertaken using "Housemark", which is a national housing benchmarking organisation in Autumn 2006, and again in November 2008. These benchmarking exercise enabled us to compare our service based on detailed performance and cost data. In the main, the comparison organisations were housing associations rather than Local Authorities. However the results give a good indication of the level of performance and cost by comparison to others. A further benchmark exercise is due to take place once the External Repairs Management Contractor is appointed. This is to enable a more commercial look at the costs compared to the profit and loss accounts used in the commercial sector.

Benchmarking the Repairs and Maintenance Service is to be explored in more detail as part of the Value for Money Strategy

9. Risk Management

9.1 Introduction

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

9.2 Corporate Risk Register

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

9.3 Housing Risk Register

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

The Housing Risk Register has been developed by applying a risk analysis, whereby each of the identified risks are assessed in terms of likelihood and impact. "Likelihood" ranges from "very high" to "almost impossible" and "Impact" ranges from "catastrophic" to "negligible".

Risk management is applied to each of the identified risks, through exploring the best options to reduce either likelihood or impact or both. Not all risks can be reduced, but they can be managed.

The action plan for "critical" risks relating to Repairs and Maintenance are included in Section 9 of this Business Plan.

9.4 Key Housing Operational Risks – Repairs and Maintenance

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

- Failure to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010
- The HRA falling into deficit
- Disaster at a sheltered housing scheme or Homeless Persons Hostel
- Disaster at the Civic Offices or The Broadway Area Housing Office
- Major failure of the integrated housing IT system
- Loss or insolvency of, or poor performance by, a major contractor/supplier
- Major incident, involving death or serious injury, due to poor health and safety procedures, or breach of health and safety legislation
- Significant overspend on a major housing maintenance contract
- Fraud, corruption and theft
- Loss of important paper records
- Failure to comply with Government or legislative requirements
- Physical or verbal attacks on staff
- Uninsured losses, especially through subsidence, heave or landslip
- Catastrophic budget overspends

10. Strategies

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

	Strategy	Link with Corporate Objective/Guidance
A	Maintenance and Repair Programmes	
1	<p>To develop ongoing programmes of maintenance and repairs expenditure for a period, of five and 30 years based on:</p> <p>Projections of the amount of funding likely to be available for repairs and maintenance;</p> <p>The findings of the stock condition survey;</p> <p>The number of non decent homes and reasons for them being non decent;</p> <p>The need to eliminate non decent homes by 2010;</p> <p>Patterns of demand for responsive repairs;</p> <p>Key targets (see below);</p>	<p>ODPM Guidance on Business Plans</p> <p>EFDC Council Plan</p> <p>EFDC Performance Plan</p> <p>EFDC HECA Strategy</p> <p>EFDC Fuel Poverty Strategy</p> <p>Decent Homes Guidance</p> <p>Housing Services Risk Strategy</p> <p>Equalities Impact Assessments</p> <p>Housing Strategy</p>
2.	<p>To achieve the following key targets:</p> <p>Replace all existing warm air heating systems by 2010.</p> <p>Identify hard to heat properties and carry out additional insulation measures to improve the energy efficiency of the property.</p> <p>Average SAP rating of 69 by end of 2010</p> <p>Explore alternative fuel sources for properties in the rural communities where properties are harder to insulate and affordably heat.</p>	<p>EFDC Council Plan</p> <p>EFDC Performance Plan</p> <p>Housing Services Strategy on Energy Efficiency</p> <p>HECA Strategy</p> <p>EFDC Fuel Poverty Strategy</p>
3.	<p>To ensure maximum value for money from maintenance expenditure by:</p> <p>Extending the life cycle of building components as long a possible so that they are replaced 'just in time.'</p> <p>Using criteria for the replacement of sub components to extend the lifetime of heating systems, door entry systems, window units and other building components.</p>	<p>ODPM Guidance on Business Plans</p>

	Employing option appraisals where significant maintenance expenditure is required on a limited number of properties.	
B.	Responsive Repairs and Voids Work	
1.	To continue to reduce expenditure on voids in line with the recommendations of the Voids and Lettings Study by ensuring as much work takes place as possible through planned maintenance contracts.	Voids and Lettings Study
2.	To aim to spend the HRF allocation from the HRA each year whilst acknowledging the fluctuating nature of repairs and maintenance programmes.	EFDC Housing Strategy Housing Services Risk Strategy
3.	<p>To improve the all-round performance of the Repairs Service for our tenants and leaseholders.</p> <p>To combine the Housing Repairs Team and the Building Maintenance Works Unit</p> <p>To reduce the number of craft workers, but retaining a core to undertake a proportion of the day to day ad hoc repairs to the Council's Housing Stock, and/or those to void properties</p> <p>The balance of the work not undertaken directly by the Council being externalised via new or existing framework agreements.</p> <p>To appoint an Interim External Management Contractor to supervise the combined Building Maintenance Works Unit and Repairs Service, thus bringing in the added benefit of private sector knowledge and experience.</p>	Repairs Refresh Programme Continuous Improvement Plan
C.	Resources	
1.	<p>To maximise funding on maintenance expenditure by:</p> <p>Making use of available capital receipts where possible.</p> <p>Using RCCO where possible.</p> <p>Transferring approximately ££5.6 million from the HRA into the HRF each year for a further 4-years.</p>	Housing Services Risk Strategy Capital Strategy
2.	To review the level of staffing resources annually against the planned level of expenditure.	Repairs Refresh Programme Value for Money Strategy
3.	Monitor repairs and voids expenditure every six months to identify patterns in expenditure, which	

	could be incorporated into a planned maintenance programme through the use of new or existing framework agreements.	
D.	Tenant Consultation and Participation	
1.	To discuss expenditure plans and programmes of work with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation at least annually.	EFDC Tenant Participation Agreement
2.	To involve representatives of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation in discussions on new policies relating to the Repairs and Maintenance Services.	EFDC Tenant Participation Agreement Housing Services Risk Strategy
3.	To consult tenants affected by major improvement schemes over the proposals.	
4.	To consult leaseholders on all planned improvements in line with Leasehold legislation	
5.	To undertake a "Customer Perspective" review of the Repairs Service	Customer Perspective Programme
6.	To consult the Repairs and Maintenance Focus Group on the future of the R&M service.	Continuous Improvement Plan
E.	Contract Strategy	
1.	To roll out the use of either framework agreements in the form of Partnering contracts to new areas of work.	Value for Money Strategy Housing Services Risk Strategy
2.	To utilize the Essex Hub wherever possible to enter into framework agreements with (sub) contractors or suppliers.	Value for Money Strategy Contract Standing Orders
3.	To undertake, where appropriate, capital works using Contract Management methods in conjunction with our existing framework agreement sub-contractors so as to save paying overheads and profits to construction companies.	Value for Money Strategy Contract Standing Orders

11. Action plan

11.1 List of main actions flowing from the plan

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

Action	Officer responsible	Target date	Progress
1. Implement programme for repairs and maintenance expenditure over 5 and 30 years.	HAM ADoH(P)	Ongoing	Included in this plan
2. Implement upgrade to latest version of Codeman software	HAM	Sept 2011	Project to recommence via Northgate as the new IT provider.
3. To publish clear service standards for planned maintenance, Decent Homes, repairs, Right to Repairs and Leaseholder responsibilities, which are available in printed leaflet form and on the web site (Also relates to NI14 – Avoidable Contact Action Plan). To publish the Voids standards on the Web site and to issue a copy to all tenants in advance of them undertaking a viewing or a void offer. Undertake a review of the repairs responsibilities to ensure they dovetail with other service strategies ie ASBO, introductory tenancies, demoted tenancies	HAM CRM CRM	Dec 2010 Dec 2010 Dec 2010	To follow the outcome of the Customer Perspective programme. To follow the outcome of the Voids Working Group and the Customer Perspective programme. To be undertaken in conjunction with the Repairs Refresh Programme.
4. Timetable at least one meeting each year with the Tenants Federation to discuss the repairs and maintenance expenditure programme.	ADoH(P) HAM	Ongoing	Tenants Federation meet in March each year to consider the repairs and maintenance expenditure.
5. Introduce Asbestos record cards in all properties, and maintain the records for contactors and tenants use.	CRM	Apr 2011	Item previously deferred due to the restructure. To be undertaken in conjunction with the Repairs Refresh Programme.
6. Closer partnership working with ECC Social Care Occupational Therapists to better forward plan the budget required to meet the ongoing and future demand for disabled adaptations.	HAM	April 2011	
7. Explore options whereby emphasis is put on "fix first time" for responsive repairs.	CRM	Dec 2010	(a) To be undertaken in conjunction with the Repairs Refresh Programme.
Seek, through the Essex Hub, a framework agreement with specialist	HAM	March 2011	(b) Identified through Repairs Refresh

	contractors for asbestos removal, Door entry installations and maintenance, Drainage clearance as well as ad-hoc repairs where necessary			Programme. (UPVC window installation and maintenance contract let in 2009)
8.	To hold the first meeting of the Repairs Focus Group, consisting of tenants wanting to participate in shaping the way repairs and maintenance is carried out in the future. To continue with the Repairs Focus Group once set up, and create an action plan for inclusion in the Repairs Refresh Programme	ADoH (Prop)	March 2010	First meeting arranged.
9.	Continue feasibility studies into alternative fuel sources for properties in rural communities where mains gas is not available. To explore external wall insulation for solid wall constructed properties, and to seek grant funding to support future programmes To review all projects with a contract value in excess of £1m on completion to identify any lessons learnt.	HAM	April 2011	Replacing old electric storage heating with electric boilers incorporating traditional radiators have received positive tenant feedback. Solar heating panels installed in three property to map the benefits. Awaiting HEEP funding notification
10.		HAM	April 2011	
11.		HAM HRM	On-going	On-going
12.		HWO	April 2011	Identified through Repairs Refresh Programme. Target reduced from 8-weeks to 6-weeks in April 2008.
13.		HRM	April 2010	Restructure agreed. Jobs graded by the Job Evaluation Panel. New structure to be implemented in April 2010.
14.		HRM	Apr 2011	Agreed in principle. Officer working group set up to agree contract terms.
15.		ADoH(P)	Aug 2010	To be incorporated in Repairs Refresh Programme. EU advert placed, with 15 expressions of interest. Shortlisting taking place with a view to tender the appointment in April 2010.
		ERMC	Over a 3 year period after appointment.	

	<p>review of the current stores systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop better pricing models for works undertaken and where necessary recharged to ensure value for money. • Building the team to ensure excellent HR practices are used, which will build a skilled, high performance, customer focused and motivated team. • Introduce an IT system for developing an effective R&M service from the point of order to completion and post inspection actions. • To deliver a quality R&M service, taking account of the TSA Regulatory Framework. • To build the experience, competencies and knowledge to be able to take on new work streams in the future and to be commercially able to market services outside of the Council. • To implement a customer focused service by implementing a full appointment system, extended opening hours and to operate a discretionary service to undertake tenants responsibility repairs. • To reduce the number of jobs carried out as emergencies and urgent and bring the ratio of jobs to the recommended 10:20:70 for emergency, urgent and routine respectively. 		
16	To develop a Value for Money Strategy	ADoH (P)	March 2010
17	To develop a separate Repairs and Maintenance Service Strategy	ADoH (P)	July 2010
18.	To seek to include at least one local business on the list of tenderers for all future contracts.	HAM / HRM	On-going
			New at the request of the Tenant and Leaseholder Federation Meeting in 2009

Appendix A – 5-Year Capital Programme

HOUSING (HRA) PORTFOLIO CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2009/10 to 2013/14 5-YEAR FORECAST EXCLUDING CARRY FORWARDS

	2009/10 Revised Actual £000	2010/11 Forecast £000	2011/12 Forecast £000	2012/13 Forecast £000	2013/14 Forecast £000	5 Year Total £000
Housing Revenue Account						
Springfields, Sub Total (Works & Fees)	1,548	0	0	0	0	1,548
Boiler Replacements	310	300	300	300	300	1,510
New Heating Upgrades	450	739	726	722	617	3,254
MVHR / Ventilation Installations	16	40	40	40	40	176
Rewiring - (Kitchens & Bathrooms)	336	230	317	332	364	1,580
Rewiring - (Heating)	150	230	317	332	364	1,394
Central Heating/Rewiring Sub Total	1,262	1,539	1,700	1,727	1,686	7,913
PVCu Double Glazing / Door replacement	150	131	203	206	229	919
Roofing	522	539	528	605	409	2,602
Balcony Resurfacing	24	25	25	25	25	124
Asbestos Removal	52	115	115	115	115	512
Communal water tank renewals	120	67	80	83	81	431
Windows/Roof/Rewiring Sub Total	868	876	951	1,034	858	4,588
Norway House Improvements	50	50	50	50	50	250
Communal TV Upgrade/Other	35	100	0	0	0	135
Door Entry	14	26	18	35	104	196
Drainage Works	20	100	100	100	100	420
Energy Efficiency Works	160	200	200	200	200	960
Total Other Planned Maintenance	279	476	368	385	454	1,961
Total Planned Maintenance	3,957	2,891	3,019	3,145	2,998	16,010
Jubilee Court - Conversion of Warden Accom.	2	0	0	0	0	2
Parsonage Court - Conversion of Warden Accom.	139	0	0	0	0	139
Miscellaneous Structural Works	250	400	400	400	400	1,850
Total Structural Schemes	391	400	400	400	400	1,991
Small Capital Repairs	438	685	632	464	493	2,711
Kitchen & Bathroom Replacements	2,110	1,548	1,672	1,720	1,204	8,254
Total Cost Reflective Repairs	2,110	1,548	1,672	1,720	1,204	8,254
Fencing	22	15	15	15	15	82
Environmental Improvements - Shops	280	165	120	50	50	665
Off Street Parking	21	607	541	41	41	1,251
Estate Environment	112	102	102	102	100	518
Structural Watercourse Improvements	10	10	10	10	10	50
CCTV	34	50	50	50	50	234
Total Non-Cost Reflective Repairs	479	949	838	268	266	2,800
Welfare Heating	48	50	50	50	50	248
Other Disabled	534	400	400	400	400	2,134
Disabled Adaptations	582	450	450	450	450	2,382
External Lighting Schemes	32	5	5	5	5	52
Feasibilities	41	15	15	15	15	101
Other (New Roof Covering Loughton Way)	8	0	0	0	0	8
Careline Equipment Upgrade	50	0	0	0	0	50
Other Repairs & Maintenance	131	32	20	20	20	211
Contingency						0
TOTAL HRA	8,088	6,955	7,031	6,467	5,830	34,359
Housing DLO vehicles	55	50	50	50	50	255
TOTAL DLO	55	50	50	50	50	255

Appendix B – 30 Year Capital Programme

HOUSING (HRA) PORTFOLIO 30 YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME (EXCLUDING CARRY FORWARDS)							
	Years 1-5 £000	Years 6-10 £000	Years 11-15 £000	Years 16-20 £000	Years 21-25 £000	Years 26-30 £000	
1 Total Planned Maintenance	12,210	12,288	11,523	10,536	10,733	10,313	
Roofing	2,922	4,151	3,778	2,544	1,012	1,778	
Rewiring	1,686	1,498	768	996	1,482	1,888	
Window & door replacement	750	900	748	2,293	3,779	2,274	
Heating and boiler replacement	3,560	2,141	2,729	1,228	985	1,398	
Asbestos removal	582	575	575	575	575	575	
Drainage	500	500	500	500	500	500	
Energy efficiency	960	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,000	
Norway House improvements	250	250	250	250	250	250	
Door Entry Security	404	148	125	100	100	100	
Ventilation	176	250	250	250	250	250	
Communal water tank replacement	420	375	300	300	300	300	
2 Structural Schemes	2,963	711	928	1,168	1,369	1,639	
3 Cyclical Maintenance	52	75	75	75	75	75	
4 Small Capital Works	1,838	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	
5 Cost reflective improvements	5,622	1,800	2,250	3,550	2,020	1,650	
Kitchen & bathroom renewals	5,622	1,800	2,250	3,550	2,020	1,650	
6 Non-cost-reflective repairs	2,641	1,500	1,500	1,250	1,000	1,504	
7 Disabled Adaptations	2,182	2,321	2,962	3,780	4,825	6,158	
8 Other repairs and maintenance	58	500	500	500	500	500	
9 Feasibilities	101	75	75	75	75	75	
10 Housing DLO Vehicles	255	250	250	250	250	250	
11 Less income							
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	27,922	21,270	21,813	22,934	22,597	23,914	

Appendix C – Decent Homes Summary

Fails Decent Homes	Base Year Failures 2001 (Business Plan)		*Current Failures 2009/10		All Current and Potential 2010	
	1627		97		272	
Stock	7088		6559		6559	
Non-Decent homes as a % of total stock	22.95%		1.48%		4.15%	
Min. Fitness Standard	No. 8	£ 8,000	No. 0	£ -	No. 0	£ -
Key Building Components	688	1,140,100	158	432,800	462	1,266,300
Walls	6	1,500	24	60,000	36	90,000
Roof Cover	28	56,000	15	30,000	48	96,000
Chimneys	1	400	2	800	6	2,400
Heating	210	462,000	30	81,000	127	342,900
Electrics	443	620,200	87	261,000	245	735,000
Modern Facilities	1180	1,657,100	62	168,000	163	372,000
Kitchens	513	923,400	22	88,000	23	92,000
Bathrooms	667	733,700	40	80,000	140	280,000
Thermal Comfort	459	573,750	10	10,000	10	10,000
TOTALS	2,327	3,378,950	230	610,800	635	1,648,300

Glossary of Terms

Appendix 2

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

General Fund	The Council's financial account that deals with income and expenditure relating to all the Council's services, part of which is the ring fenced <i>HRA</i> .
Halifax House Price Index	A source of information, operated by the HBOS Bank, that provides details of average house prices and house price trends in local areas, based on information providing by mortgage applicants.
Housing association	See <i>Registered Social Landlord</i> .
Homes and Communities Agency	The Government agency that funds <i>registered social landlords (RSLs)</i> .
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	The Council's financial account, within the <i>General Fund</i> that deals with income and expenditure relating to the management and maintenance of the Council's housing stock.
Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan	An annual plan produced by the Council that analyses issues relating to the Council's own housing stock and sets out the objectives, targets, plans, income and expenditure for the management and maintenance of its housing stock over the next 5-30 years.
HRA subsidy	An annual revenue subsidy provided to local authorities by the Government to assist with the management and maintenance of their housing stock.
ISO 9001:2000	An internationally recognised system of ensuring the provision of quality services, that is checked by external assessors.
Major repairs allowance (MRA)	An annual Government subsidy given to local authorities to assist with the maintenance of their housing stock, calculated by a formula based on the type and age of the housing stock.
Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG)	The Government department that replaced the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and has responsibility for formulating and implementing the Government's housing policy at a national level and allocates resources for different national housing programmes.
Out of charge properties	Properties for which the Council cannot use for a long time, and for which no rent is being received.
Portfolio Holder	A senior councillor, who is a member of the <i>Cabinet</i> , responsible for specific areas of Council work (eg housing, finance etc). The Council has a number of portfolio holders, with the number reviewed each year.
Private Finance Initiative (PFI)	A way of enabling private companies to provide large amounts of money to construct or purchase public buildings, and then manage them over a long period, in return for a management fee paid by the public organisation responsible for providing the service.
Prudential borrowing	A new system being proposed by the Government, that would not restrict how much councils could borrow to fund capital expenditure. However, councils would only be able borrow money that they know they could pay back over the years of the loan, from their day-to-day income.
Registered Social Landlord (RSL)	A non-profit making organisation (usually a housing association) that is registered with, and regulated by, the <i>Housing Corporation</i> . They are run by a voluntary Board of Management, and employ professional housing officers to manage the organisation.
Rent restructuring and rent convergence	A Government requirement that all councils and <i>RSLs</i> must re-calculate their rent levels, by reference to individual property values, regional and national earnings, national average rent levels and numbers of bedrooms. Nationally, council and <i>RSLs</i> must also ensure that their rent levels are brought in line with each other by 2010.

Resource accounting	A way of accounting for income and expenditure, that takes into account the value of the assets (e.g. properties) and their depreciation.
Revenue contributions to capital outlay (RCCO)	Rental or other income used to pay for capital expenditure.
Right to Buy	A Government scheme that allows Council tenants, who have held tenancies for more than two years, to buy their own home from the Council. Discounts are currently given of up to £34,000, depending on how many years they have held tenancies.
Sheltered housing	Independent accommodation provided to elderly people, with support from a Scheme Manager and an emergency call facility, usually having a communal lounge facility.
Social exclusion	The situation where individuals, or groups of individuals, within the community do not have the means, material or otherwise to participate in social, economic, political or cultural life.
Social Housing – Existing Use Value	A way of valuing Council or housing association properties, taking into account the fact that the rents charged are much lower than for private properties.
Social Housing Grant (SHG)	Capital funding provided to <i>RSLs</i> by the <i>Housing Corporation</i> to enable them to build or acquire <i>affordable housing</i> .
Social inclusion	The process whereby people do not experience <i>social exclusion</i> .
Social landlords	Generally, <i>RSLs</i> and local authorities.
Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP)	A measure of how energy efficient a property is, between a score of 0 –120 (previously 0 –100). A score of 120 is the most energy efficient.
Stock condition survey	A survey of the inside and the outside of some of a council's properties, that gives an indication of the condition of all the properties
Stock Options Appraisal	A process to determine the most appropriate future ownership and management of the Council's housing stock.
Supported housing	Housing where the tenants need help – e.g. sheltered housing for the elderly or housing for people with physically disabled people.
Supporting People	A Government initiative introduced in April 2003, which brings together sources of funding for supported housing into county-wide “pots” for distribution to supported housing providers within the County, based on locally determined priorities, through agreed contracts. County-wide “commissioning bodies” produce Supporting People Strategies explaining how the funding will be distributed.
Supporting People Commissioning Team	The team of County Council officers responsible for managing and administering <i>Supporting People</i> at the county level.
Target rent	The individual rents for properties that councils and housing associations should aim to charge by 2012, based on a Government formula.
Tenant Services Authority	The Government Agency that regulates council and housing association landlords
Tenants participation compact / agreement (TPA)	Written agreements between <i>social landlords</i> and groups of tenants, at both district and estate level, setting out the agreed approach to tenant participation.

Contact List

Appendix 3

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CONTACTS Civic Offices, Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ

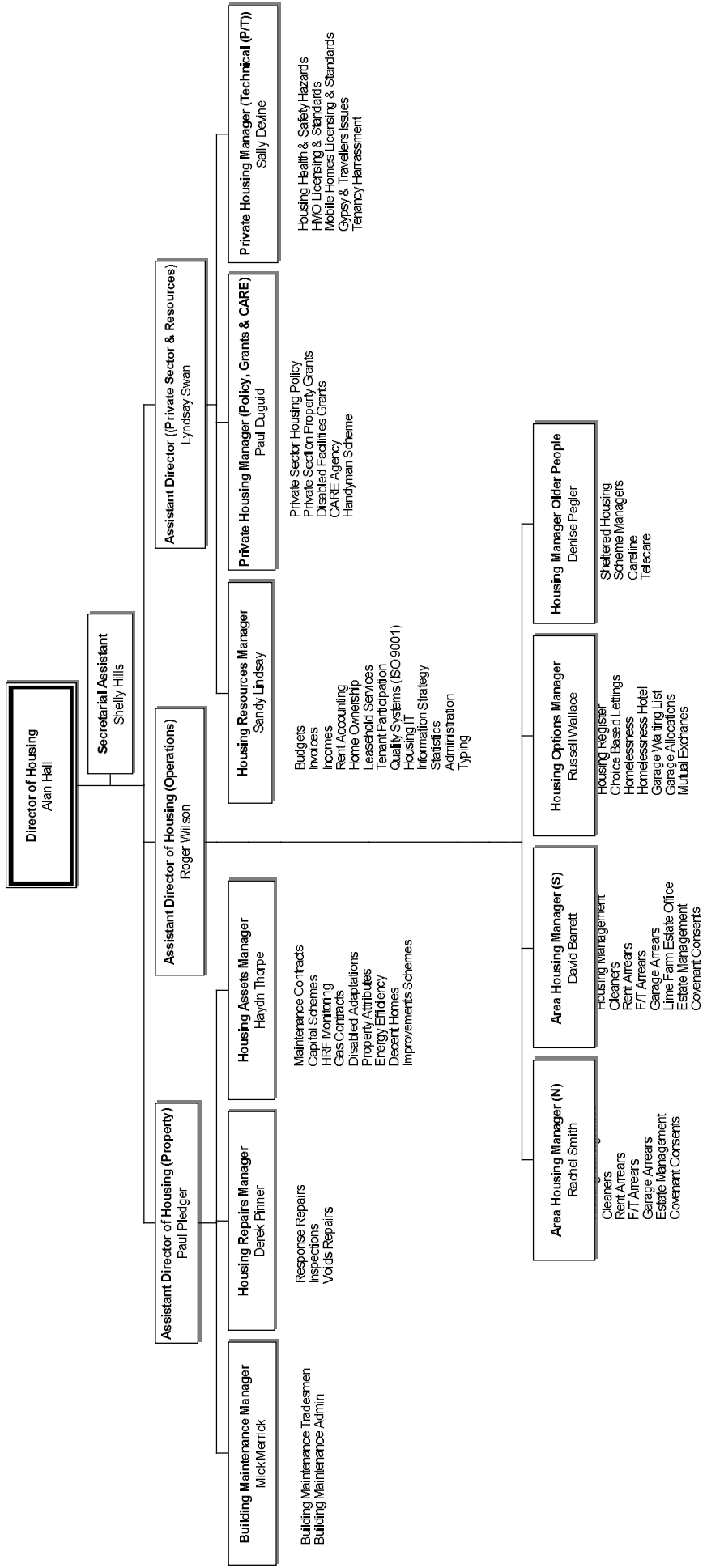
Subject	Name	Designation	Telephone	e-mail
Area Housing Office (North)	Rachel Smith	Area Housing Manager	01992 564005	rsmith@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Area Housing Office (South)	David Barrett	Area Housing Manager	01992 565183	dbarrett@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Careline Service	Denise Pegler	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	020 8508 8596	dpegler@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Chief Executive	Peter Haywood	Chief Executive	01992 564080	phaywood@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Council Plan	Steve Tautz	Senior Performance Management Officer	01992 564180	stautz@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Director of Housing	Alan Hall	Director of Housing	01992 564004	ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Energy Efficiency (Council Properties)	Haydn Thorpe	Housing Assets Manager	01992 564162	hthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
HRA Business Plan	Alan Hall	Director of Housing	01992 564004	ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Homelessness	Russell Wallace	Housing Options Manager	01992 564490	rwallace@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Housing Finance	Brian Molden	Principal Accountant	01992 564455	bmolden@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Housing Maintenance	Haydn Thorpe	Housing Assets Manager	01992 564162	hthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Housing Management	Roger Wilson	Asst Director of Housing (Operations)	01992 564419	rwilson@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Housing Portfolio Holder	Cllr David Stallan	Housing Portfolio Holder	01992 564004	ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Housing Repairs	Derek Pinner	Housing Repairs Manager	01992 564161	dpinner@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
House Sales	Marie Thorpe	Principal Housing Officer (Home Ownership)	01992 564015	mthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Housing Strategy	Alan Hall	Director of Housing	01992 564004	ahall@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Leasehold Services	Marie Thorpe	Principal Housing Officer (Home Ownership)	01992 564015	mthorpe@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Rents Administration & Strategy	Sandy Lindsay	Housing Resources Manager	01992 564035	slindsay@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Sheltered Housing	Denise Pegler	Housing Manager (Older Peoples Services)	020 8508 8596	dpegler@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Supporting People	Roger Wilson	Asst Director of Housing (Operations)	01992 564419	rwilson@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Tenant Participation	Richard Jones	Tenant Participation Officer	01992 565184	rjones@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

OTHER PARTNERS CONTACTS

Organisation	Contact	Tel. No	e-mail
Citizens Advice Bureau	Rachel Poulter	01992 574989	bureau@eppingcab.cabnet.org.uk
Voluntary Action Epping Forest	Jaqui Foile	01992 564178	jfoile@vaef.org.uk
Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation	Molly Carter	01992 564292	csobey@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Essex County Council Supporting People Team	Simon Harniess	01245 240020	simon.harniess@essexcc.gov.uk
GO-East	Dennis Roberts	01223 372500	dennis.roberts@goeast.gsi.gov.uk

Senior Management

Appendix 4



Appendix 5

National and Local Performance Indicators for HRA Landlord Services

Performance (2009/10 - Quarter 3) and Targets (2010/11)

National Indicators				
PI. No	Definition	Target (2009/10)	Actual (2009/10 – Q3)	Target (2010/11)
NI 156	Number of households living in temporary accommodation	100	51	60
NI 158	Percentage of non-decent Council homes	0 %	0 %	0 %
NI 160	Local Authority tenant satisfaction with landlord services	83 %	83 %	85 %
Local Indicators				
LPI 04	Rent collected as a proportion of rents owed on housing revenue account dwellings	98.8 %	97.2 %	97.0 %
LPI 05	Average number of days to re-let Council dwellings	40 days	30 days	30 days
LPI 07	Emergency repairs undertaken within target time (24 hours)	99 %	98 %	99 %
LPI 08	Urgent repairs undertaken within target time (within 5 working days)	95 %	94 %	95 %
LPI 09	Routine repairs undertaken within target time (6 weeks)	90 %	96 %	95 %
LPI 10	Satisfaction with repairs undertaken	98 %	98 %	98 %

