

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 29th July 2010

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr D. Stallan

**Subject: Housing Customer Perspective Programme
– Final Action Plan and Progress Report**

Officer contact for further information:

Alan Hall – Director of Housing (01992 56 4004)

Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Action Plan formulated through the Housing Customer Perspective Programme, and the associated current progress report, be considered, and that any comments on the Action Plan and Progress Report be made to the Director of Housing.

Report:

1. As a front line service of the Council, 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. The Housing Directorate's "customers" are predominantly (but not exclusively) tenants, leaseholders, housing applicants and landlords.
2. In March 2007, the Director of Housing introduced the Housing Customer Perspective Programme, which has been a major undertaking, but has now been completed. The basis of the Programme has been to consider all aspects of "interfaces" that individual sections of the Housing Directorate have with its customers, whether it be in person – at the Council's offices or elsewhere – by telephone, by e-mail, through the provision of written information or through letters.
3. Over the past three years, in a programmed way, existing housing policies, practices, information, documentation and standard letters - relating to all 9 sections of the Housing Directorate - have been discussed and challenged by a group, chaired by the Director of Housing, comprising Housing staff from all sections and the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. The following written material was circulated to members of the Group around 2 weeks before each meeting:
 - All information leaflets provided to customers
 - All forms completed by customers, including accompanying notes
 - All standard letters sent to customers
 - Hard copies of any pages on the Council's website dedicated to the function being challenged

4. The meetings were attended by the Housing Manager from the section whose function(s) were being challenged, who explained all the various customer interfaces in relation to the Section's work.
5. As a result of this process, the Group has formulated a Customer Perspective Action Plan, listing around 120 improvements to the way the Housing Directorate interfaces with its customers. A copy of the Action Plan, together with a progress report as at 6th July 2010 is attached as an Appendix for the Scrutiny Panel's consideration.
6. Although most of the identified actions have been completed, some are still outstanding, particularly those that are more recent or require more work. The outstanding tasks will be transferred to the Housing Continuous Improvement Plan, which will be closely monitored by senior housing officers on a quarterly basis.
7. The Scrutiny Panel is invited to consider the Action Plan and provide any comments to the Director of Housing.
8. The completed Action Plan will also be considered by the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation at its meeting on 20th July 2010, and any views the Federation may have will be reported orally at the meeting.

Reason for decision:

The Scrutiny Panel is charged with scrutinising the Housing Service, and it is felt appropriate that the Scrutiny Panel should consider the outcome of the Customer Perspective Programme.

Options considered and rejected:

To not report the Action Plan the meeting.

Consultation undertaken:

None

Resource implications:

Budget provision: Nil

Personnel: nil

Land: Nil

Corporate Plan reference: Housing

Relevant statutory powers: N/A

Background papers: Documents considered by the Group

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: None

Key Decision reference: N/A

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
Homelessness			
1) Redesign initial Homelessness "Triage" Form to: (a) Make it better visually; (b) Explain the purpose of the form and give an invitation of help to complete the form; and (c) Provide a closing paragraph explaining the next steps	Russell Wallace	31.12.07	Completed – January 2008
2) Request NACRO to amend and reprint its SAFE leaflet, since its needs updating and, currently, photocopies are given out that are not as professional looking as the original leaflets.	Russell Wallace	31.3.08	Completed – March 2008
3) Work with Relate to produce personalised leaflets, jointly branded, since the current leaflet is rather basic	Russell Wallace	31.1.08	Completed – February 2008
4) Combine private rented information and details of private letting agencies in one leaflet, to make it easier for customers to reference the information, and to help ensure that they read the information together	Russell Wallace	31.1.08	Completed – March 2008
5) Provide all leaflets to homeless applicants in an EFDC Housing Information Pack, to look more professional and to enable customers to keep the information in one wallet	Jenny Wilson	30.11.07	Completed – January 2008
6) Re-draft the follow-up homelessness letter that requests further information, to make it less brusque for customers to read	Jenny Wilson	31.12.07	Completed – December 2007

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
<p>7) Revise the standard homelessness decision letter, as follows, to make it more clearer for customers:</p> <p>(a) Combine the priority need criteria into one list (instead of two)</p> <p>(b) Clarify the issue of vulnerability</p> <p>(c) Embolden key points</p> <p>(d) Clarify the arrangements for requesting a review of the decision</p> <p>(e) Amend reference to the next steps for applicants in priority need and unintentionally homeless to make reference to the choice based lettings scheme</p>	Russell Wallace	31.12.07	Completed – December 2007
<p>8) Investigate cost and implementation issues of portable audio loop systems, for use in the interview rooms and elsewhere, to assist customers with hearing difficulties</p>	Chris Sobey	31.3.08	Completed - 2 portable audio loop systems have been provided in the interview rooms at the Civic Offices and The Broadway
<p>9) Undertake Homelessness Exit Survey, to obtain the views of customers on their experience of their visit to the Civic Offices, including interviews</p>	Russell Wallace	31.3.08	Completed - Undertaken between 3 rd March and 14 th March 2008
<p>10) Review homelessness information provided on the EFDC website, since it is not as comprehensive as the information provided in leaflets</p>	Chris Sobey / Russell Wallace	31.3.08	Completed – May 2008

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
--------	---------------------	--------	--

Temporary accommodation (e.g Norway House, B&B)

11) Produce a cardboard “Norway House Information Pack” wallet to hold all information leaflets about Norway House given to new residents, to look more professional and to enable residents to keep the documents together.	Chris Sobey	31.1.08	Completed – March 2008
12) Bring together all the information contained in Norway House leaflets into one glossy brochure, for which residents sign receipt, since residents are given lots of different information sheets – of varying – quality and are asked to sign confirmation of receipt many time	Chris Sobey / Russell Wallace	31.3.08	In progress – A folder has been produced to contain all information. The next stage is to produce a brochure. Russell to liaise with Chris to implement.
13) Include details of charges (eligible and ineligible) within the B & B Placement notification, since customers are not currently advised of this in writing.	Russell Wallace	31.12.08	Completed – December 2008

Housing Register, allocations, nominations, mobility schemes

14) Produce a leaflet on Jessopp Court for inclusion in the Housing Application Pack given to older people, to promote this extra care scheme that is provig difficult to let.	Chris Sobey	30.6.08	Completed – May 2008
--	-------------	---------	-----------------------------

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
15) Combine the HomeOption and housing application registration letter into one letter, to avoid customers receiving two separate letters, also explaining how to report changes in circumstances, which the letters do not currently do.	Russell Wallace	28.2.08	Completed – March 2008
16) Provide a sign at HomeOption Freesheet distribution points about the use of the website, to encourage use of the website	Chris Sobey	28.2.08	Completed – April 2008
17) Survey distribution points for HomeOption Freesheets and consider need for redistribution from low to high demand sites, or additional printing, to ensure that there are sufficient copies available at all sites	Russell Wallace	31.1.08	In progress - Tracy Selley will be meeting shortly with other councils in the Herts & Essex Housing Options Consortium where the issue of distribution will be discussed. Note that one Council within the Consortium no longer distributes a Freesheet.
18) Change terminology in Allocations Scheme, leaflets and letters from “Strong” and “Additional Preference” for medical reasons to “Strong” and “Moderate”, for easier understanding by customers	Russell Wallace	31.3.08	In progress – Roger Wilson asked to amend the wording when the Allocations Scheme is next reviewed and revised in September 2010.
19) Change opening paragraph of standard tenancy offer to explain its being made following their successful expression of interest under the Home Option Scheme, to update the letter to reflect choice based lettings.	Russell Wallace	31.1.08	Completed – March 2008
20) Update the paragraph on the standard information given with offers relating to the financial incentive to move to smaller accommodation, to reflect the Cabinet’s recent changes to the incentive scheme	Russell Wallace	31.1.08	Completed – January 2008

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
--------	---------------------	--------	--

Garage Waiting List and garage allocations

21) Ensure that the garage tenancy conditions included in the garage leaflet are the same as the separate list of garage tenancy conditions, since there are currently some differences	Chris Sobey	31.3.08	Completed – February 2009
22) Include a paragraph in the standard garage offer letter, emphasising that the garage should only be used to store a motor vehicle, since there is an increasing problem with unauthorised uses and customers need to be fully aware of this requirement from the outset, in case subsequent action is taken.	Russell Wallace	29.2.08	Completed – April 2008

Estate Management

23) Include a highways form with letters to applicants when giving permission for vehicular crossovers, to avoid the customer having to make another contact (with Highways) to obtain a form	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	29.2.08	Not actioned - Essex Highways has advised that they prefer to keep their packs/forms separate for monitoring purposes
24) Embolden the paragraph in the letter that explains the need for covenant approval, which advises the occupier that it is in their interests to seek covenant approval – to emphasise the importance of this advice to the customer.	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	29.2.08	Completed – February 2008

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
25) Advise the Home Ownership Team that, on receipt of applications to purchase housing land, they should always check with Legal from the outset to ascertain whether the Council owns the land and if there are any relevant covenants, to avoid problems or disappointment for the customer at a later stage in the process if the land is not Council-owned	David Barrett	29.2.08	Not applicable – Since this is undertaken within the existing procedure.
26) Include contact details for Planning in the letter to tenants giving permission for satellite aerials	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	29.2.08	Completed – February 2008
Rent Arrears Management			
27) Delete Christian names from salutation for standard rent arrears letters (eg, “Dear John Smith”)	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	30.6.08	Completed – May 2008
28) Refer to availability of housing benefit within all standard rent arrears letter	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	30.6.08	Not implemented - In view of the number of letters involved. It is felt that there is adequate advice/assistance within the Council’s recovery procedures.
29) Amend standard letter relating to breach of agreement to ensure that all deadlines are the same and clear (currently two separate deadlines in the same letter)	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	30.6.08	Completed – June 2008
30) When referring to the use of “tolerated trespassers” and “mesne profits” in letters, especially for the first time, include an explanation of the effect of being a tolerated trespasser (particularly loss of rights) and what mesne profits are respectively.	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	30.6.08	Completed – June 2008

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
--------	---------------------	--------	--

Tenancy Management

31) Include item in next Housing News, advising tenants who temporarily leave their property for a length of time to notify their housing management officer	Chris Sobey	30.9.08	Completed – September 2008
32) Include reference in the Assignment procedure, leaflet and letters that, where under-occupation results, occupiers should be encouraged to move to smaller accommodation, with EFDC's assistance	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	31.7.08	Completed – Although there are no leaflets or relevant letters, the Work Instruction has been revised to ensure the assignee is advised.
33) Update the succession procedure, and advise all housing management officers, about the effect of successor tenants providing care and support to the late tenant, before their death	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	30.5.08	Completed – June 2008
34) Reword letter to under-occupying successor tenants about the need to move, in a more compassionate and understanding tone.	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	30.6.08	Not necessary – An alternative letter is already available
35) Update procedure on succession, explaining that homosexual couples are treated to be treated, in law, in the same way as a spouse.	David Barrett / Nich Taylor	30.6.08	Completed – August 2008

The Broadway

36) Investigate the provision of a publicly accessible PC in the Reception, giving access to the choice based lettings and Homeswapper websites	Roger Wilson	30.9.08	Completed – January 2009
---	--------------	---------	---------------------------------

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
37) Investigate the feasibility of the Housing Benefits Section providing a “Housing Benefit Surgery” at the office, in order to provide a more localised and responsive housing benefits service.	David Barrett	30.9.08	In Progress – This was also recommended as part of the external Benefits Inspection in 2009. Consideration is being given to the provision of a “one stop shop” as part of the Broadway Regeneration Scheme, which would include a benefits presence.
Limes Farm Housing Office (specific issues)			
38) Investigate the provision of a publicly accessible PC in the Reception, giving access to the choice based lettings and Homeswapper websites	Roger Wilson	30.9.08	Completed – February 2009
39) Investigate the feasibility of the Housing Benefits Section providing a “Housing Benefit Surgery” at the office, in order to provide a more localised and responsive housing benefits service.	David Barrett	30.9.08	Completed – March 2010 It has been agreed that there will be a joint housing management / housing benefits office at the new Limes Farm Community Centre, to be completed by March 2011 and funded by the Council with some external funding.
Council Switchboard Service			
40) Provide telephonists with the two A-Z Guides to Housing	Chris Sobey	30.6.08	Completed – September 2008
41) Ensure that telephonists asks more questions of customers about the “housing query” to ensure that customers are put through to the right section first time	Angelo Stephen	31.7.08	Not actioned - Angelo Stephen has advised this is not possible, due to effect on response times.

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
42) Ensure that Housing Managers inform Switchboard when they send out bulk letters and are expecting lots of calls, so that the Switchboard are prepared and can staff up accordingly. This is to ensure that customers do not have to hold on too long.	Alan Hall	31.7.08	Completed - Discussed at Housing Directorate Group meeting on 3 rd July 2008
Council (Epping) Reception Service			
43) Discuss with Russell Wallace arrangements for Reception staff to be notified of homelessness appointments (names, times and officer's name), so that Reception can advise officers direct. This will result in customers being expected at Reception and also not having to report again to another reception (Housing Needs Desk)	Jane Boreham	31.7.08	Completed – July 2008
44) Ask Finance if Epping Cashiers can provide rent account numbers and rent balances to customers, to avoid customers having to report back to the Epping Reception and wait for a Housing Officer to attend	Alan Hall	30.6.08	Not actioned – An e-mail was sent to Rob Pavey – June 2008. A number of difficulties were highlighted in response and it was agreed that it was not worth pursuing any further
45) Request Housing Managers to advise staff that customers with children should bring their children into interview rooms with them, and not leave them in the reception area unaccompanied, for the safety of the children and to avoid other customers being affected by noisy/unruly behaviour	Alan Hall	31.7.08	Completed - Discussed held at Housing Directorate Group meeting on 3 rd July 2008

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
46) Ensure that receptionists obtain sufficient information from visitors, including name, address and nature of enquiry before asking housing officers to attend. This is to ensure that the customer is seen first time by the right person	Jane Boreham	30.6.08	Not necessary - Jane Boreham advised that Information staff already do this. However, there are occasions when tenants do not wish to share this information.
Housing Repairs & Voids			
47) Promote “Repairs Direct” facility on website in the next issue of Housing News, to ensure that customers are aware of this useful facility, that is available 24/7	Chris Sobey	31.7.08	Completed – October 2009
48) Amend repair notification to customers (when next updated) signposting them to the Tenants Handbook to obtain more information about the Right to Repair, to ensure that customers are aware of their repair rights	Barry Lampard (previously Derek Pinner)	30.9.08	No Progress – Due to the restructure of the Housing Repairs Service and lack of managerial staff. New target date is December 2010
49) Promote the Tenants Right to Compensation for Improvements Scheme in the next issue of Housing News, to ensure that tenants are aware of this right	Chris Sobey	31.7.08	Completed - March 2009
50) Check if reference to tenants’ eligibility to compensation is included in standard letters giving permission for improvements.	Damian Ghela	30.6.08	Completed – June 2008. Damian Ghela confirms that this information is already included
51) Add results from tenants satisfaction surveys of repairs undertaken by external contractors to the quarterly performance management reports, to ensure that this is properly monitored and can be compared with satisfaction with the Council’s own DSO.	Barry Lampard (previously Derek Pinner)	30.9.08	No Progress – Due to the restructure of the Housing Repairs Service and the lack of managerial staff. New target date is July 2010

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
52) Amend the Void Property Tenants Satisfaction Forms to delete reference to accompanied viewings, to avoid confusion amongst customers	Barry Lampard (previously Derek Pinner)	30.9.08	No Progress – Due to the restructure of the Housing Repairs Service and the lack of managerial staff. New target date is July 2010
Planned and cyclical contracts			
53) Delete <i>detailed</i> reference to leaseholder legislation from consultation letters to leaseholders regarding major works, in order to make the letters more reader friendly	Haydn Thorpe	31.3.09	In progress - Haydn Thorpe to produce draft letter and seek advice on layout with Legal Services.
Disabled adaptations			
54) Check the member decision and policy relating to the cost, above which disabled adaptations will not be undertaken for under-occupying tenants. Sample letters currently refer to a £2,000 maximum; the Director of Housing believes that the maximum is £15,000.	Haydn Thorpe	28.2.09	Completed - Haydn Thorpe confirmed that the £2,000 maximum referred to in the letter is correct.
55) Discuss with the Housing Options Manager, the possibility of a Housing Options Officer visiting under-occupying tenants who have been refused adaptations because of the cost, in order to discuss options for moving to smaller accommodation	Alan Hall	28.2.09	Completed - Russell Wallace confirms that Housing Options Officers will visit. Will liaise with Haydn Thorpe
56) If, as result of (56) above, a Housing Options Officer can visit under-occupying tenants, make reference to this arrangement in the letter to tenants explaining that adaptations cannot be undertaken	Haydn Thorpe	31.3.09	Completed - Haydn Thorpe confirmed that the letters have been amended to reflect the actions. The letters contain the contact details for R. Wallace.

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
57) Revise the standard letter to under-occupying tenants refusing to undertake adaptations, to be more clearer and more friendly, explaining the reasons for the Council's policy	Haydn Thorpe	31.3.09	Completed - Haydn Thorpe confirmed that the letters have been amended to reflect the actions.
58) In the letter to tenants explaining that improvements will not be undertaken (e.g. due to rent arrears): a) Give the name of the Housing Management Officer and their telephone number; b) Advise that EFDC will do the work when they have cleared the arrears c) Advise the tenant to contact the Housing Assets Section when the arrears are cleared d) Move the location of the officer's telephone number to the correct position.	Haydn Thorpe	31.3.09	Completed - Haydn Thorpe confirmed that the letters have been amended to reflect the actions.
59) In the letter to tenants explaining that their adaptation will not be undertaken until next year, due to lack of budget; a) Apologise for not being able to undertake it this year; b) Refer to the high demand for adaptations; c) That we have increased the budget a number of occasions over recent years, but the demand has increased more; and d) Explain we have to do adaptations in date order, to be fair to those who have waited the longest	Haydn Thorpe	31.3.09	Completed - Haydn Thorpe confirmed that the letters have been amended to reflect the actions.

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
60) Meet with OT Manager to request that OTs prioritise disabled adaptations (1 – 3), to ensure that those in most need are dealt with first	Haydn Thorpe	30.4.09	Not required – Haydn advises that All OT recommendations made to the council are already categorised, as a priority ‘A’ adaptation. Further prioritisation, given the length of the waiting list would result in some adaptations not being completed.
Internal decorations for the elderly			
61) Discuss at next HDG Meeting, whether decorations should be undertaken in 2 bed properties	Alan Hall	5.3.09	Completed – Discussed at HDG on 5 th March 2009. Agreed that Haydn Thorpe should draft a report recommending that decorations should be extended to older people in 2 bed properties
62) Provide Alan Hall with details of nos. seeking internal decorations for HDG discussion	Haydn Thorpe	28.2.09	Completed - Haydn Thorpe emailed details to Alan Hall on the 2 March 2009.
63) Include an item in the next Housing News about internal decorations, in order to raise awareness	Chris Sobey	31.3.09	Completed – October 2009
64) Consider whether a payment of £3 per roll of wallpaper purchased by tenants themselves is now sufficient, in the light of inflation since the figure was first agreed.	Haydn Thorpe	28.2.09	Completed - Haydn Thorpe confirmed that the allowance of £3 is currently in the schedule of rates for DSO internal decorating works.
Gas servicing, repairs and installations			
65) Improve the grammar in the letter to tenants from gas contractors providing appointments for 2 nd visits	Haydn Thorpe	31.3.09	Completed - Haydn Thorpe tabled the amended letter at Gas Core Group Meeting

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
--------	---------------------	--------	--

Energy efficiency schemes

None

Other Housing Maintenance

66) Ensure that recognised tenants associations are informed of proposed works involving leaseholders, in accordance with legislation.	Haydn Thorpe	31.3.09	In Progress
67) Ensure that housing management officers can access maintenance programmes on the network, and advise them accordingly, in order for HMOs to be aware of planned works in their area.	Haydn Thorpe	28.2.09	Completed - However, it is difficult to view maintenance programmes as programmes are identified by work type and not by property address. Haydn Thorpe confirmed that some capital programmes are included on the OHMS system and it is planned to increase this method of programming.

Sheltered housing

68) Amend sheltered housing leaflet (when reprinted) to explain that an assessment of applicants for sheltered housing will be undertaken for eligibility, to ensure that applicants are aware of the process	Denise Pegler	31.12.10	No progress yet – This will be amended and re-printed in 2010/11
---	---------------	----------	---

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
69) Ensure that all housing offices and information offices has leaflets on sheltered housing, to maximise publicity	Denise Pegler	31.5.09	Completed – June 2009
70) Arrange for Housing Assets Section to have leaflets about sheltered housing and Careline, to give to older people if appropriate when assessing for internal decorations	Denise Pegler	31.5.09	Completed – June 2009
71) Produce poster on sheltered housing, referring to the regular availability of vacancies, and distribute to various locations	Chris Sobey	31.7.09	No progress to date
72) Amend In Depth Assessment Form from asking questions about the current condition to questions about their ability to cope, to enable a better dialogue with applicants on their abilities	Denise Pegler	31.7.09	Completed – July 2009
73) Revise the information on “Duties of a Scheme Manager” and “Housing Management Officer” to be more customer-focussed and less clinical	Denise Pegler	31.7.09	In progress - Both documents have been updated – amended versions to be inserted in the Welcome Pack when updated
74) When reprinted, remove date from the Welcome to Sheltered Housing Information Wallet	Chris Sobey	30.9.09	No progress – To be removed when the Welcome to Sheltered Housing Pack is updated
Careline			
75) Combine the Private and Joint-Funded Careline Application Forms into one form, to avoid confusion fro applicants on which one to complete.	Denise Pegler	31.7.09	Completed – August 2009

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
76) Relocate explanation about VAT exemption from the bottom to the top of the form, to give greater prominence to this important information	Denise Pegler	31.7.09	Completed – July 2009
77) Emphasise on the form that the eligibility criteria for VAT exemption is HMRC's and not the Council's	Denise Pegler	31.7.09	Completed – September 2009
78) Provide HMRC's website and telephone contact details on the form, to enable applicants to obtain more information about eligibility if required	Denise Pegler	31.7.09	Completed - July 2009
79) Revise wording for the Terms and Conditions leaflet to provide the information in plainer English, or provide a separate plain English guide, to ensure that vulnerable applicants can understand the terms and conditions	Denise Pegler	30.9.09	Completed - October 2009
80) Revise the Keyholder Agreement, to explain the purpose at the beginning of the document	Denise Pegler	30.9.09	Completed – October 2009
81) Change reference to the "Finance Cabinet Committee" on the charge increase letter to "Council"	Denise Pegler	31.7.09	Completed – August 2009
Housing rents			
82) Circulate details to Area Housing Managers about how text payments can be used to pay rent, so that they can publicise its use	Chris Sobey	31.10.09	Completed – May 2010
83) Add reference to supporting people charges/changes on the "standard" rent change letter, to make the charges clearer to tenants.	Sandy Lindsay	28.2.10	In Progress – Angie Preston to discuss with Roger Wilson the required wording – To be completed by end of July 2010.

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
84) Increase the font size of rent change and leasehold charges letter to 11 point, to make the letters easier to read, especially those with sight difficulties	Sandy Lindsay	28.2.10	Completed - This was undertaken in February 2010 for the 2010/11 rent increase notifications.
85) Consider whether or not EFDC should provide refunds to people who are not executors, to ensure that deceased tenants' money is distributed to the right person. If such refunds are not made, ensure that a similar approach is taken in both Area Housing Offices, to ensure consistency	Rachel Smith	31.10.09	In Progress - Research was undertaken and completed in August 2009. Subsequent discussions were held with Housing Resources in September 2009. Council Tax has also been consulted who are in the process of rewriting procedures in connection with the way Finance deals with refunds to deceased residents. The aim is that Finance and Housing adopt consistent procedures regarding refunds in respect of the deceased.
Housing invoices			
None			
Right to buy			
86) Delete reference to EFDC not undertaking repairs when RTB applications are submitted, since this is contrary to the Landlord and Tenant Act, but make it clear that no improvements will be undertaken whilst the RTB application is being progressed, to ensure that tenants are fully aware of this EFDC policy	S. Lindsay	31.10.09	Completed – In April 2010

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
87) Provide more explanation to RTB applicants about the importance of stating all improvements that they have undertaken themselves on their application form, since it could affect the valuation – to the benefit of the applicant.	S. Lindsay	31.10.09	Completed – In April 2010
88) Amend the standard letter to RTB applicants about the required survey, to refer to it being sent out after the offer letter (and not after the purchase), to make it clearer to applicants	S. Lindsay	31.10.09	Completed – In September 2009
Small land sales			
89) Amend the letter to applicants seeking to purchase land, by deleting reference to the need to seek the agreement of their ward member and stating that their ward member will be consulted on the proposal, so that the procedure is correctly explained to the applicant	S. Lindsay	31.10.09	Completed – In April 2010
Leasehold services			
90) Explain the reason for service charge refunds in service charge refund letters, to make the reason clear to leaseholders.	S. Lindsay	31.10.09	Completed – In April 2010
91) Change the contact name to Haydn Thorpe for maintenance queries related to leasehold properties, to ensure that leaseholders speak to the right person on first enquiry.	S. Lindsay	31.10.09	Completed – October 2009. Each letter has the name of the appropriate contact officer

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
92) Change into plain English references to the “S20 Consultation Procedure” in letters to leaseholders about the estimated costs for planned works, so that the reasons and procedures relating to the required consultation are more understandable to leaseholders.	S. Lindsay	31.10.09	<p>Under discussion with Legal – An additional paragraph needs to be added within the letter, according to the work being undertaken, to make it clear. However, there are concerns that changing the wording on the Section 20 letter may result in the Council not complying with legislation.</p> <p>Director of Housing has asked S. Lindsay to discuss further with C. Sobey and A. Mitchell to endeavour to meet with the Group’s suggestion, whilst ensuring that the Council complies with legislative requirements.</p> <p>With C.Sobey to refer to Legal to clarify that the letters meet requirements.</p> <p>New target date - September 2010</p>
93) In response to letters from leaseholders advising EFDC that they will be sub-letting their properties, instead of suggesting that leaseholders should advise EFDC’s Insurance Section, introduce a procedure for leasehold officer to advise the Insurance Section, to provide a “one stop” notification to avoid the leaseholder unnecessary inconvenience.	S. Lindsay	31.10.09	Completed – In April 2010
94) Improve the presentation of the “Summary of Rights and Obligations”, to make it clearer to the customer	C. Sobey	31.12.09	<p>In progress – The Housing Resources Manager has advised that the Summary of Rights and Obligations cannot be changed . However, Chris Sobey will add headings and improve presentation.</p> <p>Revised target date – September 2010</p>

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
--------	---------------------	--------	--

Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest (C.A.R.E.) Service

95) Correct references on some documents from “Caring and Repairing in Epping” to “Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest”, to make it clear to customers that the service covers the whole of the Epping Forest District, not just the town of Epping.	P. Duguid	30.6.10	Completed – May 2010
96) Change references from “Environmental Services” to “Housing Directorate” on all C.A.R.E. letterheads, so that it is clear to customers which directorate is responsible for the service.	P. Duguid	31.8.10	Completed – May 2010 All letters now show ‘Housing Directorate’
97) Arrange for the C.A.R.E. Advisory Panel to consider the current fees of 5% and 10% (dependent on the service provided) to ensure that the fee income is appropriate and sufficient, with any resultant increase being used to make the C.A.R.E. Service more viable, for the benefit of future users.	P. Duguid	31.8.10	In Progress - The next C.A.R.E. Advisory Panel meeting is programmed for 29 July 2010. This matter will be raised within the agenda.
98) Arrange for the C.A.R.E. Advisory Panel to consider whether or not a charge should be made to unsuccessful grant applicants, to meet C.A.R.E.’s costs for the abortive work, to make the C.A.R.E Service more viable, for the benefit of future users.	P. Duguid	31.8.10	In Progress - The next C.A.R.E. Advisory Panel meeting is programmed for 29 July 2010. This matter will be raised within the agenda.
99) Ensure that all letter to customers are in both large print and Arial (not Times New) Roman, to assist customers with poor sight	P. Duguid	30.6.10	Completed – May 2010 (and ongoing). An instruction has been made to all Private sector staff regarding correspondence.

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
100) Collect and record equality and diversity information relating to customers, both at the C.A.R.E. application stage and as part of the Client Evaluation Survey, in order to obtain a greater understanding of clients diverse needs.	P. Duguid	31.8.10	In Progress
101) Check whether or not the Defects Liability Period for contracts supervised by C.A.R.E. should be for 6 months (as currently stated) or for 12 months (as understood by technical members of the Group), to ensure that C.A.R.E. monitors customers' defects for the correct period	P. Duguid	31.5.10	Completed – May 2010 6 months is the minimum period for defects to workmanship and shall be kept for private contracts. Materials, fitted appliances etc carry separate guarantees.
Discretionary Grants for non-Council Occupiers			
102) Check if the a copy of the Initial Assessment Form is available on the Council's website, to ensure maximum accessibility for potential applicants	P. Duguid	31.5.10	No Progress
103) Arrange for the (important) Initial Assessment Form to be re-designed into a more attractive format using desk-top-publishing, to maximise the interest of potential applicants and to give confidence that their grant application will be considered in a professional way.	P. Duguid	31.8.10	No Progress
104) Before re-designing the Initial Assessment Form (103 above), check to ensure that no changes or updates are required to the form, to ensure that the Council collects are the required information from applicants to efficiently and effectively process their application.	P. Duguid	30.6.10	No Progress

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
105) Include an Equality and Diversity Form with the Initial Assessment Form, in order to collect “baseline” information on equality and diversity, compare with the diversity of successful applicants and ensure that the service is meeting applicants’ diverse needs and there is no direct or indirect discrimination.	P. Duguid	31.8.10	In Progress – This will be concluded shortly with input from Lyndsay Swan / Barbara Copson who are currently reviewing existing Equality and Diversity.
106) Change references to “Environmental Services” on the Decent Homes leaflet to “Housing Directorate” to ensure that applicants are aware of the directorate responsible	P. Duguid	31.8.10	No Progress - This will be addressed for the next batch for reprinting.
107) Produce an attractive, cardboard Private Housing Grants Information Folder to enable all the relevant leaflets sent to applicants to be brought together.	P. Duguid	30.9.10	No Progress
108) Re-format the small number of existing A4 size leaflets into an A5 format, so that all leaflets are in the same size, for ease of use by applicants.	P. Duguid	30.9.10	No Progress
109) Housing Assets to produce a leaflet explaining the Decent Homes Standard for Council tenants, in a similar format as the private sector housing leaflet, so that easy-to-read information about the Standard can be provided to Council tenants when required.	H. Thorpe	30.9.10	No Progress
110) Change references to e-mail address of information@eppingforestdc.gov.uk on all literature to the general e-mail address set up for private sector housing, so that applicants’ enquiries are directed straight to private sector housing staff, thereby reducing response times to applicants.	P. Duguid	31.8.10	In Progress

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
111) Delete use of <i>italicised</i> print in all leaflets (when re-printed), in accordance with the Plain English Campaign's guidance, to assist those applicants with reading difficulties and poor sight.	P. Duguid	30.9.10	Completed – May 2010
112) After collecting equality and diversity information at the Initial Assessment Form stage (see 105 above), record this data in relation to enquiries that lead to a formal application and, subsequently, a grant approval, to enable periodic analyses to be undertaken, to ensure that no direct or indirect discrimination occurs.	P. Duguid	30.9.10	In Progress – See 105 above
Private Sector Housing (Technical)			
113) Introduce Customer Satisfaction forms for completion by both tenants and landlords, to obtain feedback on how their issue had been handled, to further improve the service in the future	S. Devine	31.8.10	New Action - Added 6.7.10
114) Introduce a “No Access Card” to be left at residents’ homes, asking them to contact the officer that had called, instead of continuing with the current practice of posting a business card through the letter box with a request to make contact.	S. Devine	31.8.10	New Action - Added 6.7.10
115) Improve the private sector housing pages of EFDC's website, to increase significantly the amount of information that users can obtain and download, to improve accessibility to the service.	S. Devine	31.12.10	New Action - Added 6.7.10

Customer Perspective Programme – Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Target	Progress (as at 6 th July 2010)
116) Ensure that 11 Point font is generally used for all formal Notices, to ensure that they are easily readable, with 12 Point font used when the recipient is known to be elderly and/or have poor eyesight	S. Devine	31.7.10	New Action - Added 6.7.10
117) Amend reference to “Social Services” within standard letters to “Adult Social Care” to ensure that the current terminology is used.	S. Devine	31.8.10	New Action - Added 6.7.10
118) Revise the section within the HMO Licensing Guidance relating to “households”, to make the explanation clearer	S. Devine	31.8.10	New Action – Added 6.7.10