

**EPPING FOREST
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**DRAFT COUNCIL PLAN
2006-2010**

Contents

Section A – Cover (Page 1)

Section B – Contents Page (Page 2)

Section C – Leader’s Introduction (Page 3)

Section D – District Profile (Page 5)

Section E – Background To The Council Plan (Page 8)

Section F – Strategic Direction (Page 10)

Section G – Evidence Sources (Page 12)

Section H – Priorities (Page 15)

Section I – Resource Management, Partners and Portfolios (Page 25)

Section J – Measuring Performance (Page 29)

Section K – Action Plan (Page 31)

SECTION C – LEADER’S INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

- 1.1 Over recent years it has become more important than ever for councils to provide high quality services, and local authorities are increasingly expected to prioritise and address those issues that have a real impact upon residents and quality of life.
- 1.2 Epping Forest District Council is committed to improving all that we provide. We want to be a responsive authority that listens to your concerns and improves services. This Council Plan highlights our main priorities for the next four years that provide the framework within which we will make improvements and strive to become a top performing authority. No local authority can serve its residents successfully without a plan for the future and, as our vision is to develop and promote the Epping Forest District as a safe, healthy and attractive place in which to live and work. The council will continue to preserve the natural environment and heritage of the district whilst also developing and improving opportunities for all of our residents and customers.
- 1.3 Through consultation we have established your main concerns and have developed our strategic priorities for the future. To ensure that these priorities are addressed effectively, we have developed aims on a thematic basis in line with the Community Strategy for the district. This Council Plan follows this thematic approach and highlights key aims designed to aid the achievement of our corporate goals, and allows us to more effectively identify and address many vital cross-cutting issues that are important to you. It is our aim to continue to ensure that you receive the best services that meet the changing needs of local people at a price you can afford.
- 1.4 As residents of the district, we want you to know that every effort will be made to provide high quality services that are open, accessible and accountable. However, we cannot do this by ourselves. A high level of public involvement will be required in the future, as will continued partnership working with other public and private organisations, the voluntary sector and local communities, to secure our vision and values and the long-term future of the district.
- 1.5 The council has welcomed its community leadership responsibilities and took the lead in the establishment of the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), a partnership of all the statutory and voluntary agencies that work in the district, to develop the Community Strategy. The council has, and will continue to, respond to the important issues facing the district. Further partnership working is the key to resolving such issues, as many of these focus on areas where the council has only a supporting responsibility.
- 1.6 We believe that everybody in the Epping Forest District should enjoy the best quality of life and hope that you will join us in making this possible.

**Councillor John Knapman
Leader of the Council**

SECTION D – DISTRICT PROFILE

2. THE EPPING FOREST DISTRICT

- 2.1 Epping Forest is a contrasting mixture of urban and rural life, covering 34,500 hectares. The district has six main centres of population (Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell, Epping, Loughton, Chipping Ongar and Waltham Abbey) and numerous picturesque villages and hamlets, but no natural centre. The majority of the district lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt, designed to restrict the spread of London into the home counties.
- 2.2 The district has a population of 120,89, compared with 116,000 in 1991. Over 40% of the population live in the southwest of the district (Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and Loughton). The population is ageing, with the 2001 Census profile showing a reduction of under fives and an increase in over seventy-fives. There is a small (5%) ethnic minority population but we have the largest number of travellers in Essex stationed on unauthorised encampments and approved sites.
- 2.3 The district has boundaries with four London Boroughs and a number of Essex and Hertfordshire districts, and overall, the district is seen as an affluent and prosperous area of large houses and wealth. Unemployment is low, and the 2004 Index of Local Deprivation ranked the district as 234th least deprived of the 354 local authority areas in England and Wales.
- 2.4 There is constant pressure for development in the countryside. The Council's planning policies have traditionally been directed towards resisting encroachment into the Green Belt, but this protection is being challenged by Government proposals for significant housing development in the London (M11)-Stansted-Cambridge corridor growth area, and the regeneration of the neighbouring district of Harlow.
- 2.5 The district is home to a number of places of special interest, including the world's oldest timber-framed church at Greensted, the former Royal Gunpowder Mills site at Waltham Abbey now a centre for leisure and tourism, and an historic wartime airfield at North Weald that has been owned and managed by the Council for recreation since 1980, and is our most significant land asset and the venue of the largest regular outdoor market in Europe. The Council owns local leisure facilities in four of our main population centres, the newest of which is Loughton Leisure Centre, the majority of which are managed on its behalf by SLM Limited.
- 2.6 Within the district there are twenty-five conservation areas and over fifteen hundred listed buildings, which is the fourth highest total in Essex. The Council's countryside management service, Epping Forest Countryside, maintains the natural environment of the district for the benefit of local people and wildlife, and areas of parkland and natural beauty such as the Lea Valley Regional Park, the Roding Valley and Epping Forest itself, provide plentiful opportunities for informal sport and leisure.
- 2.7 There are seven Central Line underground stations and one village served by a main-line railway station within the district. The redundant section of the Central

Line running westwards from Epping and the former underground stations at North Weald, Blake Hall and Ongar may assume future importance as strategic transport routes, as part of the government's proposals for housing development. The district is quartered by the M11 and M25 motorways, but has only two full and one restricted access junctions to these routes. Bus services are poor in rural areas and car ownership in the district is high (47,996 households with one car or more).

- 2.8 Extremely high local property prices as a result of the proximity of the district to London and Stansted Airport, force indigenous young adults to leave the district to secure cheaper accommodation elsewhere. As an employer, the Council has difficulties in recruiting staff due to the high housing costs and our proximity to London, where comparable local authority positions can attract higher salaries. We currently provide a modest level of key worker housing, to assist local public sector organisations with their recruitment difficulties. There are small and medium-sized businesses in many urban and rural sites, with larger businesses are concentrated on industrial estates at Loughton, North Weald and Waltham Abbey.
- 2.9 The Council has always regarded the continued provision and support of affordable housing as a key priority and currently manages and maintains its own housing stock, consisting of approximately 7,000 residential dwellings, 770 leasehold properties and a homeless persons' hostel. Local planning guidance requires developers to provide 30% affordable housing on all large-scale residential developments. For many years Registered Social Landlords have been given Social Housing Grant and free land to enable the development of affordable housing for allocation to applicants on our Housing Register. The Council's housing stock represents approximately 15% of the total social housing stock within the district.
- 2.10 The Council was formed in 1974 and has fifty-eight Councillors elected for a period of four years. The authority currently has no overall control and consists of 26 Conservative, 14 Liberal Democrat, 4 Labour, 4 Independent 1 Independent Socialist, 6 Loughton Residents' Association and 3 British National Party members. The Council has been politically balanced for thirteen years and all committees, including Cabinet have pro-rata membership. The authority introduced a Leader and Cabinet system of decision-making in May 2002 and our nine Portfolio Holders are appointed on a pro-rata basis, covering the thematic responsibilities of our Council Plan and Best Value Performance Plan (People First, Community Wellbeing, Planning and Economic Development, Housing, Leisure, Environmental Protection, Civil Engineering and Maintenance, Finance and Performance Management, Corporate Support Services and Communications and E-Government).
- 2.11 The district is fully parished, with twenty-four town and parish councils. The development of three-tier liaison is of particular importance to the Council. We have a positive attitude to public participation, and have introduced public speaking arrangements at the District Development Control Committee and four area-based sub-committees that deal principally with development control matters. Public questions are welcomed at full Council meetings.
- 2.12 The Council works effectively with its partners on many crosscutting initiatives to deliver service improvements. We see partnerships as an effective way of

enhancing service provision, or of providing facilities where none currently exist and are recognised by our partners as being outwardly focussed and concerned for our customers. We have achieved good levels of customer satisfaction in the provision of our services, and are also committed to serving our residents in areas where we have no statutory responsibility, such as children and young people. We have achieved a number of awards such as Charter Marks and the Investors in People accreditation that highlight our focus on meeting the needs of our citizens.

- 2.13 The Council is committed to its community leadership responsibilities and took the lead in the formation of the LSP, which developed the Community Strategy for the Epping Forest District. The Council has, and will continue, to respond to issues facing the district. Further partnership working is the key to resolving such issues, as many of these will focus on areas where the Council has only a supporting responsibility.
- 2.14 The Council employs over seven hundred staff, organised into two arms, Community Services and Resources, each headed by a Joint Chief Executive who together form the Council's corporate Management Board. Nine Heads of Service, together with the Management Board, constitute the Senior Management Team. The Council is committed to the provision of quality services for its customers. However, the context in which we have to operate, such as the rural/urban mixture of the district, the lack of a single focal centre of the district, the high level of property prices, and our ability to recruit and retain suitable staff present significant challenges.

SECTION E – BACKGROUND TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

3. THE COUNCIL PLAN 2006 – 2010

- 3.1 The Council Plan sets out our priorities and aims for the next four years. This new Council Plan gives us the opportunity to identify and promote the key aims that will build upon our successes and take us forward from 2005 to 2009. This document replaces the previous Council Plan issued during 2003, which was intended to be in force until 2007. We have issued a new edition of the plan at this time to reflect our recent progress, the results of our first Comprehensive Performance Assessment, and new duties and responsibilities given to us by the government.
- 3.2 The Council Plan does not cover everything that we do, but focuses on those issues that matter most to people, national priorities set by the government and local challenges arising from the social, economic and environmental context of the Epping Forest District. As a strategic document, the Council Plan does not contain specific information on the wide range of services that we already provide, or how we deliver statutory duties or enforce legislation. Details of our areas of individual service provision can be found in the annual service business plans available from our Performance Management Unit (Telephone 01992565180 or email bestvalue@eppingforestdc.gov.uk).
- 3.3 The new Council Plan also recognises the aspirations of the Community Strategy for the district, which was published during 2004 by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The Community Strategy addresses the key challenges facing the district over the next sixteen years, including significant housing growth and its potential impact on the environment, and issues such as local transport provision. The LSP carried out extensive consultation with residents and stakeholders to produce the strategy, and will monitor the progress of its constituent agencies in achieving the aims of the Community Strategy.
- 3.4 The Council Plan is a key component of our Performance Management Framework, which links the strategic priorities of the council to the activities of our staff. The Framework includes indicators and systems for improving services, our performance and the way we work, to enable us to measure how we are doing and alert us when corrective action required to bring under-performance back into line.
- 3.5 We want Epping Forest District Council to be a high performing local authority that delivers top-quality services in the most cost effective way, and to ensure that the views and priorities of the users and recipients of our services are integral to everything that we do. Our Customer Charter underpins the culture that we are striving to achieve, and we aim for the council to be well run, open and accountable. Through effective leadership and the provision of quality services we will tackle the problems and opportunities facing the district either ourselves or in partnership with others.

- 3.6 To achieve excellence we will continue to review the effectiveness of our services, to ensure that we provide value for money and minimise the Council Tax burden on our residents. The Audit Commission, an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, assesses us as a 'good' performing authority in its Comprehensive Performance Assessment undertaken in February 2004, and we want this to improve. In order to achieve excellence we are focusing on areas in which we are currently performing less well, in order to achieve improvements in service delivery.
- 3.7 The objectives contained in this Council Plan can best be achieved through joint working and partnership involving the council and the local community. We all have a part to play in ensuring that Epping Forest is a district that people will want to live and work in and an area that we can be proud of.
- 3.8 This Council Plan follows a thematic approach based on the Community Strategy, which allows us to be flexible and to address the issues that matter most to our customers. The Council Plan will be formally reviewed each year to ensure continued appropriateness, having regard to changing issues and the progress that we make.
- 3.9 This Council Plan has been subject to consultation with residents and a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies operating in the Epping Forest District. The Plan may be inspected at our information centres and additional copies can be obtained from the Performance Management Unit or our website www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk.

SECTION F – STRATEGIC DIRECTION

4. STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE EPPING FOREST DISTRICT

Our Vision

- 4.1 We want the Epping Forest District to be a safe, healthy and attractive place in which to live and work. This is our vision and overall strategic aim for the district for the next four years
- 4.2 Our district is a mixture of suburban commuter belt and beautiful countryside. In the past we have sought to maintain its' special character by carefully limiting development. Due to the housing pressures faced in the south east of England we have been set high targets for new housing. Our district has a great many natural advantages. We want to preserve and enhance these, whilst recognising the need for managed, sustainable development where necessary. We want to ensure that our communities are safe places, with good housing, leisure and employment opportunities. The council is committed to listening to the views of local people and has a range of mechanisms in place to engage local communities. Residents of the district have indicated that these are core concerns and these issues have been reflected in the Community Strategy for the district.
- 4.3 The Community Strategy sets out visions for the future of the District on a thematic basis designed to improve the overall quality of life for our residents. In this Council Plan and our annual Best Value Performance Plan we have linked the way in which we provide services and how we can contribute to the achievement of the Community Strategy as a leader, partner or influencer of action, to the following themes of the Strategy where we have specific responsibilities:

Green and Unique – Ensuring the protection of the unique, green and sustainable environment the district;

Homes and Neighbourhoods - Ensuring that the district has decent housing and clean and attractive neighbourhoods;

A Safe Community - Ensuring that residents of the district can enjoy local amenities with little fear of being a victim of crime;

Fit for Life - Ensuring that residents of the district lead a healthy lifestyle by having access to effective, high quality leisure and cultural services;

Economic Prosperity - Ensuring that the district has a thriving and sustainable economy.

- 4.4 Other themes of the Community Strategy cover issues such as 'Getting About' and 'Lifelong Learning'. These are areas where Essex County Council generally has responsibility and will act as leader and influencer of action to achieve aims of the Strategy. Copies of the Community Strategy can be obtained from the Community

Strategy and Partnerships Manager by contacting (01992) 564423 or email msheriff@eppingforestcvs.org

- 4.5 The council's strategic aim has been developed with reference to issues such as the views of local people, the current social and economic profile of the district, the pressures and aspirations facing the south-east of England, and central government priorities that we are required to address. The aim reflects the concerns of our residents and the major challenges facing the district over the forthcoming years. All of our plans for the next four years will be aligned to this aim and a separate plan called the Best Value Performance Plan is produced annually to detail how we are going to achieve targets for each of the four years that the Council Plan covers.
- 4.6 We have adopted our strategic aim to provide focus, direction and priority for the services and activities that matter most to you over the next four years. This aim represents the common core interests of the council, which currently has no overall political control, and seeks to ensure that we concentrate on those matters that are important and will help us to direct and allocate resources appropriately.

Our Customer Charter

- 4.7 We have developed our Customer Charter to let you know the overall standards that you can expect from the council and how we will work to provide the best services for the district that we can. We will:
- Consult with our customers, listen to what they say, and respond in the best way we can;
 - Be open in all financial matters, and always remember we are spending public money;
 - Constantly search for ways in which we can improve our services;
 - Respond to changes which affect our customers;
 - Be open and honest in all our dealings, and treat everyone equally and fairly;
 - Strive towards excellence in all our services, and provide the best value available;
 - Invest in our staff through training and development so we can provide the best service; and
 - Do our best to care for the environment for today and for the future.

SECTION G – EVIDENCE SOURCES

5. THE GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY OF THE EPPING FOREST DISTRICT

5.1 In the preparation of this new Council Plan, we have had recourse to the views of residents in relation to the services that we provide, and a number of sources of factual data and information about the geography and demography of the district, in order to determine our strategic direction for the next four years.

Public Opinion

5.2 We regularly consult our community about our plans, priorities and services, both in relation to corporate and issue specific matters.

5.3 In 2003 we carried out a survey of a random sample of residents asking what they thought of our services and the quality of life in the district. The main findings of this survey in relation to overall customer satisfaction were:

- 54% of respondents were satisfied with the way the authority runs things;
- 63% of respondents were satisfied with the cleanliness of the district;
- 86% of respondents were satisfied with waste collection facilities;
- 78% of respondents were satisfied with local waste recycling facilities;
- 47% of respondents were satisfied with the district's sports and leisure facilities;
- 73% of respondents were satisfied with the district's parks and open spaces.

5.4 The survey also sought information on the factors most often chosen as important in making somewhere a good place to live were, the main findings of this element of the survey were:

- Low level of crime (chosen by 73% of respondents);
- Clean streets (52%); and
- Health services (50%).

5.5 The survey also identified that the things that respondents considered most need improving in the district were:

- Road and pavement repairs (highlighted by 50% of respondents);
- Activities for teenagers (45%);
- Level of traffic congestion (40%);
- Level of crime (38%); and
- Clean streets (34%).

What do these customer satisfaction results tell us?

5.6 Several of the issues raised in the survey are matters over which the Council has no control or influence, such as wage levels and the local cost of living. Since the survey was conducted responsibility for highway services has transferred to Essex

County Council, and we now only have some discretionary powers over local roads and footpaths. Some of the issues raised in the survey such as crime and activities for teenagers are matters in which the Council has no direct responsibility, but works in partnership with other agencies.

- 5.7 The customer satisfaction surveys tell us that that the key expectations of the public are that the council is competent in providing value for money core services that impact directly on the area in which they live, such as waste management, street cleansing and repair and community safety. However, we need to do better in a range of issues, some of which we will achieve jointly with the Local Strategic Partnership.
- 5.8 We have used the results of the most recent surveys to identify relevant priorities for the next four years. The full results of the survey are available on our website www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk or from the Performance Management Unit. The survey will be undertaken again during 2006/07.

Performance Indicators

- 5.9 We monitor our performance throughout each year against a range of Performance Indicators. Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) are set by the Government across the range of local government services such as waste, planning, benefits and housing, to reflect national priorities. Local Performance Indicators (LPIs) are adopted by the council to reflect its own priorities and help demonstrate how it is responding to local issues.
- 5.10 We have used the most recent audited BVPI and LPI results (2003/04) to identify relevant priorities for the next four years.

Census

- 5.11 A Census is a survey of all people and households in the country. It provides essential planning information from the national to neighbourhood level for government, business, and the community. The census is undertaken every ten years.
- 5.12 The most recent Census was held on 29 April 2001, and the next will be held in 2011. Full details of the national 2001 Census results and specific findings for the Epping Forest District can be obtained from the Office of National Statistics (www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/census2001.asp).
- 5.13 We have used the results of the most recent Census to identify relevant priorities for the next four years.

Index of Deprivation

- 5.14 The Index of Multiple Deprivation measures multiple deprivation at the local area level. Levels of deprivation for each local authority area are assessed by the government on the basis of income, employment, health, education and skills, barriers to service access, crime and disorder, the environment, and deprivation affecting children and older people.

- 5.15 We have used the results of an updating to the Index of Multiple Deprivation completed by the Government during 2004, to identify relevant priorities for the next four years.

Area Profile

- 5.16 An Area Profile for the Epping Forest District was produced by the Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in 2004, bringing together key learning and skills information about the district from a variety of sources, in order to provide an understanding of the learning and skills needs of people and employers in the district.

Community Strategy

- 5.17 We share and fully support the overall aim of the Community Strategy to build strong communities by placing local people at the heart of local service planning and improving life in the Epping Forest District, and the Council Plan sets out the key issues that we will concentrate upon until 2009. The Plan recognises the work of the Local Strategic Partnership and the Community Strategy, and aims has to dovetail the activities of the council with the ambitions and action plans set out in the strategy.

Local Area Agreement

- 5.18 Councils and their partners have been given greater freedom to explore local solutions to local problems, under a system of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). LAAs are intended to simplify funding streams, join up public services and give councils and other local delivery partners more flexibility. The Agreements are structured around three key themes: children and young people; safer and stronger communities; and health and older people. Essex County Council and the district and borough councils in the county are currently developing the first countywide LAA, and are negotiating targets and outcomes for specific actions within these areas.
- 5.19 We report on our progress in meeting the Council's LAA targets in our annual Best Value Performance Plan.

SECTION H – PRIORITIES

6. THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES 2006-2010

- 6.1 Beneath our vision and strategic aim lie individual priorities. These priorities are set out in this section of this Council Plan, and are linked to themes of the Community Strategy where we have specific responsibilities or provide statutory services. This part of the Plan highlights the issues that have led and informed the development of our individual priorities for the next four years, which are set out in the action plan to be found later in this document.

7. Green And Unique

- 7.1 Our priority is to maintain the special character and advantage of the district and to address local environmental issues.
- 7.2 The environment of the district is an important and valuable asset, which contributes positively to all our lives. The Council is committed to protecting and conserving the natural and built environment, addressing inequalities in services that arise from the geography of the district, meeting the needs of all of our diverse communities, and promoting the minimisation, reuse and recycling of waste.

Green and Unique issues

- 7.3 The main Green and Unique issues affecting the Epping Forest District are:
- The majority of the area lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt;
 - The district has a population of 120,896, which is estimated to grow to 128,000 by 2011 (Source: 2001 Census);
 - The district is of a mixed urban and rural nature;
 - There is a small (5%) ethnic minority population in the district (Source: 2001 Census);
 - The government is currently proposing major housing development in the countryside of the district (Source: East of England Regional Plan (RSS14));
 - The proposed regeneration and growth of Harlow and the expansion of Stansted Airport;
 - We are struggling to meet our statutory targets for the recycling of waste;

What these issues tell us

- 7.4 These issues tell us the following about the District:

- The Green Belt designation of much of the district leads to constant and significant development pressure;
- The council's traditional stance of Green Belt protection is being challenged by development and regeneration proposals affecting the district;
- Significant population growth in the district over the next ten years will require the provision of additional levels of housing and significantly enhance infrastructure.
- The district has no natural centre of population and varying levels of transport and communication links, including seven underground stations, a rural village served by a main-line railway station and sections of the M11 and M25 motorways. Bus services are poor in rural areas placing a reliance on cars and potentially leading to exclusion for young people or those without their own transport;
- The district has a lower than average ethnic minority population but has a large traveller community, resulting in a possibility that minority community residents do not have adequate opportunity to inform council policy or receive adequate service provision;
- Increased efforts need to be made to encourage residents to reduce and recycle waste, and to promote the use of sustainable resources;

What we have achieved

7.5 We have already achieved the following in respect of these priority issues:

- We have influenced regional planning guidance to secure a 7,000 dwelling reduction in the total number of new homes proposed to be built in the district in future years;
- We have participated in an Audit Commission assessment of the way in which we engage with all of our communities;
- We have developed a Race Equality Scheme and are reviewing each of our services to assess whether they appropriately meet the needs of the ethnic minority residents of the district;
- We have introduced new waste collection and recycling services through the use of wheeled bins and the fortnightly collection of non-recyclable waste, to encourage residents to produce less waste and improve our recycling performance;

What we want to achieve

7.6 Over the course of the next four years we want to achieve the following in respect of these priority issues. These aims are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan.

- We want to further reduce the number of new homes that the government proposes be built within the Green Belt areas of the district, and to protect the unique character of the area for future generations;
- We want to implement the recommendations of the Audit Commission assessment and adopt a new Consultation Strategy to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to inform our policies and service provision;
- We want to complete the impact assessment of all of our services and plan future service provision in the light of our findings;
- We want to improve our recycling performance to exceed our statutory targets;

8. Homes and Neighbourhoods

8.1 Our priority is to facilitate and where appropriate provide decent housing and clean and attractive neighbourhoods that meet the needs of those who want to live in the district.

8.2 Everyone needs a satisfactory affordable home in order to enjoy quality of life, and the standard of housing is a major determinant of people's health. The Epping Forest District has a shortage of development land that places severe environmental constraints on our ability to address the full range of housing needs. The Council manages its own public housing stock and works with other partner registered social landlords to provide affordable housing.

8.3 The Council believes that decent, affordable housing is the minimum requirement for everyone and seeks to achieve this by investing in its own stock, supporting people to stay in their homes and promoting the development of affordable housing. As local planning authority, the Council endeavours to plan or anticipated housing needs of the right mix and in the right locations.

8.4 *Text to be added here around neighbourhood issues.*

Homes and Neighbourhoods issues

8.5 The main Homes and Neighbourhoods issues affecting the Epping Forest District are:

- A Housing Needs Survey undertaken in 2003 established that around 665 new affordable properties per annum were required over the following five years to meet both the current and anticipated housing need over that period. There are currently over 3,000 households on the Council's Housing Register;

- Homelessness is a problem. We currently have over 200 households in temporary accommodation and, at any one time, around 24 single households in bed and breakfast accommodation;
- Our latest Housing Needs Survey told us that around 9,000 households in the District (18%) have somebody with some form of disability. Many of these people are in accommodation that does not meet their special needs, and action needs to be taken to enable them to either have a better quality of life in their existing homes or provide more suitable alternative housing;
- Around 17.5% of the housing within the District is either unfit or in substantial disrepair. Around 4% of all the homes in the District are empty at any one time;
- Around 7.5% of the Council's own properties do not meet the Government's Decent Home Standard; the Government requires us to ensure that all our homes meet the Standard by 2021.

What these issues tell us

8.6 These issues tell us the following about Homes and Neighbourhoods in the District:

- There is a significant unmet need for affordable housing in the district for families and single people on low incomes;
- The geographical location of the district, its proximity to London and its picturesque nature, together with constraints on development in the Metropolitan Green Belt, have resulted in local house prices rising disproportionately to wage levels;
- Local people can no longer afford to live in parts of the district due to high house prices;

What we have achieved

8.7 We have already achieved the following in respect of these priority issues:

- Registered Social Landlords have been given Social Housing Grant and free land by the council to enable the development of affordable housing for allocation to applicants on the council's Housing Register;
- Developers are required to provide 30% affordable housing on all large-scale residential developments in the district for rent to applicants on our housing waiting list;
- We have considered options and consulted our tenants on the future delivery of our housing services, including the possible transfer of the housing stock to a registered social landlord, and have decided to retain the management of the stock in-house.

What we want to achieve

8.8 Over the course of the next four years we want to achieve the following in respect of these priority issues. These aims are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan.

- To ensure that the growth in the number of homes within Epping Forest is properly planned, in a sustainable way, and meets the District's overall housing needs.
- To assess the District's current and future housing needs, and to plan and facilitate ways to meet those housing needs
- To manage and maintain the Council's own housing stock effectively and efficiently and ensure that all the Council's tenants live in a decent home

9. A Safe Community

9.1 Our priority is to tackle crime and disorder and create safe communities in the Epping Forest District.

9.2 The district is a relatively safe place in which to live and work and although some areas have more crime than others, it has its share of anti-social behaviour and maintaining standards of civil behaviour is a challenge. The Council works closely with other local agencies to develop joint community safety priorities through the Epping Forest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, which aim to improve the quality of life in the district for our residents, visitors and businesses.

Safe Community Issues

9.3 One of the ways in which crime levels across the Epping Forest District are assessed is by a set of indicators that measure the number of specific offences such as robbery, violence and vehicle crime taking place each year for every 1,000 households or people in the district. During 2003/04:

- 15.98 domestic burglaries were committed per 1,000 households, compared with the average for the eastern region of England of 9.5 and a national average of 14.5 (Source: BVPI Results 2003/04);
- 9.07 violent offences were committed in a public place per 1,000 people, compared with a regional average of 8.7 and a national average of 10.1 (Source: BVPI Results 2003/04);
- 13.77 vehicle crimes were committed per 1,000 people compared with a regional average of 10.6 and a national average of 14.5 (Source: BVPI Results 2003/04).

What these issues tell us

9.4 These issues tell us the following about crime and disorder in the District:

- Although incidences of robbery and burglary in the Epping Forest District are relatively low when compared with local authorities across England, the District has the highest level of such crimes amongst a group of fifteen comparable local authority areas in the south and east of the country.
- The level of incidences of criminal damage and theft in the district is the fourth best amongst the same comparable authorities.

What we have achieved

9.5 We have already achieved the following in respect of these priority issues:

- We have funded the appointment of six Police Community Support Officers to work in the district from August 2005.
- The Epping Forest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership has used measures such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and CCTV to combat crime and anti-social behaviour in the district, and also offers advice on issues such as bogus callers, domestic violence and hate crime.
- A number of services are available free of charge to the public, including graffiti removal and a home safety scheme for the over-60s.

What we want to achieve

9.6 Over the course of the next four years we want to achieve the following in respect of these priority issues. These aims are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan.

- *Detail to be added here*

10. Fit For Life

10.1 Our priority is to address leisure need in the district and to promote a good standard of health for our residents.

10.2 We believe that people who live and work in Epping Forest should be able to access healthy living choices in order to ensure a good standard of health. The full spectrum of leisure opportunities from sport and physical activity through the arts to entertainment and events is important to enriching the quality of life and, although the Council does not have a statutory responsibility to provide leisure and cultural facilities, this is a key priority for achieving the aim of the Community Strategy for local people to live a healthy lifestyle.

10.3 The Council encourages improvements in the health of the whole community and works closely with the Epping Forest Primary Care Trust and other agencies to ensure that appropriate health care services are provided in the district. Leisure and cultural facilities are also essential features of a healthy and vibrant area, and make a significant contribution to personal wellbeing and quality of life.

Fit for Life Issues

10.4 The main Fit for Life issues affecting the Epping Forest District are:

- The council owns leisure centres and facilities in Epping, Loughton, Ongar and Waltham Abbey that provide good proximity of services to the majority of the population;
- 71.75% of the population of the district were in good health, compared with a regional level 70.35% and a national total of 68.55% (Source: 2001 Census);
- 7.41% of the population of the district were not in good health, compared with a regional level 7.60% and a national total of 9.22% (Source: 2001 Census);
- 15.49% of the population of the district had a limiting long-term illness, compared with a regional level 16.21% and a national total of 18.23% (Source: 2001 Census).

What these issues tell us

10.5 These issues tell us the following about Fit for Life in the Epping Forest district;

- The limitations of existing public transport services can deter or make it difficult for residents of the rural parts of the district from using the services provided at the councils leisure facilities;
- The overall health of residents of the district is generally above national averages.

What we have achieved

10.6 We have already achieved the following in respect of these priority issues:

- We have completed the development of a new swimming pool and leisure centre complex at Loughton, jointly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Sport England;
- We have entered into a ?? year agreement with SLM Limited for the management of our leisure centres in Epping, Loughton and Ongar, to provide increased opportunities for investment in the facilities;

- We have introduced the 'Lifewalks' walking for health scheme, approved by local doctors, hospitals, and the Epping Forest Primary Care Trust, as part of the national 'Walking - The Way to Health' campaign;

What we want to achieve

10.7 Over the course of the next four years we want to achieve the following in respect of these priority issues. These aims are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan.

- *Detail to be added here.*

11. Economic Prosperity

11.1 Our priority is to encourage sustainable economic development in the Epping Forest District.

11.2 The role of the Council is to create a framework within which enterprise can flourish, and to direct resources towards areas of deprivation.

11.3 Enterprise is vital to stimulate economic growth and to expand the range of services and facilities available locally. It is essential that the Council and other partners promote economic vitality by providing and encouraging opportunities for business development and investment, whilst also balancing the need to preserve the local environment and quality of life. With our partners we aim to promote business efficiency in the district, enhance local town centres, assist the economy of the rural parts of the district, and promote local tourism opportunities.

Economic Prosperity issues

11.4 The main Economic Prosperity issues affecting the Epping Forest District are:

- The Council and other public service agencies have difficulty in recruiting staff, and on average only 85% of the council's establishment is filled at any one time;
- There are six centres of population but no major shopping centres or facilities within the district;
- 75.8% of the working age population are employed, compared with a regional level 76.66% and a national average of 72.13% (Source: 2001 Census);
- 50% of the working age population of the district travel to work outside Essex (Source: LSC Area Profile 2004);
- Three wards in the district are amongst the top 20% of income deprived wards in the country, six are amongst the top 20% of skills deprived wards, and thirteen are amongst the top 20% of access deprived wards (Source: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004);

- Five wards are amongst the top 20% in the country where deprivation affects children and three are amongst the top 20% where deprivation affects older people (Source: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004).

What these economic prosperity issues tell us?

11.5 These issues tell us the following about Economic Prosperity in the Epping Forest District:

- Public service recruitment difficulties exist due to high housing costs in the district and the proximity of Epping Forest to London, where comparable positions can attract higher salaries;
- The district has a higher level of employment (full-time, part-time, self-employed) amongst people aged from sixteen to seventy-four, than the national average;
- There is significant 'out-commuting' from the district in terms of the enjoyment of employment, business and retail opportunities;
- Above average levels of deprivation and social exclusion exist alongside areas of comparative affluence, with deprivation tending to be concentrated in 'pockets', including wards in Ongar, Waltham Abbey and parts of Chigwell;
- The large geographical area of the district and its mixed urban/rural nature has led to some instances of access deprivation and services such as recycling, only being available at reduced levels in some rural areas;

What we have achieved

11.6 We have already achieved the following in respect of these priority issues:

- A modest level of key worker housing has been provided to assist local public sector organisations (but not the council) with the recruitment of staff;
- Major national retail chains such as Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer have been attracted to the district in recent years
- As part of revisions to waste management services, recycling facilities have been equalised across the district, and enhanced locally delivered street cleansing services have been introduced for the Paternoster ward in Waltham Abbey, a deprived area that has had particular problems with littering, dumping and poor environmental standards;
- An Estate Housing Office has been provided as part of a regeneration scheme for the Limes Farm estate at Chigwell, a deprived area of high concentration medium-rise council housing requiring intensive housing management;

- The establishment of tenant associations as part of an approach to increasing tenant participation has been facilitated on housing estates, with four of the five associations recognised by the council covering the most deprived estates in the district;
- The Epping Forest Community Sports Project developed in partnership with NACRO and Sport England, provides diversionary sports, leisure opportunities and training for young people at risk of offending, and has been targeted at areas of social deprivation in Loughton, Waltham Abbey and Ongar;
- Consultation has been undertaken on a major exercise to explore community need in the rural areas of the district that it is recognised often receive less attention than the urban parts, which will lead to targeted programmes of activity in specific areas and bring communities together;

What we want to achieve

11.7 Over the course of the next four years we want to achieve the following in respect of these priority issues. These aims are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan.

- *Detail to be added here.*

SECTION I – RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, PARTNERS & PORTFOLIOS ETC

12. HOW WE DELIVER OUR STRATEGIC AIMS AND PRIORITIES

Resource Management

- 12.1 The Government's Best Value initiative places a duty on all councils to deliver the most economic, efficient and effective services possible.
- 12.2 We manage our resources and the corporate services that provide essential support to the work of the council, to ensure that we provide efficient, cost effective services that meet customer needs and are constantly improving. The council's budget reflects the aims and objectives set out in this Council Plan, and is reviewed each year as result of changing objectives and priorities.
- 12.3 The Council has been politically balanced and in a position of no overall control for more than twelve years. Nevertheless, there remains in this situation a duty on our members to give clear direction on priorities, and during this time we have sought to build consensus across all party groups, working together for the common good of the district wherever we have common ground, in order to:

(a) Communicate with the public about service delivery

The aim of the Council is to provide high-quality services to our diverse and vibrant community. To do this, we regularly seek feedback on the issues that are important to you. We aim to listen and engage with our customers in meaningful ways and to action feedback wherever possible in order to improve our services.

(b) Prioritise objectives and services

The Council is an organisation with limited resources, which means that we must prioritise our work, concentrating effort and expenditure on the areas of highest need, and that we must also identify issues which are not a priority to our residents.

(c) Co-operate and plan with our partners

We work with the LSP and our other partners to improve services across the District. We also work in partnership with other Essex local authorities on matters such as the procurement of goods and services to deliver value for money.

(d) Identify and target resources, realise capacity and manage performance

We want to ensure value for money in all we do. We are designated a debt free authority and seek to manage our resources carefully, mindful of the effect of Council Tax increases.

(e) Procure services in the most beneficial and cost effective way

We are currently reviewing our procurement strategy to ensure we obtain value for money and work with other Essex authorities to achieve better market management and economies of scale.

(f) Develop services, staff and the working environment

The Council attained re-accreditation against the Investors in People standard in 2005. We recognise that our staff are crucial in the successful delivery of our services, but are sometimes hampered by recruitment and retention difficulties.

Our Budget

12.4 The Council's budget is designed to achieve the strategic aims and priorities set out in this Council Plan. The budget is reviewed annually and is adjusted as necessary to reflect changing priorities and objectives. The Council Plan is underpinned by our resource and financial planning processes and, in undertaking resource and financial planning, the council observes the following general principles:

- All spending plans are subjected to rigorous and regular review to ensure that they are aligned with established need and to provide value for money;
- Changes in service delivery to meet the corporate aims and priorities are underpinned by the appropriate alignment of available resources;
- The resource and financial planning processes will cover all services, and both revenue and capital expenditure; and
- Efforts are made to maximise the availability of external sources of funding such as central government grants and income, and new partnership funding arrangements are pursued wherever possible

Our Partners

12.5 The Council is a large and complex organisation, delivering many services. We do not deliver all the services that our customers receive ourselves, but work closely with a large number of partners from the public, voluntary and private sectors. Our key partners include:

- Essex County Council;
- other town and parish councils in the district;
- the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership;
- other local authorities in Essex;
- educational establishments in the district;
- local business in the district; and
- other bodies such as the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and the Corporation of London

Service Structure and Provision

12.6 We have established nine portfolios through which we deliver our aims and priorities, grouped to reflect the themes of the Epping Forest District Community Strategy for 2004 to 2021. Each portfolio is the responsibility of an elected councillor who has a seat on our Cabinet, which is the Council's main decision-making body.

- Our Civil Engineering and Maintenance Portfolio, certain planning functions of the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio and some environmental responsibilities of the Environmental Protection Portfolio, seek to address the Green and Unique aspects of the Community Strategy for 2004 to 2021. The key Green and Unique objective of the Community Strategy is reflected in our strategic aim to maintain the special character and advantage of the district and address local environmental issues;
- The Housing Portfolio and the private sector housing responsibilities of the Environmental Protection Portfolio seek to address the Homes and Neighbourhoods aspects of the Community Strategy for 2004 to 2021. The key Homes and Neighbourhoods objective of the Community Strategy is reflected in our strategic aim to seek to address key housing need;
- The community safety responsibilities of the Community Wellbeing Portfolio seek to address the Safe Community aspects of the Community Strategy for 2004 to 2021. The key Safe Community objective of the Community Strategy is reflected in our strategic aim to tackle crime and disorder and create safe communities in the district;
- The Leisure Portfolio and the health responsibilities of the Community Wellbeing Portfolio seek to address the Fit For Life aspects of the Community Strategy for 2004 to 2021. The key Fit For Life objective of the Community Strategy is reflected in our strategic aim to address leisure need and promote a good standard of health for our residents;
- The economic development responsibilities of the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio seek to address the Economic Prosperity aspects of the Community Strategy for 2004 to 2021. The key Economic Prosperity objective of the Community Strategy is reflected in our strategic aim to encourage sustainable economic development;

- Our People First, Information and Communications Technology and Corporate Support Services, and Finance and Performance Management Portfolios are responsible for resource management and support services.

12.7 The individual services within each portfolio are detailed in our annual Best Value Performance Plan, which is available from the Performance Management Unit, our information centres and the council's website.

SECTION J – MEASURING PERFORMANCE

13. HOW WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS

Performance Management Framework

- 13.1 This Plan sets out the Council's direction for the next four years. In order to make sure that we use our resources wisely, targeting them on areas of highest need, and that we know how well we are performing, we have developed our Performance Management Framework. This starts at the strategic level, identifying the overall priorities for the district until 2021 (the Community Strategy), and translating these where appropriate into aims and objectives for the council over the short and medium terms.
- 13.2 Our policies and priorities emanate from this Council Plan, which sets out the overall goals and aspirations of the authority. These are cascaded through the cabinet and committees of the council to individual services and functions, ensuring that strategic objectives are pursued at all levels of the organisation and our staff, who are set personal targets for each year linking directly to the priorities are clear about what they do and why they do it. The Performance Management Framework works by translating strategy into action, and by aligning the work of service groups and individual members of staff to the achievement of our strategic aims and priorities.

Performance Review

- 13.3 Performance Management is a key factor in successful delivery of the targets and aims set out Council Plan. Regular monitoring of the priorities in the Council Plan will be important so that its effectiveness is continually under review and there is timely acknowledgement of success as well as emphasising actions where targets are failing. This will ensure that the aspirations in the Council Plan are delivered on time and to budget.
- 13.4 Progress against the aims and targets set in annual Service Plans and the Best Value Performance Plan are regularly monitored. As part of the preparation of this new Council Plan, a review has been undertaken of progress made in the last three years towards the achievement of the targets and aims set out in the Council Plan for 2003-2007. The results of this review have been published as an appendix to the Council Plan.

14. HOW OTHERS MEASURE OUR SUCCESS

- 14.1 Best Value and Local Performance Indicators in the main, measure our performance. Our performance against these indicators is monitored on a quarterly basis by a panel of our councillors to ensure that we are maintaining appropriate service levels and standards or that corrective action is taken where necessary. Performance is published in our annual Best Value Performance Pan to provide residents with information about the performance of the council. We are currently

improving our systems for the reporting of performance information, in order that we can respond quickly in areas where we need to take action to improve.

14.2 In the first year of this Council Plan we want our performance on at least 40% of the most important performance indicators to match that of the best performing local authorities in the country, and we have therefore adopted forty 'Key' indicators upon which we will focus improvement.

14.3 In addition to the BVPIs and LPIs, information on our performance is drawn from a range of other sources:

Satisfaction Surveys

14.4 We regularly consult residents and service users in relation to the services that we provide. Every three years we consult a sample of residents for their views on service specific issues and matters such as how well you think the council is run and the quality of life in the district. The results of these surveys are submitted to the government and inform our future plans and policies.

Overview and Scrutiny

14.5 We have developed our overview and scrutiny function to provide an independent assessment of our priorities and performance, and have established a number of Overview And Scrutiny Panels to review services and performance in a number of specific areas;

Review and Inspection

14.6 The council has reviewed the majority of its key services in recent years, some of which have also been subject to formal inspection by the Audit Commission;

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

14.7 Carried out by the Audit Commission, CPA considers the performance of all local authorities, including relationships with and the performance of partners including the Local Strategic Partnership in terms of the delivery of the Community Strategy. The council's first CPA was carried out in 2004, when we were awarded a 'Good' rating;

14.8 The CPA is to be undertaken again during 2007, although the methodology has changed from that used in the initial round of assessments. In 2007 the council's overall performance will be assessed from a combination of factors, including a range of performance indicators, how we have improved since the first CPA, how we engage and consult with our residents and communities, how we use our resources, and whether we offer value for money in the services we provide.

SECTION K – EXAMPLE ACTION PLAN

Ref	Objective	Action (s)	Responsibility	Timescale	Resources
Green and Unique					
Homes and Neighbourhoods					
	Try to reduce the number of additional homes planned for the District and avoid the imposition of a development corporation to oversee the growth.	(a) Making representations to the Examination-in-Public of the East of England Plan (b) Approaching neighbouring councils with a view to jointly planning the delivery of the additional homes across our areas.			
	Increase the amount of affordable housing that is provided within the District.	(a) Altering our Local Plan to require that 40% of all homes built on developments over 15 properties are affordable to people on low incomes (b) Working with housing associations to provide more affordable housing			
	Reduce the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation and work towards the eradication of the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.	(a) Increasing the amount of affordable housing. (b) Providing additional temporary accommodation. (c) Increasing homelessness prevention.			
	Help people with special needs to stay in their own homes and work with other agencies to provide more supported housing	Working with the other main agencies involved with supported housing and, after consultation with service providers and service users, produce an annual Local Supporting People Strategy that clearly sets out the ways that, together, we will help meet people's special needs.			
	Help certain people living in	(a) Targeting renovation grants and			

	properties in the private sector to improve the condition of their accommodation and take steps to reduce the number of empty homes.	home repairs assistance to home owners in need (b) Following a detailed review, produce an Empty Homes Strategy that sets out how we will reduce the number of empty homes. This will include the provision of information to owners of homes that have been empty for more than six months, the use of the new Empty Property Management Orders and, in extreme cases, the use of compulsory purchase orders.			
	Work towards ensuring that the Council has no non-decent homes by April 2010.	(a) Continuing to identify which Council homes do not meet, or will not meet, the Decent Homes Standard (b) Providing sufficient resources and carrying out appropriate programmes of work to ensure that all these homes meet the Standard by 2010.			
A Safe Community					
Fit for Life					
Economic Prosperity					