

Epping Forest District Council
HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

2006/07 to 2008/9

CONSULTATION DRAFT

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Summary

1. Foreword

- 1.1. This is the first review of the Council's Homelessness Strategy originally produced in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Act 2002 in 2003, for 2003/04 – 2005/06. The first strategy provided for a review to be conducted every two years. As before, this latest 2006/07 -2008/09 strategy will interrelate with other housing strategies and form part of the next Housing Strategy, as well as the Council Plan. The strategy records what has been achieved since 2003 and incorporates an updated review of needs and resources, as well as examining what should be done during the period of the strategy. Key points are highlighted at the end of each section and these inform the **Action Plan 2006/07 – 2008/09**.
- 1.2. Having produced this Consultation Draft the Council wants to consult with partner organisations (listed at **Appendix 8**) on the proposals and, where appropriate, incorporate their comments. Where it is not possible to include them, they will be tabled separately at **Appendix 9**. Service users will be consulted by way of a survey.
- 1.3. The homelessness service is provided through the Housing Services' Housing Needs Section of Epping Forest District Council (EFDC). A staffing chart is shown at **Appendix 1** and a breakdown of costs at **Appendix 6**.
- 1.4. EFDC's Housing Services qualified for an Investors in People Award in 2001. This was extended to all Council Services in 2002 and renewed early in 2005. Housing Services was also accredited for the international ISO 9001:2000a quality assurance scheme by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance in 2002. This has been renewed and is now valid until 2007. Housing Services also achieved Charter Mark status in January 2005.
- 1.5. In 2003 EFDC commissioned David Couttie Associates (DCA) to carry out the second Housing Needs Survey in the District. The first had been conducted 5 years earlier by the same company and had found that 'very few will be able to enter the local housing market without gaining access to a significant amount of capital.' The 2003 survey confirmed that little had changed in this respect. It estimated that there was 'an annual affordable housing shortfall of 642 units' but recognised that this number of additional affordable housing units per annum was 'not economically deliverable or sustainable' and recommended that the Council should seek the provision of 40% affordable housing on development sites comprising 15 units or more, or of half a hectare or more. The necessary changes to the Local Plan are due to be examined at a Local Plan Public Enquiry in February 2005 and, if agreed, are scheduled for adoption in June 2006.

2. Statistical Analysis of Homelessness

- 2.1. Statistical information in this strategy is in a similar format to the original strategy, updating information and helping to identify trends.
- 2.2. The overall picture is that, despite intense homelessness prevention work, there has been a steady increase in the number of homelessness applications received and a significant increase in the number of applicants found to be in priority need of accommodation. It is considered this reflects ongoing changes in society, with more people losing their homes as a result of failed relationships and drug and alcohol problems being significant issues. Nevertheless, the incidence of rough sleeping is negligible.
- 2.3. Homelessness is on the increase among 16 and 17 year olds and only a little more than 40% of the homeless applicants to whom the Council accepts a full housing duty need family sized accommodation.

3. Housing Advice

- 3.1. The Council has an integrated Housing Advice Strategy (HAS) that works within the framework of the Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP) for the Epping Forest District.
- 3.2. The Council has a rolling Service Level Agreement with the three Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) in the District to provide a range of advice and to support those who have difficulties expressing their needs effectively.
- 3.3. Homelessness Prevention Officers provide a link to Housing and other Services.
- 3.4. The Housing Needs Section within Housing Services holds a good stock of advice and information leaflets. General information on the Council's Housing Services can be obtained through the Council's Website, from which housing applications can be downloaded. Arrangements are in hand for on-line completion of applications by April 2006.
- 3.5. The Council offers an excellent service in respect of pre-tenancy determinations for people endeavouring to secure private rented accommodation in the District and intending to claim Housing Benefit.

4. Homelessness Prevention

- 4.1. The number of cases being dealt with through homelessness prevention has recently exceeded the number being dealt with as statutorily homeless and the aim is to further extend intervention work. Homelessness prevention has proved highly effective, with a number of strategies being used.
- 4.2. The work has so far focused on families with children and expectant mothers but, with more resources, it could be extended to other priority need groups. A bid was made to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) for funding for an additional homelessness prevention officer to work primarily with young people but was unsuccessful. One additional officer would allow most, if not all, potential priority need cases to be referred to the service.
- 4.3. A key factor in building on the success of the homelessness prevention service will be increasing the availability of funds for deposits on privately rented accommodation. The Council supported a bid made by East Thames Housing Group (ETHG) to the ODPM for funding to provide a rent deposit scheme to complement the existing voluntary scheme operated by Epping Forest Housing Aid (EFHAS), but the bid was not successful.
- 4.4. Additional strategies to those already employed, could be used, subject to more resources.

5. Support Schemes, Welfare and Mediation Services

- 5.1. A number of support schemes are in place in the District for people who have been homeless or may be at risk of being homeless, including two floating support schemes, both supported by EFDC. They are operated by Cygnet Housing Association (CHA) and Womens's Aid.
- 5.2. The Council employs a part-time housing welfare officer to support people placed in interim and temporary accommodation and a full time officer to help vulnerable people maintain their secure tenancies. The 2 Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) in the District have commented on the positive support offered by the Council's housing officers. The Assistant Housing Needs Manager (Homelessness) meets on a quarterly basis with one of the team managers to discuss issues of common interest and there is a protocol for joint working (see **Appendix 5**).
- 5.3. EFDC also uses a specialist mediation service to coordinate mediation in serious neighbour disputes where tenancies are at risk.
- 5.4. In homelessness prevention work the services of Relate are invaluable.

6. The Role of Social Care

- 6.1. Housing Needs and Social Care staff work closely together. Essex County Council (ECC) Learning and Social Care has two teams in the area whose activities relate to young people, families and homelessness. They are the Children and Young People's Team and the Leaving Care Team.
- 6.2. A protocol between Housing Services and Social Care for dealing with 16 and 17 year olds who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness has recently been updated.
- 6.3. It is considered a 'crash pad' would be useful as part of a strategy to support families and reduce homelessness among young people.
- 6.4. Households with children deemed to have become homeless intentionally by EFDC are referred, with parental agreement, to the Children and Young People's Team, which may be able to help them secure accommodation in the private rented sector.

7. Services for People Involved in Drug and Alcohol Abuse

- 7.1. This section reports on the work of the Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Service (ADAS), the Community Drugs and Alcohol Team (CDAT) and the Essex Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service (EYPDAS). The services are based outside the District. It would be helpful if there were a base within the area.
- 7.2. ADAS is a charity, based in Harlow but serving this District as well. All ADAS clients are triaged and complex cases referred to CDAT. Support is also available from ADAS for partners and relatives and there is a play therapist for children affected by substance abuse issues. Clients with alcohol problems far outnumber those with drug problems.
- 7.3. CDAT is also based in Harlow but offers outreach services in Loughton and Waltham Abbey. Clients are referred through a number of sources, including hospitals, ADAS, General Practitioners, family members and self-referrals. The minimum age for clients is 16. There is no upper age limit. All CDAT clients are triaged and risk assessed. All clients have a physical assessment and a community care plan. A panel meets monthly to prioritise cases. Again, people with alcohol problems far outnumber those with drug problems.
- 7.4. Homelessness is commonly a problem for CDAT clients. The floating support scheme provided by Cygnet Housing Association (see **Support, Welfare and Mediation Services**) is considered invaluable but more provision of this sort is needed. B&B out of the Epping Forest District is seen as counterproductive. Although CDAT continue to offer services, clients say their contact with other users increases in B&B and, as a consequence, their exposure to suppliers.
- 7.5. EYPDAS is based in Chelmsford but offers services across Essex, subsidising travel in some instances. It is one of a number of The Children's Society's projects but receives funding from diverse sources. It works with clients until they reach the age of 19 but also offers support to families, carers and professionals.
- 7.6. The family support helps young people remain in their own homes but when necessary they are referred to the emergency night shelter in Colchester. This is not considered to be very satisfactory because of risk of exposure to drug dealers and the cost of travel may be prohibitive.
- 7.7. The work of EYPDAS in the Epping Forest District has included a number of information sessions but it has fewer clients in this locality than others. A staff member is to attend

meetings of a sub-group of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership so that the reasons for this may be explored.

8. Assessments, Decisions, Notifications and Reviews

- 8.1. The process of assessing homelessness applications is complex and governed by the provisions of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), by the Code of Guidance on the legislation issued by the ODPM, by statutory instruments, the Local Authority Agreement and a vast amount of homelessness case law. Also relevant is legislation on immigration.
- 8.2. Central Government recommends that enquiries into homelessness applications should be completed within 33 days. The average time taken by this authority is currently less than 20 days but around 1 in 5 cases exceeds the recommended time scale. EFDC conducts rigorous enquiries (see 8.4. below) and it is inevitable that some become protracted. Information on EFDC's performance is published annually in the Best Value Performance Plan.
- 8.3. Homelessness enquiries may involve contact with previous landlords (both public and private), mortgage lenders, solicitors, environmental health officers, land registry, social workers, medical practitioners, occupational therapists, hospital workers, victim support groups, police, neighbours, relatives, and the Immigration & Nationality Directorate.
- 8.4. EFDC adopts a 'firm but fair' approach to homelessness. The intention is only to secure accommodation when statutorily required to do so. However, applicants have a legal right of review on adverse homelessness decisions. Such reviews are conducted, depending on the nature of the case, by an officer more senior than the one who made the original decision or the Housing Appeals Panel, which comprises 5 Councillors. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the decision made at the statutory review, they have the right to pursue a further review, on a point of law, through the County Court.
- 8.5. The Housing Needs Section provides an 'out of hours' homelessness emergency service.

9. Interim and Temporary Accommodation

- 9.1. EFDC uses a variety of interim and temporary accommodation, including Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation for households without children and self-contained flats with support for households with children. Many formerly homeless households are in temporary accommodation for 6 months to a year.
- 9.2. The Government set a target for all local housing authorities to have no families with children (or expectant mothers) in B&B accommodation by April 2004. EFDC met this target 3 months ahead of schedule in December 2003.
- 9.3. The Government has now set all local housing authorities a further target of reducing the number of households in all types of temporary accommodation to at least 50% of the levels as at 31st December 2004, by 31st March 2010. For EFDC this means a reduction from 181 to 90 households in the next four and a half years. This Strategy sets out how this may be achieved. Good quality temporary accommodation, such as the District's Women's Refuge, will be retained and, in some instances extended, whilst the use of B&B and non-secure tenancies in the Council's general housing stock will be eliminated. The Council's hostel will be retained for interim accommodation.

10. Assistance to Homelessness Applicants not in Priority Need

- 10.1. There are currently 2 schemes operating in the District that can assist homeless people whom EFDC have found not to be in priority need of accommodation. They are Epping Forest Housing

Aid Scheme (EFHAS) and the Single Accommodation For Epping Forest (SAFE) project. EFHAS is mainly funded by the Lottery and EFDC.

- 10.2. The aim of EFHAS is to enter into arrangements with landlords, guaranteeing payment to cover damage, theft and loss of rent up to the value of one month's rent, in order to help homeless people unable to provide the deposit usually required in the private rented sector.
- 10.3. Referrals to the scheme are in accordance with an agreed procedure, mainly by EFDC Housing Needs Section, though some are made by the CABX and SAFE (see below). Self-referrals are also possible. All applicants must be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, on a low income and unable to raise a rent deposit through a loan or other means. Although the scheme started out exclusively assisting only people found not to be in priority need of accommodation by EFDC, it has now been expanded and a number of family referrals have been made by homelessness prevention officers.
- 10.4. As at 31st October 2005 the scheme had 57 guarantees in operation, valued at £42,385. Between 1st January 2005 and 31st October 2005, 6 claims were made by landlords, amounting to £2,997.
- 10.5. SAFE is part of NACRO Community Enterprises, a registered housing association and charity, and offers temporary accommodation with support to single homeless people. It works in partnership with EFDC, Social Care and Essex Probation Service (EPS).
- 10.6. It provides 36 bed spaces across the District in a mix of shared houses and individual units. Referrals to the project are generally through EFDC Housing Services (around 80%), Learning and Social Care, and Essex Probation Services, though some self-referrals are made. Applicants must be single and homeless or at risk of homelessness. The target age group is 18 to 25 years, though some younger and older applicants are accepted, depending on circumstances.
- 10.7. At any one time there are around 8 applicants who have been accepted for the scheme and are waiting for a place. Between 35 and 40 applicants referred by EFDC are housed on the project each year.
- 10.8. EFDC has been working with a voluntary organisation, the Epping Forest Foyer Project (EFFP), for a number of years, to examine the feasibility of establishing a foyer in the District. This would provide accommodation for up to 2 years for young people, aged 16 to 25, who also want to receive skills training for employment.
- 10.9. Given the size and nature of the District, a relatively small scheme is thought to be more appropriate here. A scheme with 24 hour staff cover, which is considered necessary because some clients may be school leavers, is likely to need a minimum of 30 units.
- 10.10. Turn-over in foyer projects is high, with around 35% of tenants remaining for the maximum 2 years. This is not necessarily because they have 'failed'. Some may be reconciled with families from whom they have previously been estranged, some decide to take up opportunities for full time further education, others, once they obtain employment, are able to move on. If this experience is to be relied upon, around 20 new tenants would be needed per annum for a 30 unit foyer. Therefore, levels of homelessness amongst young people in the District need to be closely monitored, particularly if homelessness prevention measures are extended and prove successful.

11. Consultation with Service Users

- 11.1. Homelessness Service users **are being** consulted by way of a survey conducted by Housing Services' Information and Strategy Section, which is independent from the Housing Needs Section. Details of the survey are given under the heading **Consultation with Service Users**.

12. Epping Forest District Council's Allocation Scheme

- 12.1. EFDC operates a Housing Register. Allocation of social housing is through the Housing Register in accordance with the provisions of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme, which is reviewed annually to facilitate responses to changes in circumstances.
- 12.2. The Housing Allocations Scheme applies to vacancies in EFDC's own housing stock and to properties in the District owned by RSLs for which EFDC is entitled to make nominations. The Scheme offers all housing applicants the opportunity to express preferences about the location and type of accommodation to be offered to them, as well as the type of social landlord by whom they wish to be housed.
- 12.3. The degree of priority awarded to applicants on the Housing Register is assessed by reference to a banding system. The banding system is devised to afford homeless people, those at risk of homelessness and those who have been homeless, a reasonable degree of preference for long-term accommodation. Full details of the banding system are given at **Appendix 3**.
- 12.4. EFDC intends to introduce a Choice Based Lettings Scheme, in which social housing vacancies are advertised, by April 2007, in conjunction with its five neighbouring local authorities, through the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium, which comprises the six local authorities and the main RSLs with which they all work .

13. Action Plans

- 13.1. This section includes a table giving a progress report on the previous Action Plan 2003/04 – 2005/06 and a new Action Plan for 2006/07 - 2008/09, summarizing the actions needed to implement this Strategy, identifying officers responsible for progressing them and setting target dates for completions.

14. Appendices

- 14.1. There are 9 appendices to this Strategy.

Foreword

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This is the first review of the Council's Homelessness Strategy which was produced in 2003 in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Act 2002.
- 1.2. The first strategy provided for a review to be conducted every two years. The frequency of reviews was determined by the following factors: EFDC's Housing Services' other strategies are reviewed every two years; Shelter advised that other authorities in the region were likely to adopt 2 year review periods; it was considered that the elapse of more than two years could impede ability to respond to change; and an annual review would be disproportionately onerous. These factors remain valid.
- 1.3. This updated **Consultation Draft** interrelates with other housing strategies, as did its predecessor, and will form part of the next Housing Strategy, as well as the Council Plan.
- 1.4. This **Consultation Draft** incorporates an updated review of needs and resources, recording what has been achieved since 2003, as well as examining what still needs to be done to tackle and prevent homelessness and to support people who are or are likely to become homeless. Key points are highlighted at the end of each section and the **Action Plan 2006/07 – 2008/09** derives from them.
- 1.5. **Following a widespread consultation exercise, the final version of the Homelessness Strategy will be produced, based on this Consultation Draft and the outcome of the consultation.**

2. Background to the Council's Homelessness Service

- 2.1. The homelessness service is provided within EFDC's Housing Services' Housing Needs Section. A staffing chart is shown at **Appendix 1** and a breakdown of costs at **Appendix 6**.
- 2.2. EFDC's Housing Services qualified for an Investors in People Award in 2001. This was extended to all Council Services in 2002 and renewed early in 2005. Housing Services was also accredited for the international ISO 9001:2000 quality management scheme by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance in 2002. This has recently been renewed and is valid until 2007. In addition, Housing Services achieved Charter Mark status in January 2005.
- 2.3. EFDC works within the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and follows the guidance set out in the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice in Rented Housing.

3. Context of Homelessness

- 3.1. Research by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Federation of Housing Associations conducted nationally has shown that, in 2004, average property prices were 8 times the average income, having risen by 99% between 1999 and 2004. During the same period, housing waiting lists grew by 46% (21% between 2003 and 2004). For every one unit of social housing built, 3 were sold. It was estimated that a couple buying for the first time needed an annual income of over £50,000 to purchase a house on a 95% mortgage.
- 3.2. In this area, in 2003, EFDC commissioned David Couttie Associates (DCA) to carry out the second Housing Needs Survey for the District. The first had been conducted 5 years earlier by the same company and had found that 'very few will be able to enter the local housing market without gaining access to a significant amount of capital.' The 2003 survey confirmed that little had changed in this respect, stating 'the housing market excludes many families and single person households who are currently seeking access to local housing'.

- 3.3. The 2003 survey estimated that there was 'an annual affordable housing shortfall of 642 units per annum which projected over the 8 year period to 2011 is 5,136 units.' The model used to calculate the shortfall to 2011 was updated in March 2004, when it showed an estimated annual shortfall of 705 units, and in March 2005, when it showed an estimated annual shortfall of 712 affordable housing units.
- 3.4. The DCA report recognised that even 642 additional affordable housing units per annum was 'not economically deliverable or sustainable'. With stable communities in mind, it recommended that the Council should seek 40% affordable housing on development sites comprising 15 units or more, or of half a hectare or more in size. It is intended that Alterations to the Council's Local Plan will adopt these recommendations, increasing the amount of affordable housing required on new housing developments, from 30% to 40%. The necessary changes will be considered at the Local Plan Public Inquiry in February 2006 and, if agreed, were placed on deposit in June 2004 and are scheduled for adoption in June 2006.
- 3.5. In order to monitor the achievement of these targets, Heads of Service will report regularly to Joint Chief Executives and provide action plans if progress is not satisfactory. In turn, the Council's Joint Chief Executives will report quarterly to the Cabinet and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on this and other key priorities, providing detailed information where necessary. In addition, the Finance and Performance Management Committee will receive reports from Internal and External Auditors on any risk to objectives.

4. Consultation

- 4.1. In producing this Consultation Draft the Council is consulting with partner organisations (listed at **Appendix 8**) and wherever possible their comments will be incorporated. Where it is not possible to include them, they will be tabled separately at **Appendix 9**.
- 4.2. Service users are also being consulted by way of a survey conducted by Housing Services' Information and Strategy Section, which is independent from the Housing Needs Section. Details of the survey are given under the heading **Consultation with Service Users**.

Key Points

- This is the first review of the Council's Homelessness Strategy produced in 2003. In revising the Strategy, the Council is consulting with partner organisations and service users.
- This strategy incorporates an updated review of needs and resources, recording what has been achieved since 2003 as well as examining what still needs to be done to tackle and prevent homelessness and to support people who are, or are likely to become, homeless.
- In 2003 EFDC commissioned an independent Housing Needs Survey which recommended that the Council seek 40% affordable housing on development sites comprising 15 units or more, or of half a hectare or more in size. It is proposed that the Council's Altered Local Plan will adopt these recommendations.
- The homelessness service is provided through EFDC's Housing Services, which has achieved Charter Mark status, qualified for an Investors in People Award and been accredited for the ISO 90001:2000 quality management scheme by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance.
- The Council is consulting with partner organisations on this Strategy and wherever possible their comments will be incorporated.
- Service users are being consulted by way of a survey by Housing Services' Information and Strategy Section, which is independent from the Housing Needs Section.

Statistical Analysis of Homelessness

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The statistical information contained in this section is in a similar format to the original strategy, though some has been condensed and additional information is given on the ethnicity of homeless applicants. Latest figures are given and trends identified.
- 1.2. The overall picture is that, despite successful homelessness prevention work, there has been a steady increase in the number of homelessness applications received and the number of applicants found to be in priority need of accommodation. The indications are that much of the increase in homelessness is among 16 and 17 year olds (whom the Council now has a statutory duty to assist) adults with drug and/or alcohol problems and victims of domestic violence.

2. Incidence of Homelessness

- 2.1. Local housing authorities are required by Government to complete Housing Activity Returns, which include statistics on homelessness, on a quarterly basis. These form the core of the information given below on homelessness decisions made by this authority in the last three financial years, with an estimate for the current year, based on figures for the first quarter. From 2003/04 onwards the overall percentage change from the baseline date of 2002/3 is shown in bold in brackets.

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06 (Estimate)
Total number of homeless applications received	470	487 (+ 3.6%)	500 (+ 6.4%)	512 (+ 8.9%)
Number of applicants found to be not homeless	194	152 (- 21.6%)	145 (- 25.3 %)	140 (- 27.8%)
Number of applicants found to be ineligible for assistance	9	18 (+ 100%)	19 (+ 111%)	10 (+ 11.1)
Number of applicants found not to be in priority need	113	119 (+ 5.3%)	119 (+ 5.3%)	134 (+ 18.6%)
Number of applicants found to be intentionally homeless	9	12 (+ 33.3%)	15 (+ 66.6%)	8 (-11.1%)
Number of applicants to whom a full housing duty is owed	145	186 (+ 28.3%)	202 (+ 39%)	220 (+ 51.7%)

- 2.2. The figures at 2.1 above show a steady increase in the number of homelessness applications received by the authority in the last three years and this looks set to continue in the current year. Proportionately, the numbers to whom the Council has accepted a full housing duty have also significantly increased, by 39% over the 2 year period 2002/03 – 2004/05. Officers believe the higher number of applications and increased acceptances reflect ongoing changes in society as a whole, with more people becoming homeless as a result of failed relationships and more people presenting with problems as a result of drug and alcohol abuse.

- 2.3. Around a quarter of homeless applicants each year are found to be homeless, eligible for assistance but not in priority need of accommodation. This means that the Council does not have a duty to secure accommodation for them. Most of these applicants are single people, ranging in age from late teens to early thirties. Often, in the younger age group, the cause of homelessness is a breakdown of relationship with parents or step-parents. In some cases, parents have retired from work and moved to smaller accommodation elsewhere in the country or abroad. For people over 30, the most common cause of homelessness is the breakdown of relationship with a partner (in the 2001 Census almost 10% of the District's population described themselves as 'separated'). Occasionally homelessness is linked to loss of income.
- 2.4. Each year, around 35 to 40 people between the ages of 18 and 25 are housed by the SAFE project (see **Assistance to Homeless Applicants not in Priority Need**). Housing Register information indicates that at the present time more than 20 single people remain of no fixed address, moving around between friends and relatives. Many single applicants have friends or relatives who do not ask them to move on but, nonetheless, endure unsatisfactory living conditions, sleeping in living rooms or on bedroom floors. For applicants with access rights to children, these situations present particular difficulties. The Housing Allocations Scheme has been formulated in accordance with the provisions of the Homelessness Act 2002 to give reasonable preference to homeless people. Nevertheless, single people of no fixed address generally wait at least 2 years before their turn for a tenancy to be reached.
- 2.5. Since the last Homelessness Strategy was devised the government has asked local housing authorities to record incidences of rough sleeping. Historically, this has not been perceived as a major problem in the Epping Forest area and the new records confirm this belief. Generally, they show only one person sleeping rough in the district at any one time.
- 2.6. Information on the ethnicity of homeless applicants is shown below, with percentages shown in bold in brackets.

Ethnicity/Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06 (Estimate)
White	420 (89.2%)	425 (87.3%)	445 (89.0%)	440 (86.0%)
Black	12 (2.6%)	7 (1.4%)	15 (3.0%)	18 (3.5%)
Asian	13 (2.8%)	15 (3.1%)	4 (0.8%)	14 (2.7%)
Other (e.g. mixed ethnicity)	12 (2.6%)	17 (3.5%)	7 (1.4%)	10 (1.9%)
Not given	13 (2.8%)	23 (4.7%)	29 (5.8%)	30 (5.9%)
Total	470 (100%)	487 (100%)	500 (100%)	512 (100%)

- 2.7. On the basis of confirmed ethnicity, homelessness applications from members of ethnic minority groups ranged between 8% and 5.2% of all applications in the years between 2002/03 and 2004/05. The 2001 Census showed that ethnic minorities made up just under 5% of the population of the district at that time. Homelessness officers do not consider that there is a disproportionate rate of homelessness within ethnic minority groups in the area. Their experience is that ethnic minority figures are sometimes boosted by applicants fleeing domestic violence from other areas where there are larger populations of ethnic minorities, chiefly the London Boroughs.
- 2.8. Gypsies and travelers are not identified as separate racial groups on Housing Activity Returns but they do face particularly problems when homeless, having a cultural aversion to 'bricks and mortar'. A number have purchased land within the District on which they have sited caravans

and mobile homes for residential purposes without planning permission. Some have exhausted appeals processes, been evicted and sought homelessness assistance. However, officers have been unable to identify suitable alternative sites for their homes. These individuals have now moved on but more homelessness applications of a similar nature are likely to be received in the future. Essex County Council does have a mobile home site specifically for gypsies within the District but there is a waiting list for vacant plots. This is the case on the 12 sites throughout the county. The situation is the same in neighbouring Hertfordshire. EFDC should work in conjunction with other local authorities in Essex to explore appropriate provision for gypsy and traveling households.

3. Analysis of Priority Need

- 3.1. Priority need is determined by statute and prescribes categories of persons for whom local housing authorities must secure accommodation if they are homeless, providing they have not become intentionally homeless.
- 3.2. The following is an analysis of priority need categories, taken from the Council's Housing Activity returns. Changes in the way in which local housing authorities are required by government to monitor priority need is reflected by N/A (not applicable) in several of the boxes. Estimates for the current financial year include estimated percentages of the overall number of applications.

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06 (Estimate)
Applicants homeless because of fire, flood, storm or similar disaster	0	0	0	1 (0.5%)
Applicants with dependent children	76	73	61	73 (33%)
Applicants in priority need because of pregnancy but no other children	11	18	29	20 (9%)
Applicants aged 16/17	0	5	4	19 (8.5%)
Applicants formerly in social care	2	1	0	0 (0%)
Applicants vulnerable due to old age	1	7	14	14 (6%)
Applicants vulnerable because of physical disability	11	29	19	9 (5%)
Applicants vulnerable because of mental illness or disability	31	33	31	21 (9.5%)
Applicants vulnerable due to alcohol/drug abuse	N/A	N/A	18	26 (12%)
Applicants who were former asylum seekers	N/A	N/A	0	0 (0%)
Applicants formerly in HM Forces	N/A	0	0	0 (0%)
Applicants formerly in prison	N/A	0	0	0 (0%)

Applicants fleeing domestic violence	1	10	18	29 (13%)
Applicants fleeing other violence	1	2	2	0 (0%)
Applicants vulnerable for other reason not specified above	11	8	6	8 (3.5%)
Total number of applicants in priority need of accommodation	145	186	202	220 (100%)

3.3. The analysis of priority need groups shows -

- Out of the four categories not applicable in 2002/03, only one appears to be of significance in the Epping Forest area and that is the number of applicants found to be vulnerable because alcohol and/or drug abuse (12% of the total number of applicants in priority need).
- The level of homelessness amongst older people has increased. However, it is relatively easy to rehouse them, as there is a good supply of accommodation designated for older people within the District, which is sometimes difficult to let in any event.
- There has been a reduction in the number of people with physical disability applying for homelessness assistance of late. This is pleasing. It is very difficult to rehouse a person with a severe physical disability; even when there is a property available with adaptations, it may not be suitable for the individual.
- There has also been a reduction in recent months in the number of applications from people with mental health issues.
- Apart from those with alcohol and/or drug problems, there are two other groups where homelessness is on the increase. The first is women fleeing domestic violence. A women's refuge comprising 3 x 1 bedroom and 2 x 2 bedroom self-contained flats has recently been built in the District by an RSL on land provided free of charge by the Council (see **Interim and Temporary Accommodation**). However, this provides only 50% of the number units recommended by the government as appropriate for the size of population in the District.
- The other group where homelessness is on the increase is 16 and 17year olds. When they are being evicted by their families, effective work should be possible to improve the situation. Relate has counsellors specialising in dealing with young people. One way forward may be for Relate to make a bid to the Big Lottery to fund a specialist counselor to whom the Homelessness Prevention Service could make referrals. EFDC will work with Relate to achieve this.

3.4. In summary, just over 40% of homeless applicants to whom the Council accepts a full housing duty need family sized accommodation; almost 60% need a one bedroom property. This is the reverse of the situation when the previous homelessness strategy was produced two years ago. Whilst additional one bedroom properties in the social housing stock would be useful (currently they represent 35 % of the Councils housing stock), new build should not be focussed on one bedroom dwellings because there are a number of families living in small Council flats in need of larger accommodation. Additional housing to meet their needs would release smaller properties for single people.

4. Reasons for Homelessness

4.1. Information on reasons for homelessness in priority need groups is set out below.

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06 (Estimate)
Parents no longer willing to accommodate	38	63	56	56 (25%)
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	13	15	31	28 (13%)
Violence or harassment (all categories, including domestic and racial)	22	20	39	40 (18%)
Breakdown of relationship with partner (non-violent)	15	25	20	16 (8%)
Mortgage arrears	4	3	2	8 (4%)
Local housing authority repossessions due to rent arrears	0	1	1	1 (0.5%)
Registered social landlord repossessions due to rent arrears	1	1	2	1 (0.5%)
Private Sector rent arrears	2	5	1	15 (7%)
Loss of rented or tied accommodation for other reasons, for instance, end of Assured Shorthold tenancy	41	44	28	36 (16%)
Discharge from hospital, residential home, prison, H.M. Forces etc.	2	4	4	7 (3%)
Homeless for reasons not shown above (for example, returning from abroad)	7	5	18	12 (5%)
Total	145	186	202	220 (100%)

4.2. The most common reason for homelessness (in up to 25% of cases) continues to be 'parents no longer willing to accommodate'. However, the age at which difficulties arise appears to be reducing (see 2.8 above). The second most common cause of homelessness (18% of cases) is violence and harassment. This is mainly domestic violence and almost 14% of applicants have fled other areas, to refuges outside the Epping Forest District, then applied to this authority for homelessness assistance. Whilst homelessness prevention work can be effective locally, in such instances it cannot. This is in marked contrast to the third most common

reason for homelessness, loss of privately rented accommodation for reasons other than rent arrears (usually because of short-term letting by landlords). Formerly, this was the second most common reason and therefore one of the government's targets for reduction. The improvement can be attributed to the homelessness prevention service identifying alternative private rented accommodation.

Key points

- **The number of applicants to whom the Council has accepted a full housing duty has increased significantly over the last 2 years and this trend is expected to continue in 2005/06.**
- **Although there has been a steady increase in the number of homelessness applications received and accepted since the last Homelessness Strategy was produced, gratifying progress has been made in meeting one of the government's targets of reducing homelessness against main causes, viz. loss of privately rented accommodation for reasons other than rent arrears.**
- **Much of the increase in homelessness is among 16 and 17 year olds, adults with drug and/or alcohol problems and victims of domestic violence.**
- **Effective work can be undertaken to improve the situation in respect of 16 and 17 year olds. Relate has counsellors specialising in dealing with young people.**
- **Despite the recent opening of the first Women's Refuge in the Epping Forest area there continues to be a shortage of appropriate short-term accommodation for victims of domestic violence.**
- **Around 60% of homeless people in priority need of accommodation require one bedroom properties but new build social housing should not necessarily be confined to this size of accommodation. Additional housing for families would release smaller properties for single people.**
- **EFDC needs to work in conjunction with other local authorities in Essex on appropriate provision for gypsy and traveling households.**

Housing Advice

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Council already has a Housing Advice Strategy (HAS) which interrelates with other housing strategies and forms part of the Council's overall Housing Strategy. It also accords with the Community Strategy and the Council Plan. It was formally approved by the Council's Executive Committee on 25th March 2002 and is scheduled for updating early in 2006. It covers advice to existing social housing tenants and applicants on the Housing Register, as well as to homeless people. Since it was approved, the Council has had in post 2.5 FTE officers working on homelessness prevention whose duties relate strongly to housing advice (see **Homelessness Prevention**).
- 1.2. The Homelessness Prevention Officers (HPOs) also provide a link between the Council's Housing Services and other services. Two examples of these services are a floating support scheme and an outreach service that is provided by Harlow Womens' Aid and funded by EFDC through a Service Level Agreement, for women experiencing domestic violence (see **Support, Welfare and Mediation Services**). Other examples of co-operative working include liaison with Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme and the S.A.F.E. Project (see **Assistance to Homelessness Applicants not in Priority Need**), debt counselling arranged by CABX and liaison with landlords and local lettings agencies.
- 1.3. The Housing Advice Strategy works within the framework of the Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP) for the Epping Forest District, launched in June 2002. This is a multi-agency partnership, including Voluntary Action Epping Forest, Age Concern, CABX, some privately practicing solicitors, Essex County Council, EFDC and the Legal Services Commission. The CLSP was set up to co-ordinate the provision in the District of good quality, publicly funded legal advice and assistance on civil matters. It aims to achieve suitable quality mark accreditation for all partner organisations. At a consultation event held on 6th March 2003, housing was one of five main categories of law identified as being in most demand. Across the categories, the need for advocacy, mediation and out-reach services and home visiting services were highlighted.
- 1.4. Advice and assistance on homelessness and the prevention of homelessness can encompass a wide range of issues. Many require specialist knowledge. Some of these, for example debt management, whilst not unusual, do not arise sufficiently often in relation to housing issues for the Council to have its own expert in the field. This being so, part of the role of housing officers is to identify appropriate cases for referral to the CABX. Other agencies and organizations to which enquirers may be directed include the Department of Social Security, Social Services, Victim Support and groups offering advice on drug and alcohol issues.
- 1.5. Some matters, for instance Housing Benefit, are covered by other Council Services. Here again, the role of housing officers is to offer elementary information, ensuring that expert advice can be accessed. Issues on which Environmental Health Officers offer specialist advice include: harassment and illegal evictions by private landlords; properties in need of repair, including those which are unfit for habitation; and houses in multiple occupation.
- 1.6. Officers from the Housing Needs Section, based at the Civic Offices in Epping, give advice on such matters as; charitable organizations assisting homeless people (including victims of domestic violence); sourcing privately rented accommodation; Notices to Quit issued by landlords (together with related legal proceedings); shared ownership schemes; rent levels; property rights in cases of relationship breakdown or other domestic issues; interim and temporary accommodation and related licenses; the Housing Register; the Council's Transfers Scheme; assignments by way of mutual exchange and nominations to other local housing authorities and organizations.
- 1.7. More information relating to housing officers' duties in respect of housing advice is given throughout this document.

- 1.8. The introduction of a Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL) by EFDC in April 2007 is likely to change the role of some Housing Needs Officers to that of 'Housing Options Advisers'.

2. Literature and Website

- 2.1. The Housing Needs Section within Housing Services holds a good stock of advice and information leaflets, some produced by the service, others published by the (former) Department of Environment, Trade and Regions. As well as homelessness, subjects include; the Council's Allocations Scheme, private rented accommodation, shared ownership and key worker schemes, and housing for single people. Publications are listed in the HAS. All 'in house' leaflets are in plain English. Where English is not the first language of a client the Council is able to engage the service of Language Line and arrange for document translation in appropriate cases. For people with visual impairment, literature can be made available as required in large print, audio cassettes or Braille. Where a profoundly deaf client is a sign user, the Council endeavours to ensure that a specially trained member of staff is present at interviews. Home visits are made in appropriate instances. There is an inter-agency information pack available on domestic violence which has been praised by the Housing Inspectorate.
- 2.2. A newsletter is sent to EFDC tenants three or four times during the course of each year. At least once each year it includes information for applicants on the Housing Register and they are included in the distribution list.
- 2.3. General information on the Council's Housing Services can be obtained through the Council's Website: www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing, from which housing applications can be downloaded. Arrangements are in hand for on-line completion of applications by April 2006.

3. CABX

- 3.1. The HAS was formulated in consultation with the 3 CABX in the District as it includes housing advice offered by them. Their offices are in Epping, Waltham Abbey and Loughton. The Council has a 'rolling' Service Level Agreement with the three bureaux to provide a range of advice and to support those who have difficulties expressing their needs effectively. EFDC is contributing £120,500 from its General Fund in 2005/06 towards CABX costs and has guaranteed increased funding, at least in line with inflation, in future years, as long as there is no worsening in the Council's own budgetary situation.
- 3.2. EFDC has formal arrangements for referring cases to the CABX and, in addition to front-line liaison on a case by case basis, the Housing Management Team, which consists of the Head of Housing Services and two Assistant Heads of Service, meets with the Bureaux Managers each quarter. These meetings serve a number of purposes: to discuss general issues arising from individual cases and receive feed-back on the Council's housing policies and procedures; to consult on proposed changes to housing policies; to co-ordinate the approach to the provision of housing advice in the District; and to ensure CABX Managers have up to date information on local and national housing issues.
- 3.3. The Epping CAB provides an outreach service at the Council's hostel in North Weald (see **Interim and Temporary Accommodation**). Sessions are held on the first and third Wednesday of each month. There is also a home visiting service for people who are housebound.
- 3.4. Where a client is pursuing a review of a homelessness decision made by the Council they are advised in writing to seek assistance from the CAB or Shelter. Often, where applicants seek advice from one of the CABX, they in turn seek specialist advice from Shelter. The Council responds to requests for information from CABX or Shelter on cases of this nature, if appropriate authority has been given by clients.

3.5. EFDC offers an excellent service in respect of pre-tenancy determinations for people endeavouring to secure private rented accommodation in the District and intending to claim Housing Benefit.

Key points

- **EFDC has an integrated strategy for housing advice.**
- **A newsletter with information for applicants on the Housing Register is sent out at least once per annum.**
- **EFDC offers an excellent service in respect of pre-tenancy determinations for people seeking privately rented accommodation.**
- **EFDC Housing Services works closely with local CABX.**

Homelessness Prevention

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Since the previous Homelessness Strategy was produced, emphasis on homelessness prevention has increased and the Council currently employs 2 full time homelessness prevention officers on temporary contracts. They work under the supervision of the Assistant Housing Needs Manager (Homelessness) and are funded through a Government grant for this type of work, with a small 'top up' from the Council. The Government funding is only guaranteed until March 2008.
- 1.2. The work has proved highly effective (see 2.1 below) and so, as a precaution against additional government funds not being available, the Council is considering its ability to fully fund the work to continue on a permanent basis, relative to other Council growth proposals.
- 1.3. In addition, a part – time homelessness officer has recently been seconded to homelessness prevention the work. The number of cases being dealt with through homelessness prevention now exceeds the number of cases being dealt with as homeless and the aim is to further increase intervention.

1. Statistics

- 2.1. Homelessness Prevention Officers currently interview all potentially homeless expectant mothers and households where there are dependant children, before homelessness applications are made.
- 2.2. This table shows the number of cases dealt with by the homelessness prevention service in the 12 months, September 04 to September 05. Where intervention was not successful, figures are shown as a sub-set, in bold, in brackets. For example, in the last quarter 126 cases were dealt with in total, of which 8 went on to make homeless applications.

Reason for Action	Case numbers Sep to Dec 04	Case numbers Jan to Mar 05	Case numbers April to June 05	Case numbers June to Sept 05	Annual (Sept 04 to Sept 05)
NTQ privately rented accommodation	13 (1)	16 (1)	17 (1)	25 (2)	71 (5)
Family/friends no longer willing to accommodate	20 (1)	38 (3)	34 (8)	23	115 (12)
Domestic violence, harassment, relationship breakdown	33 (2)	24	37 (5)	37 (6)	131 (13)
RSL/Council tenancy at risk	7	10	13	16	46
Repossession, affordability	21 (1)	10	15 (2)	15	61 (3)
Other	14 (2)	11	8 (1)	10	43 (3)
Total	108 (7)	109 (4)	24 (17)	126 (8)	467 (36)

- 2.3. This table shows the number of homelessness applications made and the number of applications accepted for a full housing duty by the Council during the same periods.

	Sep to Dec 04	Jan to Mar 05	April to June 05	July to Sep 05	Annual
Applications made	123	119	128	112	482
Applications accepted	53	48	55	46	202

2.4. As identified at 2.1. above, all cases dealt with by the homelessness prevention team would be in priority need of accommodation, were they to become homeless. 467 cases were dealt with between September 04 and September 05 and only 36 (7.7%) went on to make homelessness applications (see 2.2 above). However, it cannot necessarily be said that the Council would have accepted a full housing duty towards all the remaining 431. For instance, some, ultimately may have been able to resolve their housing problems themselves, others could have been found, on full investigation, to have become homeless intentionally. Even so, it is likely that the Council would have had to accept responsibility for a sizeable proportion, all eventually needing family sized accommodation, and a conservative estimate of just 47% would double the number of homelessness acceptances in the period to 404.

3. Strategies for Preventing Homelessness

- 3.1. A number of homelessness prevention strategies are used, not least home visits, carried out in over 80% of cases. These are time consuming but pay dividends, as they enable issues to be examined in a way that is not possible in interviews conducted at the Civic Offices. Discussions and negotiations take place with families, friends and other landlords. In appropriate cases of relationship and family breakdown, referrals are made to Relate or to the 'Stay Safe' Scheme (see **Support Schemes, Welfare and Mediation Services**). Links have been made with local lettings agencies and there is close liaison with the administrator of the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme (see **Assistance to Homelessness Applicants not in priority need of Accommodation**). Work is sometimes undertaken in conjunction with CABx. HPOs also work closely with colleagues administering Housing Benefit. Good use is made of Pre-tenancy Determinations, to establish the affordability of properties in the private sector for particular clients, and Discretionary Payments are negotiated where existing private sector tenants are struggling to meet their rent.
- 3.2. Currently, homelessness prevention work is focused on families with children and expectant mothers but, with more resources, it could be extended to other priority need groups. As mentioned at 1.3. above, a part-time member of the homelessness team is already assisting with homelessness prevention work but further use of staff resources in this way is not possible at the moment, if targets on homelessness decision times are to be met and improved to meet national targets. However, this may be possible at a later date. A bid was made to the ODPM for funding for an additional HPO to work primarily with young people, as this is the age group in which homelessness appears to be on the increase in the area, but the bid was not successful. One additional homelessness prevention officer would allow most, if not all, potential priority need cases to be referred to the service. It may not be that homelessness prevention measures will be as effective in cases of vulnerability, for instance, where mental health is an issue, but they should be attempted, if possible.
- 3.3. A key factor in continuing the success of homelessness prevention is increasing the availability of funds for deposits on accommodation in the private rented sector. The Council supported a bid made by an RSL, East Thames Housing Group (ETHG), to the ODPM for funding to provide a rent deposit scheme to complement the existing voluntary one operated by Epping Forest Housing Aid (see **Assistance to Homelessness Applicants not in Priority Need of Accommodation**). This bid, although having several merits, was also unsuccessful.
- 3.4. Other strategies could be explored but these would also depend on the availability of resources. For instance, visits to landlords who are considering withdrawing properties from the private rented sector (with possible cash incentives not to do so in certain circumstances) and the

provision of a 'sanctuary rooms' in the homes of victims of domestic violence. These are appropriate where perpetrators have no right of entry to a property. They provide refuge for victims whilst the Police are summoned. The scheme involves the replacement of an internal door (usually the one to the largest bedroom) with a solid core door, reversed to open outwards and fitted with large steel hinges and mortice bolts. Fire precaution measures are added and include the provision of a collapsible escape ladder. Costs are in the region of £800 per property. The scheme is suitable for social and private sector housing funded on a 'spend to save' basis.

- 3.5. Reducing the risk of repeat homelessness is an important aspect of prevention work. The Council also supported a bid for funding to the ODPM by NACRO Community Enterprises to provide floating support to formerly homeless households placed in Council housing to supplement the work of the Council's welfare officers (see **Support Schemes, Welfare and Mediation Services**). Again, the bid was unsuccessful, the ODPM having received bids totally £41 million across the country for funds of £2 million.

Key points

- **Homelessness prevention work with families and expectant mothers has proved highly successful.**
- **Homelessness prevention work should be extended to encompass all priority need groups.**
- **Additional funding is needed to facilitate access to more privately rented accommodation.**
- **Additional resources would allow more homelessness prevention strategies to be used, for instance the provision of 'sanctuary rooms' in the homes of victims of domestic violence.**
- **Reducing the risk of repeat homelessness is an important aspect of prevention work.**

Support Schemes, Welfare and Mediation Services

1. Introduction

- 1.1. A number of support schemes are in place in the District to support people who have been homeless or may be at risk of being homeless.
- 1.2. There are two floating support schemes; one is operated by Women's Aid and one by Cygnet Housing Association (CHA). Both schemes are supported by EFDC.
- 1.3. The Council employs a housing welfare officer for 18 hours each week to support people placed in interim and temporary accommodation under the provisions of homelessness legislation. The post-holder also monitors the standard of accommodation provided and gives feed-back on suitability.
- 1.4. In addition, EFDC employs a full time housing welfare officer to help vulnerable Council tenants maintain their secure tenancies.
- 1.5. The Council also uses a specialist mediation service to coordinate mediation in intractable neighbour disputes where Conditions of Tenancy are being breached and secure tenancies are at risk.
- 1.6. The services of Relate have been secured as part of the homelessness prevention service to avert homelessness in appropriate instances of relationship breakdown.

2. Womens' Aid Floating Support Scheme

- 2.1. This is known as the 'Stay Safe' scheme. It was launched in January 2003 and is now funded through Essex County Council Supporting People, with a budget of £51,406 for this area, facilitating help for 12 households.
- 2.2. The aim of Stay Safe is to assist women experiencing or at risk of domestic violence to remain safely in their own homes, rather than to seek to move. It can also be used to support women moving on from a refuge. Support is intensive and of the same extent and standard as that given to women in a refuge. There is access to a 24 hour emergency call line and contact at least once each week. Work is undertaken in close liaison with the police. Risk assessments are made and, if it is safe, meetings take place in client's homes. Otherwise, local drop-in centres are used. On average, the support worker will spend around 3 hours per week on each case. Tailor made plans are made, setting out the action required to provide the practical support, information, advice and guidance needed in each case. Plans are kept under review and risk assessments updated.
- 2.3. Although referrals to Stay Safe may be made by other agencies, many are made through the Council's Homelessness Prevention Service, which monitors use of the scheme. It has capacity for 12 cases at any one time and has worked to capacity since inception. In fact, a waiting list is operated.
- 2.4. Applicants on the waiting list receive an 'outreach service', to which EFDC contributes £15,500 per annum towards costs. Applicants can visit the drop-in centres and have access to a solicitor, if required. They can also attend esteem boosting fun sessions, for instance, make-up demonstrations. In the 9 months between 30th September 2004 and 30th June 2005, 46 families were supported through the drop-in centres.
- 2.5. Stay Safe has one full-time equivalent (FTE) support worker in the District. She reports to an area co-ordinator who is based in Harlow and also responsible for 3 FTE support posts serving similar schemes in East Hertfordshire, Broxbourne and Harlow.

3. CHA floating support scheme

- 3.1. This scheme was jointly commissioned by EFDC and Essex County Council. Its purpose is to help single people with histories of mental ill health or substance abuse who have experienced homelessness, to develop life skills and stop homelessness recurring.
- 3.2. The scheme provides for EFDC to lease up to 12 properties at any one time to CHA. Leases last up to 2 years. CHA furnishes the dwellings, which are either self-contained studio or one bedroom properties, and lets them on renewable 6 month assured short-hold tenancies, giving support to tenants for between 6 months and 2 years, as needed. Management costs work out at around £30 per week per property and support charges at about £32 per week, with funding arrangements for support charges through the Essex County Council Supporting People budget. CHA operates a number of other floating support schemes in the county and currently employs one FTE support worker for the Epping Forest area.
- 3.3. Nominations to the scheme are made via a multi-agency referral panel. Nominees must have had a history of drug or alcohol abuse or mental health problems and the Council must have accepted a full housing duty to them. The success rate of the scheme is very high, as is the demand. There is a waiting list of around 6 applicants for the scheme at any one time and they can wait up to 6 months for a vacancy to arise. Generally these applicants are in B&B accommodation. There is a clear need for greater provision for this client group. The Council supported a bid for funding to the ODPM by NACRO Community Enterprises to provide floating support to formerly homeless households placed in Council housing, supplementing the work of the Council's welfare officers. Unfortunately, the bid was unsuccessful but NACRO will consider seeking funding from Essex Supporting People Commissioning Body in Summer 2006 (see also 7.1.below). In addition, EFDC is seeking to develop land it owns at Leader Lodge, North Weald to provide 10 self-contained units of accommodation for vulnerable people (see **Interim and Temporary Accommodation**) which may include a crash pad to reduce the use of B&B in sudden incidences of homelessness in young single people.
- 3.4. The progress of tenants on the existing floating support scheme is monitored by the referral panel with the aim that at the end of their 2 year period or earlier they are offered secure tenancies, either of their existing dwellings or alternative ones. The number of properties in the scheme is kept topped up from vacancies in the Council's housing stock. If the referral panel does not consider that an offer of a secure tenancy should be made, the arrangement is that alternative accommodation, for example where 24 hour support is available, should be organised by the most appropriate agency. However, this has not, so far, proved necessary in over 5 years of operation.
- 3.5. A multi-agency Support and Advisory Group for the Epping Forest scheme meets quarterly to consider such issues as performance and tenant satisfaction in respect of the scheme. The only area of concern that has arisen has been delays in the preparation of leases as properties in the scheme change. EFDC's management agreement with CHA ends on 28th February 2006, though an extension to 31st December 2006 is currently under consideration (see 7. below), by which time the Support and Advisory Group will have considered whether it will be beneficial for future tenants to hold their tenancies directly from the Council, with CHA continuing to provide the same services as before.

4. Housing Welfare Officers

- 4.1. The aim of the housing welfare officer (HWO) employed to support people in interim and temporary accommodation is to promote social inclusion and avert loss of accommodation because of anti-social behaviour. The post-holder undertakes outreach work but is based at Norway House, North Weald (see **Interim and Temporary Accommodation**). She provides a key link with health workers (ensuring registration with G.P.s) and with benefit staff, facilitates access to life-skill courses, where appropriate, and helps with preparations for long-term accommodation. However, her workload is such that she is unable to offer assistance with accessing education and employment.

- 4.2. Each week the HWO receives from the Assistant Housing Needs Manager (Homelessness) (see **Assessment of Homelessness Applications, Decisions, Notifications and Reviews**, details of applicants newly placed in interim or temporary accommodation. She offers interviews to all those in B&B establishments and makes assessments of their support needs. She sees around 10 applicants each week, with approximately 2 new cases being accepted for ongoing support each week. The cost of the current service is approximately £12,000 per annum, met from Essex County Council's Supporting People Budget.
- 4.3. The full time HWO works with EFDC tenants holding secure tenancies and with their families. She is based at the Civic Offices in Epping and cases are referred to her through the Council's two Area Housing Managers (one based at the Civic Offices, the other at a satellite office in Loughton). Her role is similar to that of the temporary accommodation welfare officer, with particular emphasis on safety and security, advice on financial matters and benefit claims, addressing anti-social behaviour and promoting social activities.
- 4.4. Around 55 cases are referred each year, with around 20 being active at any one time. The cost for this service is approximately £24,000 per annum, funded through the County's Supporting People budget.
- 4.5. There are 2 Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) in the District and their team managers have each commented on the positive support offered to secure tenants by the Council's Welfare Officer and Housing Management colleagues. There is close liaison between these staff and Community Psychiatric Nurses. In addition, the Assistant Housing Needs Manager (Homelessness) meets on a quarterly basis with one of the team managers to discuss issues of common interest and there is a protocol for joint working (see **Appendix 5**). No gaps in the Council's Homelessness Service have been identified by the CMHT managers.

5. Mediation

- 5.1. EFDC housing officers report that an increasing number of tenants are experiencing anti-social behaviour. In response, from April 2006, the Council will commence the use of Introductory Tenancies, whereby all new Council tenancies are insecure for at least a year. The number of perpetrators likely to be subject to legal action, including possible eviction, will probably increase and emphasis is being placed on prevention work, with mediation as one of the methods by which the need for punitive action can be averted.
- 5.2. The Council uses a specialist mediation service to co-ordinate mediation in intractable neighbour disputes between its tenants where Conditions of Tenancy are being breached and secure tenancies are at risk. The company employed is Mediation Norwich, which arranges for qualified arbiters and trained mediators to work with tenants on an impartial basis at neutral venues to construct solutions and reach agreements.
- 5.3. The cost for each case is £500 to £600 and a sum of £1,500 has been set aside from the Housing Revenue Account, with a top up from the Council's Crime Reduction Strategy Fund, to meet costs.

6. Relate

- 6.1. EFDC was one of the first local housing authorities in Essex to commission the services of Relate to help prevent homelessness. The organisation was formerly known as 'Marriage Guidance' but, for some time now, has offered counselling on a wider basis.
- 6.2. Referrals are made by Homelessness Prevention Officers and began in September 2004. In the first 9 months of operation, 9 applicants threatened with homelessness as a result of family breakdown were referred and homelessness was prevented in 5 of these cases.

- 6.3. Counselling sessions take place in Housing Services' interview rooms. Each session lasts about an hour. The service is funded on a 'spend to save basis', at a cost of £50 per case for up to 6 sessions. However, in most instances, it is apparent to the Counsellor by the third session whether or not homelessness is likely to be prevented.
- 6.4. The Service is monitored by the Assistant Housing Needs Manager (Homelessness) and he holds quarterly monitoring meetings with the Housing Needs Manager and the Relate Chief Executive.
- 6.5. Relate now employs counsellors who specialise in dealing with 16 and 17 year olds who are in dispute with their families and, in view of the rise in homelessness in this group (see **Statistical Analysis**), the possibility of enlisting their services should be explored, though this is only likely to be possible if additional staff resources are allocated to the homelessness prevention team.

7. The Future of Floating Support in Essex

- 7.1. The ODPM is undertaking 'value improvement' assessments nationally to identify possible efficiency savings in Supporting People funding and the Essex Supporting People Commissioning Body (ESPCB) is undertaking a pilot assessment on the delivery of floating support services in the County. A draft model for service delivery has been prepared and is scheduled for approval by ESPCB in February 2006. It is expected that existing service providers will then be served with termination notices and new procurement arrangements be put in place in Summer 2006. This may result in different providers delivering floating support and welfare services for EFDC from January 2007.

Key Points

- **The Stay Safe Scheme has capacity to help 12 victims of domestic violence and their dependants to remain safely in their homes. The scheme has worked to capacity since its inception and there is a waiting list. Applicants on the waiting list can use the scheme's drop-in centres.**
- **The floating support scheme for people with a history of mental health problems or drug and alcohol abuse has been very successful. There may be a change in service provider in January 2007 and the Support and Advisory Group will be consider whether future tenants should hold their tenancies directly from the Council.**
- **There is a protocol for joint working between CMHTs and homelessness officers.**
- **The welfare service provides important support for people in interim and temporary accommodation but is unable to help with access to education and employment.**
- **A sum of £1,500 has been set aside from the Housing Revenue Account, with a top up from the Council's Crime Reduction Strategy Fund, to meet the cost of mediation between feuding Council tenants where secure tenancies are at risk.**
- **Relate has counsellors who specialise in dealing with 16 and 17 year olds in dispute with their families and, in connection with homelessness prevention, the possibility of employing their services should be explored.**

The Role of Learning and Social Care

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Housing Needs and Social Care staff work closely together. Essex County Council (ECC) Learning and Social Care has two teams working in the area whose activities relate to young people, families and homelessness. They are the Children and Young People's Team and the Leaving Care Team.
- 1.2. As its name indicates, the Leaving Care Team supports young people leaving care. The Children and Young People's Team has a wide remit, part of which involves assisting, where necessary, families deemed by EFDC to have become homeless intentionally.

2. Young People Leaving Care

- 2.1. Children may stay in foster care up to the age of 18 and ECC has a responsibility to provide financial support to them up to that age. At 15, all children in care must have 'pathway' plans. These could include further education, as well as training on life skills, such as budgeting.
- 2.2. Beyond the age of 18 and up to 21, the Leaving Care Team has a duty to provide practical advice and help concerning access to training and employment. In cases of care orders, this duty extends to the age of 24.
- 2.3. Between April 2002 and July 2005 EFDC received 3 homeless applications from persons aged 18 to 20 who had formerly been in care (see Statistical Information). This low figure is probably because there are very few foster carers in the District.

3. Families

- 3.1. Because of the potential significant detrimental effect to the children, families with dependent children deemed to have become homeless intentionally by EFDC are referred, with parental agreement, to the Children and Young People's Team. In the 12 months between 1st October 2004 and 1st October 2005, 4 such families were referred.
- 3.2. The Children and Young People's Team has 'Section 17 money' available, which is discretionary to assist homeless families. B&B is sometimes used for 2 weeks or so, during which privately rented accommodation is normally secured through the provision of a rent deposit. Occasionally, properties are outside the District. EFDC is aware of the difficulties Social Care may face and frequently continues to secure accommodation for families for up to 3 months after appeals processes have been exhausted.
- 3.3. The number of children running away from their families is not seen as significantly high by Social Care, although other sources identify a problem in the Waltham Abbey area. A 'crash pad' would be useful as part of a strategy to support families, with the aim of working through their difficulties.
- 3.4. The Connexions Service provides children between the ages of 16 and 18 with a pathway plan linking to employment and offers advice on housing and other issues.

4. Liaison, Joint Working and Training.

- 4.1. The Children and Young People's Team has regular contact with EFDC's Housing Services. Case conferences are effective and have appropriate input.
- 4.2. The protocol between the 2 teams for dealing with 16 and 17 year olds who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness has recently been updated.

4.3. The Domestic Violence Forum has organised joint training and raised awareness on this and related issues, such as child protection.

Key Points

- **There is a low incidence of homelessness among 18 to 20 year olds formerly in care. This may be because there are few foster carers in the District.**
- **The Children and Young People's Team may help families, whom EFDC has found to be intentionally homeless, find private rented accommodation.**
- **There is close liaison between Social Care and Housing Services.**
- **A 'crash pad' would be useful as part of a strategy to support families going through difficulties and prevent young people becoming homeless.**
- **The protocol for dealing with 16 and 17 year olds who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness has recently been updated.**
- **The Domestic Violence Forum has organised joint training and raised awareness on this and related issues, such as child protection.**

Services for People Involved with Drug and Alcohol Abuse

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This section reports on the work of the Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Service (ADAS), the Community Drugs and Alcohol Team (CDAT) and the Essex Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service (EYPDAS). The services are based outside the area. It would be helpful if there were a base within the District.

2. Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Service

- 2.1. ADAS is a charity, based in Harlow but serving this District as well. It has 7 trustees, 2 full time and 8 part-time employees and 9 volunteers.
- 2.2. Although ADAS has a contract with Essex County Council Drug Action Team to deliver services to people with problems related to alcohol and substance abuse, it does not rely solely on ECC for funding. It has received money from a number of different sources, including the European Union and the Children's Fund. In 2002/03 it received a £20,000 capital grant and a £7,500 revenue grant from EFDC to set up a programme for crack users, with on-going funding supplied by Network East Foyers.
- 2.3. All ADAS clients are triaged. A risk assessment is undertaken, with particular attention to the risk of injury to children or of suicide. Complex cases are referred to CDAT. Clients who do not have multiple needs may enter into a structured programme with a qualified counsellor or have a single advice interview. Training on such issues as assertiveness, stress and anxiety is available. Complementary therapies, for instance aromatherapy, may be offered. Support is also available to partners and relatives and there is a play therapist for children affected by substance abuse issues. The minimum age for a service user is 3 years. There is no upper age limit. People with alcohol problems far outnumber those with drug problems.

3. Community Drugs and Alcohol Team

- 3.1. CDAT has a staff of 20, including 9 full-time and 1 part-time clinician, ranging through a consultant psychiatrist and a registrar to nurses. Other employees are social and administrative workers.
- 3.2. CDAT is based in Harlow but offers outreach services in Loughton and Waltham Abbey. It is funded through Essex County Council Drugs Action Team, working with Essex Police and Uttlesford Primary Care Trust as lead commissioner for other Primary Care Trusts. CDAT links with EFDC through the Drugs and Alcohol Reference Group, a multi-agency group representing key stakeholders in the Epping Forest area.
- 3.3. Clients are referred to CDAT through a number of sources, including hospitals, ADAS, General Practitioners, family members and self-referrals. Minimum age for clients is 16. There is no upper age limit. People with alcohol problems far outnumber those with drug problems.
- 3.4. All CDAT clients are triaged and risk assessed. Particular attention is paid to the following: risk linked to the abuse, for instance, dirty needles; mental health problems; risk of violence to self or others; and child neglect. All clients have a physical assessment and a community care plan. A panel meets monthly to prioritise cases.
- 3.5. Some clients may be referred for rehabilitation. This may be residential, usually for 6 months, or may be structured around day attendance. Both services are provided outside the local area, which is seen as beneficial to clients.

3.6. Homelessness is commonly a problem for CDAT clients. Staff are aware of EFDC's functions in respect of homelessness and liaison is good. The floating support scheme provided by Cygnet Housing Association (see **Support, Welfare and Mediation Services**) is considered invaluable but more provision of this sort is needed. It would be helpful if clients could have more housing options. B&B out of the Epping Forest District is seen as counterproductive. Although CDAT continue to offer services, clients say their contact with other users increases in B&B and, as a consequence, their exposure to suppliers.

4. Essex Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service

- 4.1. EYPDAS is funded by The Children's Society, Communities Against Drugs, the Drug Action Teams for Thurrock and Essex County Council, Essex Youth Offending Services and Colchester Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.
- 4.2. It is one of a number of The Children's Society projects and has 21 full-time and 5 part-time employees which include social, youth and community and administrative workers and a family therapist.
- 4.3. EYPDAS works with clients until they reach the age of 19 but also offers support to families, carers and professionals. It is based in Chelmsford but offers services across the county, subsidising travel in some instances.
- 4.4. EYPDAS has 5 service areas: Assessment and Counselling; Outreach (including BME and specialist); an Offender Related Service; Substance Misuse Training for Professionals; and a Structured Day Care Programme. In addition, there is a telephone help-line.
- 4.5. Most referrals are made by parents, schools and health workers. EYPDAS has noted a drop in the age at which children are referred to them (there is no lower age limit) and recently several have been under the age of 10.
- 4.6. The family support helps young people remain in their own homes but when necessary they are referred to the emergency night shelter in Colchester. This is not considered to be very satisfactory because of risk of exposure to drugs dealers and the cost of travel may be prohibitive.
- 4.7. Sometimes it is the parents who are the substance abusers. This may result in the young people leaving home or the whole family becoming homeless.
- 4.8. EYPDAS's work in the Epping Forest District has included: 'drop - in for information' sessions at Limes Farm, Chigwell; drugs workshops at Oakview School; drug awareness sessions in Waltham Abbey. Even so, it has fewer clients in the District than in other localities. A staff member is to attend meetings of a sub-group of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership so that the reasons for this may be explored.

Key points

- **Of those using the services of the ADAS and CDAT, clients with alcohol problems far outnumber those with drugs problems.**
- **Homelessness is commonly a problem for CDAT clients.**
- **B&B and the emergency night shelter in Colchester are considered counterproductive for drug and alcohol users. Clients say their contact with other users increases, as does risk of exposure to suppliers.**
- **The floating support scheme provided by Cygnet Housing Association is invaluable. Additional provision of this sort is needed.**

- **ADAS, CDAT and EYPDAS are all based outside the District. It would be helpful if there were a base within the area.**

Homelessness Assessments, Decisions, Notifications and Reviews.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. All work relating to the assessment of homeless applications is currently carried out by staff in the Housing Needs Section of EFDC's Housing Services based at the Civic Offices in Epping (staffing structure is shown at **Appendix 1**).
- 1.2. The service operates in accordance with legislation, the ODPM's Code of Guidance on Homelessness, this Homelessness Strategy and the Council's Housing Charter, which sets out in simple, clear and precise terms the Council's general approach to all its housing services.

2. Homelessness Assessments, Decisions, Notifications and Performance

- 2.1. Most homeless applicants are interviewed in dedicated interview rooms at the Civic Offices, where toys are available for children, if required, though, generally, Housing Services prefer children not to be present at interviews and procedures are being reviewed with child protection issues in mind. Although there is pressure on the availability of the 2 interview rooms, which are shared with housing management staff, applicants with appointments are generally seen promptly. Around 70% of homelessness interviews are conducted by prior arrangement, helping staff to manage workloads and clients to avoid long waits. Homelessness officers do undertake home and hospital visits when necessary. Government Housing Inspectors have commented in the past on officers' sympathetic and sensitive approach.
- 2.2. Where English is not the first language of a client, staff are able to engage the services of Language Line. A 'point card' can be used to establish which language is required and immediate translation can be effected by telephone, with the cost being met by EFDC. Document translation can also be arranged in appropriate cases.
- 2.3. The process of assessing applications is complex and governed by the provisions of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), by the Code of Guidance on the legislation issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, by statutory instruments, the Local Authority Agreement and a vast amount of case law. Much of the case law developed from Part III of the Housing Act 1977, consolidated in the Housing Act 1985. Also relevant is immigration legislation.
- 2.4. Following the requirements of legislation, EFDC adopts a 'firm but fair' approach to homelessness. Mindful that it receives 'overspill' homelessness applications from less environmentally attractive areas, whilst striving to be just, its intention is only to secure accommodation when statutorily required to do so. Nevertheless, in accordance with good practice, instead of requiring letters from solicitors, letters from evicting relatives are accepted. Likewise, Notice to Quits (NTQS) from private landlords are accepted, without the need for Court Orders.
- 2.5. Investigation of claims involves, amongst other enquiries, contact with previous landlords (both public and private), mortgage lenders, solicitors, environmental health officers, land registry, social workers, medical practitioners, occupational therapists, hospital workers, victim support groups, police, neighbours, relatives, and the Immigration & Nationality Directorate.
- 2.6. These duties rest with 2.5 FTE homelessness caseworkers, who also arrange interim and temporary accommodation as necessary. Prior to December 2004 there were 2 FTE caseworkers but their caseloads were more than double the national average (around 50 active cases per FTE officer, as opposed to around 20 nationally). This had an impact on performance and steps had to be taken to address the issue. One additional FTE officer was appointed to effect an immediate improvement (see 2.8. below). The post was then reduced to part-time, with the remaining .5 FTE equivalent being transferred to homelessness prevention work (see **Homelessness Prevention 1.3**).

- 2.7. The caseworkers are supervised by the Assistant Housing Needs Manager (Homelessness) (AHNM(H)). He monitors the progress of homeless applications on a fortnightly basis through the Housing Services' computer software, the Open Housing Management System (OHMS). Statistical information is then collated through the Housing Needs Manager (HNM), who reports on performance to the Assistant Head of Housing Services (Operations) AHH(O) and the Head of Housing Services (HHS) on a quarterly basis. Around 500 applications are processed each year (see **Statistics Information**). When caseworkers have completed their investigations they form a view as to the duty owed to each applicant and submit their decision, together with reasons, to the AHNM(H). In most cases he is able to sign-off the decision straight away but occasionally he may have to point out an error in the process or ask for a further line of enquiry. No applicant is notified of a decision on the duty owed, until the AHNM(H) or the Housing Needs Manager in his absence, is satisfied that it is correct. Notification letters are sent to applicants within 3 days of a final decision being made.
- 2.8. The Government recommends that homelessness enquiries are completed and decisions issued within 33 days of an application being made. The average time that EFDC took to make a decision in 2003/04 was 43 days. However, with the change in staffing arrangements identified at 2.6. above, the situation improved dramatically. The average time now taken to complete enquiries is 20.6 days. Around 1 in 5 cases exceeds the recommended time scale but this is because enquiries are rigorous (see 2.4.). It is inevitable that some become protracted. Information on performance is shown annually in the Council's Best Value Performance Plan and additional information is given below. The percentage target for 2006/07 will be 85%.

Year	Ave. time to complete enquiry and issue decision	Target	% of cases with enquiries complete and decision issued within 33 days	Target
2003/04	43 days	33 days	50.8 %	75 %
2004/05	29 days	33 days	66.3 %	75 %
April 05 to Dec 05	20.6 days	33 days	80.42 %	75 %

3. Out of Hours Service

- 3.1. The AHNM(H) and the caseworkers provide EFDC's 'out of hours' homelessness service. They work on a roster and are reimbursed for their home telephone lines. They receive no other payment for being 'on stand by' but are paid overtime if they are called (minimum 1 hour). The number of out of hours calls is low; per week, usually no more than 1 hour.

4. Reviews

- 4.1. When adverse decisions are made on homeless applications, applicants are fully advised of the courses of action open to them. Not only are they given information concerning their legal right to request a review of the decision, they are also advised in writing of agencies able to assist them in the review process (CABx and Shelter). This example of good practice has been commented on by Shelter.
- 4.2. Legislation requires that a request for a review of a homelessness decision should be made within 21 days of the notification of the original decision. If appellants are out of time for requesting a statutory review, EFDC may offer a non – statutory review, depending on circumstances.
- 4.3. Statutory reviews carried out on non priority need decisions are undertaken by the HNM, providing she was not involved in the original decision. Those on the suitability of temporary or

long-term accommodation are undertaken by the AHH(O). A written procedure is followed in the conduct of these reviews.

- 4.4. This table shows the number of reviews in respect of non-priority need undertaken from 2002/03 onwards.

Priority need	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06 <i>April to Dec</i>
Upheld	5	8	5	8
Dismissed	6	5	2	3
Total	11	13	7	11

- 4.5. Although the number of appeals of this nature fluctuate, levels for 2005/06 look set to exceed previous years. A link may be made with the increase in the number of non-priority applications (see **Statistical Analysis of Homelessness 2.1.**).

- 4.6. This table shows the number of reviews in respect of suitability of accommodation offered from 2002/03.

Suitability	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06 <i>April to Dec</i>
Upheld	2	8	12	5
Dismissed	1	3	10	12
Total	3	11	22	17

- 4.7. There was a doubling in the number of reviews of this nature between 2003/04 and 2004/05. This may be due to the expectations of clients not having adjusted to diminished Council housing stock (through the Right to Buy), coupled with increased demand for remaining resources. In any event, levels for 2005/06 look set to be similar to those of 2004/05.
- 4.8. Other homeless reviews (usually challenges on decisions that applicants have become homeless intentionally) are conducted by the Housing Reviews and Appeals Panel (HRAP), comprising 5 District Councillors. Applicants are able to put their case both in writing and in person. If they prefer, they can appoint a third party to represent them, for instance, a solicitor, friend, ward member or representative from Shelter or one of the CABX. Hearings review all the facts afresh. The Panel can put questions to the AHNM(H) and the applicant and the AHNM(H) and the applicant can pose questions to each other. The HRAP is guided on the particular points of law relevant to each case by the Head of Housing Services or, in his absence, the AHH(O). The way in which the original decision was made is scrutinised. If the Panel considers the original decision was correct but that there was a 'deficiency or irregularity' in the way it was made, the applicant is given the opportunity to make further representations before the Panel makes a final decision. In all cases, detailed minutes are taken by a committee secretary from EFDC's Research and Democratic Service, who also notifies applicants in writing of the Panel's decision, usually within 3 days. A copy of the minutes are provided to the applicant, when produced. Since its introduction in 1991, up to September 2005, the HRAP has considered 63 homelessness appeals, dismissing 44 and allowing 19.
- 4.9. All statutory reviews are completed within the statutory 56 days, unless otherwise agreed with the applicant. It is usually the applicant rather than the Council that seeks an extension of time.
- 4.10. If a homeless applicant is dissatisfied with a decision made at a statutory review, providing their application is made within 21 days of the statutory review decision, they have the right to pursue a further review on a point of law through the County Court. This is explained to applicants in the Panel's decision letter. In fact, only 4 applicants have ever pursued a review to the County Court; 2 were successful, 2 were not.

4.11. Occasionally there may be disputes between local authorities where applicants are referred from one to another. In such cases an accredited arbitrator may be appointed by mutual agreement to resolve the dispute. Most applicants apply to a local authority with whom they have a local connection and by whom they want to be housed, so disputes are rare and EFDC has been involved in only one in recent years.

Key points

- **EFDC adopts a ‘firm but fair’ approach to homelessness. Its intention is only to secure accommodation when statutorily required to do so.**
- **The Government recommends that enquiries are completed within 33 days. The average time taken to complete enquiries by this authority is less than 20.6 days but around 1 in 5 cases exceeds the recommended time scale.**
- **The review process is considered fair and independent, and always carried out within statutory timetable, with applicants being able to present their cases in person and/or by advocates.**

Interim and Temporary Accommodation

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Where a local housing authority has reason to believe that a homeless applicant has a priority need for accommodation, it has a statutory duty to arrange interim accommodation for the applicant, pending completion of enquiries into the case. If, on completion of enquiries, it is decided that a full housing duty is owed to the applicant, temporary accommodation must be arranged until the full housing duty is discharged.
- 1.2. EFDC uses a variety of interim and temporary accommodation: a hostel which it owns (Norway House); a small block of self – contained flats (Hemnall House) where tenants receive out-reach support from Norway House staff; privately rented accommodation leased by an RSL and sub-let to formerly homeless households (the Fresh START Scheme); the Council’s own housing stock let to CHA (see **Support Schemes, Welfare and Mediation Services**); the Council’s own housing stock let on non-secure tenancies; womens’ refuges (including Brook Haven); and B&B accommodation.
- 1.3. Information on each type of accommodation is given in this section and the table below shows the distribution of households between the different types of temporary accommodation between 31st December 2004 and 31st December 2005.

Date	Norway House*	Hemnall House*#	Fresh START*#	CHA*#	Non-secure tenancies #	Brook Haven*#	Other Women's Refuges*	B&B*	Total
31/12/04	29	7	8	12	105	5	3	12	181
31/03/05	13	7	6	12	108	5	4	11	166
30/06/05	28	7	9	12	131	5	3	15	212
30/09/05	26	7	9	12	128	5	5	20	212
21/10/05	30	7	9	12	103	5	9	12	187
31/12/05	21	7	9	12	122	5	11	21	208

*Denotes accommodation where support is given, for instance, through the housing welfare service or intensive housing management.

#Denotes self-contained accommodation.

- 1.4. Norway House is used as interim accommodation for families with children (or expectant mothers) whilst cases are being assessed (see **Assessment of Applications, Decisions, Notifications and Reviews**) and B&B is used for households without children.
- 1.5. Central government has set all local housing authorities a target of reducing the number of households they have in temporary accommodation to at least 50% of 31st December 2004 figures, by 31st March 2010. For EFDC this means a reduction from 181 to 90 households in the next four and a half years (see **Strategy** for how this may be achieved).
- 1.6. Most formerly homeless households currently spend between 6 months and a year in temporary accommodation. The average stay in B&B for single people not waiting for the floating support scheme but moving on to non-secure tenancies is 5 months.
- 1.7. Much of the temporary accommodation provided by this authority is good quality self-contained accommodation with support. Support is often key to reducing the risk of repeat homelessness and, indeed, EFDC has negligible levels of repeat homelessness with zero returns for each quarter in the last 12 months. It would be counter-productive to reduce the provision of good quality temporary accommodation (see **Support Schemes, Welfare and Mediation Services**) and, in fact, the Council plans to extend it. If the government’s target is to be met, the use of B&B accommodation and non-secure tenancies in the Council’s general housing stock needs to

be eliminated. Housing officers have met with staff from the ODPM and this approach has been agreed with them. The Strategy aims to have temporary accommodation in use at 31st March 2010 to be no more than as shown below.

Norway House	Hemnall House	Fresh START	CHA	Brook Haven	New Women's Refuge	Leader Lodge	Total
30	7	20**	12	5	5^^	10^^	89

**Denotes provision in progress but not yet complete

^^ Denotes recommended provision not yet progressed

2. Norway House

- 2.1. EFDC's hostel, Norway House, is situated on the main road from North Weald to Epping. It was formerly an air-force officers' mess and was acquired by EFDC for its current purpose in 1977. It underwent a major refurbishment and improvement scheme in 2004 and 2005, including the provision of disabled access. The work was identified in the former Homelessness Strategy. Further information is given at **Action Plan**.
- 2.2. Due to their connections with the Battle of Britain, the building and grounds has recently been Grade II listed as being of important historical interest. The grounds are substantial and back onto a nature reserve. They are maintained through Housing Services' general grounds maintenance contract with Leisure Services.
- 2.3. Adjacent to the main building is a small enclosed garden which provides a play area for children under 5. There is a second play area for older children. Both play areas were equipped by a group of volunteers, raising funds mainly through grants from Essex County Council Community Partnership and Essex Youth Development and Child-Care Partnership. This group, Supporting Epping Forest Families in Temporary Accommodation (SEFFTA), was formed in 2001. It works mainly with families in Norway House but undertakes some outreach work with those in self-contained temporary accommodation. It is instrumental in organising play schemes, outings, fun days, cookery lessons, buggy walks and barbeques. It is currently raising funds for more outdoor play equipment at Norway House and aims to have this installed for Spring 2006.
- 2.4. Norway House has 2 big car parks and a large secure store for residents' furniture, should they be unable to accommodate all their possessions in their rooms. This facility is usually full because it also provides storage for other homeless households, for instance single people in B&B accommodation.
- 2.5. The hostel has lengthy corridors and 2 staircases at each end of the main building, giving access to upper floors. There are 32 rooms on the ground and first floors which are let individually or as suites, as necessary. Four attic rooms on the 2nd floor have recently been refurbished to also provide 2 small suites of accommodation, with their own bathrooms and W.C.s. Two additional rooms on the ground floor are reserved for night and week-end emergencies, with beds made-up made ready for use.
- 2.6. Norway House also has a self-contained flat on the first floor providing 2 additional rooms to accommodate single mothers aged 16 or 17. This provision was made in accordance with a Government requirement that mothers in this age group, who do not have a partner or relatives to support them, should be housed in supported accommodation. Although demand for this facility is limited, when it is required, the amount of support that can be provided is usually not sufficient. Therefore, it is frequently used to accommodate other homeless households. There is a need for more specialist provision for young parents and EFDC, Brentwood Borough Council and Uttlesford District Council are investigating the possibility of a cross-boundary young parent scheme (see 9.2. below).

- 2.7. In the ordinary course of events, most residents at Norway House furnish their rooms themselves but, where necessary, basic items of equipment, such as beds, are supplied from hostel stores. Curtains are supplied for all rooms.
- 2.8. Residents are responsible for the cleanliness of their own rooms and, to some degree, communal facilities. External window cleaning is undertaken once a year by a private contractor.
- 2.9. There is one large kitchen for occupants of ground floor rooms, sub-divided into areas, which 2 families share. Each area has a combination grill/microwave cooker, lockable refrigerator, sink with drainer, work surface, cupboards, table and chairs. Residents are responsible for cleanliness and safety in their allotted area.
- 2.10. There are 2 more kitchens on the 1st floor. These are smaller than the ground floor one but are sub-divided and equipped in a similar way.
- 2.11. All residents' rooms have wash hand basins and a supply of drinking water. One suite of rooms on the ground floor and one suite on the first floor have their own bathrooms and W.C.s but, other than in these and the attic suites, bathrooms and W.C.s are shared. There are 4 bathrooms for females and 4 for males and residents are issued with keys to those nearest their room(s).
- 2.12. There is a laundry, which has recently been refurbished, with 3 large washing machines and 2 tumble dryers. Residents purchase a £1 per wash token from the on-site office. The dryers are operated by 50p tokens. In addition, there is an outside drying area in the hostel grounds.
- 2.13. Norway House has a large ground floor common room, furnished with sofas and occasional tables, and with a partitioned soft play area. In addition, there is a children's common room equipped for basket-ball and table tennis. The children's common room is very well used but only open if an adult resident is available to supervise. On Tuesday mornings the room is used for an 'under fives' play group and on Thursday afternoons for a homework club, run by a charity, 'Parent Club'.
- 2.14. On the first and third Wednesday of every month the children's common room is used for the Epping CAB outreach service (see **Housing Advice**). A personal counsellor, funded by SEFFTA, also visits the hostel but, generally, sees residents in their rooms.
- 2.15. The children's common room is also used for meetings of SEFFTA and for inter-agency meetings, held every 2 months. Attendees at these meetings include, among others, the ECC Partnership Coordinator, the manager for the Community Volunteer Service, a representative from EFDC's Leisure Services, the AHNM(H), the Hostel Manager and the local health visitor.
- 2.16. In 1992, in response to an increase in homelessness as a result of a crash in the housing market, 5 chalets, providing accommodation for 10 families, were built in the grounds to the rear of the main hostel. In these, each family has its own living room and 2 good sized bedrooms, whilst sharing a kitchen (including a full-sized cooker) and bathroom with one other family. The chalets are popular. They are intended for occupation by no more than 8 people in 2 households, though they could be used for one very large household. The grounds at Norway House are sufficiently large for additional chalets to be provided, should the need arise, and this option should be kept under review.
- 2.17. The hostel has 5 staff, supervised from the Civic Offices by the AHNM(H). The hostel team comprises: a Manager, 2 Deputy Managers, a Caretaker and a Part-time Cleaner (refer to staff chart at **Appendix 1**). Hostel Management staff have a small suite of offices near to the entrance of the main building, where there is also a Pay Phone for residents' use. Outside, a small former laundry serves as a staff rest room. The offices also provide a base for the Housing Welfare Officer (Temporary Accommodation). For information on this officer's duties, see **Support Schemes, Welfare and Mediation Services**.

- 2.18. The hostel has a door-entry system for the main building and closed circuit television cameras cover external doors, parking areas and some communal areas internally. These systems are controlled from the manager's office.
- 2.19. A 'tuck shop' is also run from the office, the profits from which go towards an entertainer and children's presents that are given out by a volunteer Santa at an annual Christmas party held in the common room.
- 2.20. Residents' post is also distributed from the office. Office opening hours are, generally, 9am to 5 pm weekdays. A service is also provided on Saturday mornings for between 2 and 4 hours. In addition, some cover is offered on Bank Holidays. The Manager and Deputy Managers also provide a 24 hour, 365 day, out of hours service to deal with emergencies. To facilitate this they are required to live within a 10 mile radius of Norway House. Their remuneration and terms of employment reflect the fact that they are on a roster for stand-by duties and they receive an overtime payment for each call-out.
- 2.21. On admission to the hostel, residents are given a 'welcome' pack, which includes useful information about local schools, health services etc. They are helped to apply for housing benefit, if necessary, and a Supporting People assessment is also completed. Norway House is accredited for Supporting People funding.
- 2.22. Residents sign a licence agreement that requires them to have consideration for others occupants and, as part of this, to ensure visitors leave the hostel by no later than 10.30 pm. No pets are allowed.
- 2.23. A newsletter is published by the staff at Norway House every 2 months to profile safety issues and to keep hostel residents informed on matters of general interest.
- 2.24. Details of current room charges etc. are shown at **Appendix 7**. Heating charges apply October to April, inclusive. Currently, payments are collected by the Hostel Managers and recorded manually but there are plans for payments to be made using swipe cards at Post Offices and Paypoints, with payments being administered on OHMS, the computerised system used generally in Housing Services. Residents have coin operated meters in their rooms for the consumption of electricity for television sets, hair-dryers etc. Lost keys are charged at £7.50 for room keys and £8.70 for door-entry fobs.

3. Hemnall House

- 3.1. Hemnall House in Epping stands in its own grounds, adjacent to the forest, and was originally built as a cottage hospital in the early part of the 20th century. When EFDC acquired it, almost 30 years ago, it comprised 10 units of accommodation on ground and first floors, mainly small studio flats with shared facilities, although there were some larger self-contained units.
- 3.2. The former Homelessness Strategy identified the ground floor of Hemnall House as suitable for temporary accommodation, subject to refurbishment to provide 7 self-contained flats and to the installation of new heating throughout the building. This work was completed in August 2004 (see **Action Plan**) and the first tenants moved in shortly afterwards.
- 3.3. The flats are carpeted and the kitchens equipped with refridgerators and cookers. Basic items of furniture are supplied in a similar way as at Norway House, as needed. There is a shared laundry room with a coin-operated washing machine and tumble dryer. Each flat has a coin operated electricity meter.
- 3.4. Norway House Managers support the tenants on an out-reach basis and visit Hemnall House at least twice each week. The flats are let on non-secure tenancies to families with no more than 2 children (because of the limited size of the flats) who are ready to move from Norway House to

more independent temporary accommodation. Tenants pay their rent in the same way as other Council tenants and their accounts are administered from the Civic Offices.

- 3.5. The first floor of Hemnall House is occupied by a very elderly tenant who do not want to move. At the end of her tenancy the first floor can be converted for use by homeless households (see **Action Plan**).

4. The Fresh START Scheme

- 4.1. As identified in the former Homelessness Strategy, 2 years ago the Council agreed to work in partnership with East Thames Housing Group (ETHG) to operate an open market leasing scheme, whereby the housing association would lease up to 10 properties in the District from private landlords. The properties would then be sub-let to homeless households from Norway House or B&B accommodation. The project is known as the Fresh START Scheme and part of ETHG's remit is to provide support to the tenants, to reduce the risk of repeat homelessness. The tenancies are short-hold, with rent levels within local reference rents for housing benefit purposes.
- 4.2. The scheme has proved successful. No significant management issues have arisen and arrears levels are reported by ETHG to be low. Their staff make regular visits to the properties and EFDC has an agreement to pay ETHG a management fee of £21.50 per property per week. This rate was agreed in July 2003 and was far lower than paid to ETHG by all other local authorities (the standard fee being around £36.50 per property per week at that time).
- 4.3. The scheme is now being extended (see **Action Plan**) to include an additional 10 properties, funded by savings on the use of B&B accommodation. For all 20 properties another low management fee has been agreed between EFDC and ETHG of £22 per property per week (this represents an increase of 2.3% for the existing 10 properties, compared to a rise in the Retail Price Index during the same period of 5.7%).

5. Cygnet Housing Association Floating Support Scheme

- 5.1. Full details of this provision are given in the section, **Support Schemes, Welfare and Mediation Services**.

6. Non-secure Tenancies

- 6.1. The Housing Act 1996 provides for properties in the Council's general housing stock to be offered to homeless applicants on non-secure tenancies. These are generally offered to couples and single vulnerable people, not moving to CHA's floating support scheme, the SAFE project, Norway House or the Fresh START Scheme, who would otherwise have a long wait in B&B.
- 6.2. Over 50% of non-secure tenancies are for one bedroom or studio properties. Families whose long-term housing need is for 3 bedroom accommodation are sometimes housed in 2 bedroom properties because of the shortage of large family – sized accommodation.
- 6.3. EFDC has one studio flat reserved in a sheltered housing scheme in Waltham Abbey which is used solely in emergencies for older people. It is equipped with basic furniture, including 2 single beds, bed linen, crockery, cutlery etc. and has proved extremely useful over the years in providing short-term supported housing for older people rendered homeless, for instance, as a result of a burst water tank. A similar emergency flat has recently become available at an RSL sheltered housing scheme in Theydon Bois, following the completion of major refurbishment work.
- 6.4. To supplement this provision, the Social Care Older Person's team leased a flat in EFDC's very sheltered housing scheme in Waltham Abbey for use by older people who had been hospitalised and were fit for discharge but were unable to return immediately to their own home

because, for instance, they were waiting for appropriate adaptations. However, the lease expired on 30th September 2005 and Social Care have notified EFDC that they do not wish to renew it, as the flat was little used.

7. Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

- 7.1. Up until 1999 EFDC took great pride in the fact that it had managed to avoid the use of B&B. Unfortunately, the rise in homeless acceptances and numbers in temporary accommodation meant that its use became inevitable.
- 7.2. EFDC predominately uses hotels outside the District, in Harlow and Ilford, because local hotels tend to be expensive. All hotels used have been inspected to ensure that they provide adequate living conditions and that the costs are reasonable.
- 7.3. EFDC has between 20 and 30 single people placed in B&B accommodation at any one time. It is conscious that B&B accommodation is not cost effective and does not provide ideal living conditions. With this in mind, together with the Government's aim to reduce the use of inappropriate temporary accommodation, the Council aims to avoid the use of B&B placements in all but the most exceptional cases by 31 March 2007.
- 7.4. Housing Services staff work with Housing Benefits Officers to ensure that as much of the cost of B&B accommodation is met through the housing benefit system as possible. Even so, the Council still has to pay around £126 per week per single room because of the loss in Housing Benefit Subsidy received from the Government when B&B accommodation is used. In addition, applicants themselves pay around £12.50 per week.

8. Women's Refuges

- 8.1. EFDC has worked in partnership with ETHG to provide the first women's refuge in the District, which opened in April 2005. It has ample parking, communal gardens, a door entry system, a communal lounge, an indoor play area, a laundry and an office for the Scheme Manager and her part-time assistant.
- 8.2. This refuge is unusual in that it comprises 3 x 1 bedroom and 2 x 2 bedroom self-contained flats with their own kitchens and bathrooms, whereas most refuges have communal facilities. Otherwise, the refuge is similar to others in that it offers intensive support. A Health Visitor attends regularly and the Scheme Manager ensures that all the tenants have a G.P. A solicitor visits the scheme on a regular basis to offer legal advice to those women who need it. The Scheme Manager helps with training and returning to work issues and has established good links with local schools and nurseries.
- 8.3. Essential items of furniture are provided to tenants, who have 6 month Assured Shorthold Tenancies that can be renewed if they are not ready to move on.
- 8.4. The scheme does not provide emergency accommodation and nominees for tenancies must have been accepted for the full homelessness duty by EFDC. Most will have been in interim accommodation at other refuges outside the District.

9. Future Developments

- 9.1. Leader Lodge is situated close to Norway House and was acquired by EFDC at the same time. It has similar associations with the air-force and for some years provided accommodation for the Norway House Manager and one of the Deputy Managers when they were required to live on site. It comprises 1 x 3 bed first floor flat and 1 x 2 bed ground floor flat. These are currently let on non-secure tenancies to formerly homeless families. However, the property stands on a large plot of land and EFDC is seeking planning permission to redevelop the site to provide up to 10 units of self-contained temporary accommodation, with out-reach support from Norway House, on a similar basis to Hemnall House. The development is key to reducing the use of

B&B accommodation by 50%. Some planning issues have already delayed progress but it is hoped that these will be resolved, with the outline planning application being determined by April 2006. Consideration will then need to be given to procuring the project.

- 9.2. Officers at EFDC, Brentwood B.C. and Uttlesford D.C. are investigating the possibility of a cross-boundary young parent scheme that would provide accommodation with high support, provided by Colchester Quakers Housing Association, for young parents in all 3 districts. It has been agreed, in principle, that the preferred location for the scheme would be Epping or Ongar. Essex Supporting People Commissioning Body has confirmed it will guarantee revenue funding and bids have been made to the Housing Corporation and to Essex Cpunty Council for capital funding.
- 9.3. Current provision in the District, specifically for women fleeing domestic violence, is 50% below that recommended by the government as appropriate for the size of the population. Addressing this, needs to be part of the overall plan for developing social housing.
- 9.4. Given the success of the homelessness prevention team in forging good relationships with local letting agents, it should be possible to increase the use of accommodation in the private rented sector to discharge the Council's long-term duty to applicants accepted as homelessness. For the duty to be discharged, the applicant themselves must be agreeable to the arrangement and the accommodation must be available for a minimum of a year. Such offers of accommodation are known as 'qualifying offers' and this authority has discharged its duty by way of a qualifying offer only 3 times in the last 2 years. This is because there is a reluctance on the part of successful homeless applicants to accept qualifying offers. They have concerns about high rents and the lack of security after a year. There is a similar reluctance on the part of property owners because of concerns about defaults on rent payments and other management issues. The concerns of both parties could be addressed if an RSL were to take a long lease on a property and sublet it to the applicant. East Thames Housing Group has some experience of these types of arrangement and EFDC Housing Services staff are entering into preliminary discussions with them about the possibility of a scheme in this area. Such a scheme is likely to be suitable for tenants less in need of the intensive housing management support afforded by the Fresh START Scheme.

Key points

- **Norway House is an important resource in respect of interim accommodation, with good facilities and services.**
- **The grounds at Norway House are sufficiently large for additional chalets to be provided. This option should be kept under review.**
- **There is a need for more specialist housing provision for young parents. EFDC, Brentwood and Uttlesford are investigating the possibility of a cross-boundary young parent scheme, which may be located in Epping or Ongar.**
- **Hemnall House tenants receive outreach support from Norway House staff.**
- **The number of households the Council has in temporary accommodation must be reduced from 181 to 90 by March 2010.**
- **Much of the Council's temporary accommodation is good quality, self-contained, with support. It would be counter-productive to reduce this; the Fresh START Scheme has proved successful and is being extended.**
- **It is the use of B&B and non-secure tenancies in the Council's general housing stock that needs to be eliminated. The Strategy sets out how this may be achieved.**

- **The redevelopment of Leader Lodge is key to reducing the use of B&B accommodation by 50%.**
- **Preliminary discussions with an RSL are underway to explore the possibility of a 'qualifying offers' scheme to reduce the use of temporary accommodation.**
- **Current provision in the District specifically for women fleeing domestic violence, is 50% below that recommended by the Government as appropriate for the size of the population and addressing this, needs to be part of the overall plan for developing social housing.**

Assistance to Homeless Applicants not in Priority Need

1. Introduction

- 1.1. There are 2 schemes operating in the District assisting homeless people whom EFDC have found not to be in priority need of accommodation. They are Epping Forest Housing Aid (EFHAS) and the Single Accommodation For Epping Forest project (SAFE).

2. Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme

- 2.1. EFHAS is a registered charity and a member of the National Rent Deposit Forum. It was set up in 1995 to assist people who had difficulty accessing privately rented accommodation because they did not have sufficient funds to meet the damage deposit/rent in advance that most landlords required. The aim of the scheme was, not to fund these, but to enter into arrangements with landlords, guaranteeing payment to cover damage, theft and loss of rent up to the value of one month's rent, if necessary. Fair wear and tear to premises is not covered by the scheme.
- 2.2. Executive Committee members are mainly volunteers, who may claim reimbursement for expenses, but include the Epping CAB Manager and the ECC Youth Workers' Epping Team Leader. The Council's HNM also attends meetings.
- 2.3. Referrals to the scheme are in accordance with an agreed procedure, mainly by EFDC Housing Needs Section, though some are made by the CABX and SAFE. Self-referrals are also possible. All applicants must be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, on a low income and unable to raise a rent deposit through a loan or other means. Although the scheme started out exclusively assisting only people found not to be in priority need of accommodation by EFDC, it has now been expanded and a number of family referrals have been made by homelessness prevention officers.
- 2.4. Money to start up the scheme was raised by volunteers and EFDC made a grant of £5,000. The National Lottery then donated £10,000 in 1996, £6,000 in 1997 and £20,000 in 2005, when EFDC also undertook to underwrite the provision of guarantees up to a further £10,000 at any one time.
- 2.5. As at 31st December 2005 the scheme had 59 guarantees in operation, valued at £44,270. Between 1st January 2005 and 31st December 2005, 6 claims were made by landlords, amounting to £2,997.
- 2.6. Although applicants may be given advice by the referring agency about finding accommodation, they take responsibility for identifying a suitable property themselves and for paying the rent. They are also given advice about housing benefit and helped to complete a pre-tenancy determination form. They authorise disclosure of housing benefit information to the scheme's secretary, undertake to keep him informed of any change in their circumstances and to reimburse the scheme for any monies paid out under the guarantee arrangements. They are also encouraged to save to fund a deposit for themselves in the future. The scheme provides literature for the guidance of landlords and tenants, which includes a step-by-step guide to prospective tenants.
- 2.7. When a prospective tenant has identified a suitable property, the scheme's secretary meets promptly with the landlord, inspecting the premises, agreeing an inventory and a schedule of condition in respect of décor, fixtures and fittings, and issuing a guarantee. It is an implied condition of the scheme that premises comply with fire regulations and conditions of fitness.
- 2.8. The guarantee is valid for the initial term of the tenancy but subject to review after 6 months. If a tenancy is terminated before the end of the agreed period, the guarantee ceases. An inspection of the premises is made at the expiry of the guarantee. Claims must be made by the landlord no later than 48 hrs after the end of the tenancy. The extent of any claim is agreed and payment by

the scheme's treasurer is authorised by the secretary. Any dispute over payment can be referred to 2 Justices of the Peace who have volunteered to be arbiters but, so far, this has not been necessary. It is a condition of the scheme that any theft from premises is reported to the Police.

3. Single Accommodation For Epping Forest (SAFE) Project

- 3.1. SAFE is managed by NACRO Community Enterprises, a registered housing association and charity, and offers temporary accommodation with support to single homeless people. It works in partnership with EFDC, Social Care and Essex Probation Service (EPS).
- 3.2. SAFE was set up in 1993 with funding from the Housing Corporation, the Council and the Probation Service, with land provided at a peppercorn rent from EFDC. Initially it provided 18 bed spaces in 6 x 3 bedroom houses (4 in North Weald and 2 in Roydon). In the intervening years the project has evolved in response to changing circumstances. It now provides 36 bed spaces across the District and a mix of shared houses and individual units; 18 are in Loughton, 6 in Waltham Abbey, 6 in Roydon, 3 in Epping and 3 in Buckhurst Hill. 8 x 3 bedroom houses are owned by NACRO; 2 x 3 bedroom houses, 3 x studio bungalows and 3 x studio flats are owned by EFDC.
- 3.3. Properties in the scheme are furnished and managed by SAFE, which lets them on renewable 6 month assured short-hold tenancies. Most tenants are on the project for a year. The project is staffed by a Team Manager, a Deputy Team Manager, 2 full-time and 2 part-time (20 hours per week) house managers and a part-time administrative assistant. This team is supervised by an Area Manager and a Deputy Area Manager, whose responsibilities extend across Essex and Hertfordshire. Support for tenants focuses on domestic and social skills and money management.
- 3.4. SAFE rents are currently (2005/06) around £75 per week and support charges around £65 per week.
- 3.5. Referrals to the project are generally through EFDC Housing Services (around 80%), Essex Learning and Social Care, and Essex Probation Services, though some self-referrals are made. Applicants must be single and homeless or at risk of homelessness. Some may have been accepted as being in priority need by EFDC and nominated to the scheme for temporary accommodation but many fall into the non priority need category. The target age group is 18 to 25 years, though some younger and older applicants are accepted, depending on circumstances. All prospective tenants are interviewed by one of the house managers and a case report is prepared for a referral panel consisting of representatives from the referral agencies and the SAFE Area Project Manager. The panel meets every 2 weeks to consider applications, prioritise cases and allocate bed spaces. Once accepted, applicants may be allocated a bed space immediately or they may wait for periods of up to 3 months, depending on circumstances. Some applicants are rejected, for instance, if their need is for accommodation but not for the support offered by the scheme. There is an appeals procedure. At any one time there are around 8 applicants who have been accepted for the scheme and are waiting for a place. Between 35 and 40 applicants referred by EFDC are housed on the project each year.
- 3.6. When the referral panel is satisfied that a tenant is ready to move on from the project (after a minimum of 9 months), the tenant qualifies for Band 1 (the highest priority band) in EFDC's Housing Allocation Scheme. This is to ensure that there is a reasonable supply of vacancies in the scheme. However, SAFE's Managers also endeavour to ensure that private sector move on accommodation is also secured.
- 3.7. A support and advisory group, consisting of more senior members of the referring agencies, chaired by the Council's Head of Housing Services and including an EFDC councillor and the SAFE Area Project Manager, meets quarterly to monitor and review the operation of the scheme.

4. Foyer Project Feasibility

- 4.1. A foyer brings together support, housing and skills training for employment for young people between the ages of 16 and 25, with the aim of enabling them to secure move-on accommodation and employment within 2 years. EFDC has been working with a voluntary organisation, the Epping Forest Foyer Project (EFFP) to examine the feasibility of establishing a foyer in the District.
- 4.2. EFFP members comprise local interest groups and EFDC has recently reaffirmed its commitment to support the work, introducing East Thames Housing Group, which has large foyer projects in Ilford and Harlow, who gave a presentation to EFFP.
- 4.3. Given the nature of the District, a relatively small scheme is thought to be more appropriate here. ETHG has said that for a scheme with 24 hour staff cover (which is considered necessary because some clients may be school leavers), 30 units is likely to be the minimum viable number. A suitable location, with good access to transport and other services, needs to be identified and planning permission and capital funding secured. The RSL would supply revenue funding for tenants' skills training, through rents and other resources, but the supportive element of the tenancy package would need to be funded through Supporting People. These funding issues need to be thoroughly explored before any further action is taken.
- 4.4. ETHG's experience is that the turn-over in foyer projects is high, with around 35% of tenants remaining for the maximum 2 years. This is not necessarily because tenants have 'failed'. Some may be reconciled with families from whom they have previously been estranged, some decide to take up opportunities for full time further education, others, once they obtain employment, are able to move on relatively quickly. If this experience is to be relied upon, around 20 new tenants would be needed per annum for a 30 unit foyer. Therefore, levels of homelessness amongst young people in the District need to be closely monitored, particularly if homelessness prevention measures are extended and prove successful.

Key points

- **The aim of EFHAS is to enter into arrangements with landlords, guaranteeing payment to cover damage, theft and loss of rent up to the value of one month's rent, in order to help homeless people unable to provide the deposit usually required in the private rented sector.**
- **As at 31st October 2005 the scheme had 57 guarantees in operation, valued at £42,385. Between 1st January 2005 and 31st October 2005, 6 claims were made by landlords, amounting to £2,997.**
- **SAFE is a successful scheme, assisting many single homeless people each year. It is effectively monitored and, as a result, is able to build on services and respond appropriately to changes in circumstances.**
- **EFDC has recently reaffirmed its commitment to support the work of EFFP in exploring the feasibility of a foyer project in the District. The smallest viable scheme is likely to have 30 units. Levels of homelessness amongst young people need to be closely monitored.**

Consultation with Service Users

Service Users are being consulted by way of a survey conducted by Housing Services' Information and Strategy Section, which is independent from the Housing Needs Section, and full information relating to the survey will be included in this Section.

EFDC's Housing Allocations Scheme

1. Introduction

- 1.1. EFDC operates a Housing Register. Allocation of accommodation is through the Housing Register in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Allocations Scheme.
- 1.2. EFDC reviews its Housing Allocations Scheme annually in order to be able respond to changes in circumstances. The latest Scheme is scheduled for implementation in April 2006 and reflects changes in legislation introduced over a period of time by the Housing Act 2004. The new Scheme will also introduce criteria for the demotion of housing applications in cases where the Council considers applicants have sufficient income and/or assets to purchase accommodation. However, thresholds will be high because of the high price of accommodation in the District.
- 1.3. The Housing Allocations Scheme applies to vacancies in EFDC's own housing stock and to properties in the District owned by RSLs for which EFDC is required to make nominations.
- 1.4. The Housing Allocations Scheme offers all housing applicants the opportunity to express preferences about the location and type of accommodation to be offered to them, as well as the type of social landlord by whom they wish to be housed.

2. Choice Based Lettings

- 2.1. It is a Government aspiration that all local housing authorities have a Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL), whereby applicants 'bid' for social housing vacancies that are widely advertised, by no later than April 2010.
- 2.2. EFDC aims to introduce a CBL Scheme by April 2007. It is part of a consortium with RSLs and neighbouring authorities within the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region, to commission a specialist CBL agency to operate the scheme. The other consortium members are: Brentwood Borough Council; Broxbourne Borough Council; Chelmsford Borough Council; East Herts District Council; Uttlesford District Council; and the main RSLs that operate within the six districts.
- 2.3. A successful bid has been made to the Government's CBL Regional Fund for financial assistance to help set up the scheme. It was one of only 5 successful bids in the East of England and the Consortium was commended on the quality of the bid, which was for £96,000. This will be used to appoint a consultant to project manage the implementation of the CBL and to contribute towards capital costs. The Consortium is known as the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium.
- 2.4. Any CBL Scheme introduced will take account of the needs of vulnerable people, including those who have been or are or may be homeless.

3. Prioritisation of Housing Register Applications

- 3.1. Generally, the degree of priority awarded to applicants on the Housing Register is assessed by reference to a banding system. This will not change when CBL is introduced. Applicants in Band 1 who make bids will be accorded the greatest preference for consideration, as they are now, for offers of accommodation. Those in Band 7 will be accorded the least. Applications within each band will continue to be prioritised in date order.
- 3.2. The banding system is devised to afford homeless people, those at risk of homelessness and those who have been homeless, a good degree of preference for long-term accommodation. Full details of the banding system in effect from 1st April 2006 (essentially unchanged from the present banding system) are given at **Appendix 3**.

- 3.3. In the 16 months between 1st September 2004 (the date on which the current provisions of the Housing Allocations Scheme were implemented) and 31st December 2005, 229 long-term tenancies were allocated to applicants in Band 1, 36 to applicants in Band 2, 42 to applicants in Band 3, 78 to applicants in Band 4, 35 to applicants in Band 5, 25 to applicants in Band 6 and 6 to applicants in Band 7.
- 3.4. The Allocations Scheme allows for a small number of vacancies to be allocated outside the bandings system, for instance, to applicants for whom the Council has accepted a duty under the provisions of the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976. It also allows for special arrangements to be made in respect of nominations to some RSL developments. Information concerning exceptions to the banding system are given at **Appendix 4**.

4. Best Use of Housing Stock

- 4.1. EFDC uses its Housing Allocations Scheme to make the best use of housing stock by:
- a) having criteria for the size of properties to be offered to housing applicants (see **Appendix 2**);
 - b) giving high priority to its own and RSL tenants living in the District who want to move to smaller accommodation
 - c) offering financial assistance to those moving from 3 or 4 bedroom properties to 1 bedroom accommodation;
 - d) working in partnership with Voluntary Action for Epping Forest (VAEF) to give practical advice and assistance to older and vulnerable tenants needing to move and;
 - e) operating a firm succession policy, that requires successor tenants under-occupying accommodation to move to smaller accommodation if they are family members of the former tenant;
 - f) not undertaking expensive disabled adaptations for tenants underoccupying accommodation.
- 4.2. The maximum amount payable under the financial incentive scheme is £2000 but most payments are for £1,500. The sum is calculated on the basis of £500 to cover removal expenses plus £500 for each bedroom 'released'. Payment is authorised when tenants sign their new tenancy agreement. 6 moves were funded in this way, at a cost of £9,500, in 2003/04 and 7 in 2004/05, at a cost of £10,500.
- 4.3. The service provided by VAEF employs one part-time member of staff funded by Essex County Council's Supporting People budget. The service is available to vulnerable and older tenants who need it, whether or not they are moving to smaller accommodation. It offers information and practical support, for instance, in arranging removals or registering with a new G.P.

Key Points

- **EFDC reviews its Allocations Scheme annually in order to respond to change.**
- **In partnership with neighbouring authorities in the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region, EFDC intends to introduce a Choice Based Lettings Scheme by April 2007.**
- **Housing applications are prioritised by way of a banding system which is devised to afford homeless people, those at risk of homelessness and those who have been homeless, a reasonable degree of preference for long-term accommodation.**

- **EFDC offers financial assistance to tenants moving from 3 or 4 bedroom properties to 1 bedroom accommodation to encourage the release of family sized properties for reletting.**

Action Plans

1. Introduction

- 1.1. A key theme of the Homelessness Strategy 2003/04 - 2005/06 was improvement in the supply and standard of temporary accommodation. Aims were set out in an Action Plan and have largely been achieved (see 2.1 below).
- 1.2. Issues that remain current include: further improvements to homelessness decision times; reducing reliance on B&B accommodation; and exploring possibilities for a Foyer project. These have been carried forward to the Action Plan 2006/07 – 2008/09.

2. Action Plan 20003/04 – 2005/06

2.1. This table gives a progress report on the Action Plan 20003/04 – 2005/06

Action	Priority	Target date	Comments	Responsibility
<i>Increasing provision of temporary accommodation</i>				
1. Additional rooms at Norway House	**	March 2004	Completed. Attic rooms available for use by March 2004.	AHHS(S)
2. Use of Hemnall House as temporary accommodation	***	March 2004	Completed. Used as temporary accommodation from September 2004.	AHHS(S)
3. Private sector leasing initiative	**	March 2004	Completed. Scheme in use from March 2004	HHS
4. Development of new hostel at Leader Lodge site	***	March 2005	Delayed. Planning application under consideration by Council (proposal for 10 units of accommodation). Carry forward to 2006/07 – 2008/09 Action Plan.	AHHS(S)
5. Consider use of a crash pad.	**	March 2005	Delayed – see 4. above. Carry forward to 2006/07 – 2008/09 Action Plan.	HNM
6. Ensure development of temporary accommodation facilities suitable for wheelchair users.	***	March 2005	Completed. Disabled adaptations included in general improvements to Norway House.	AHHS(S)
<i>Reducing usage of bed and breakfast accommodation</i>				
7. To achieve government target of placing no families in bed and breakfast accommodation by 31 March 2004.	***	March 2004	Completed. Ahead of schedule – no families in bed and breakfast accommodation B&B by December 2003, or since.	HNM
8. To avoid the use of bed and breakfast entirely by 31 March 2006.	**	March 2006	Ongoing. Carry forward to 2006/07 – 2008/09 Action Plan.	HNM
9. To allocate self contained accommodation to applicants in the hostel within six months of their admittance.	**	March 2004	Completed. Average length of stay in Norway House reduced to 3.5 months.	HNM
10. To develop a Homelessness Prevention Strategy	***	October 2004	Completed. Incorporated into Homelessness Strategy 2005/6 – 2006/07, as recommended by Housing Quality Network.	AHHS(S)

11. Consider making one or both Homelessness Prevention Officers permanent.	**	October 2004	Delayed. Funding received from ODPM until March 2008. Consideration of permanent position to be Carry forward to Action Plan 2006/07 – 2008/09.	AHHS(S)
12. To develop a Private Sector Homelessness Strategy	**	October 2004	Completed. Included in Homelessness Strategy 2005/6 – 2006/7	AHHS(S)
Norway House				
13. To complete the package of improvements to the hostel	***	March 2004	Completed. Existing kitchen refurbished and 2 additional kitchens installed, together with general improvement to facilities, including revamped laundry and new lounge furniture.	AHHS(S)
Provision of information				
14. To improve the quality of written information provided to applicants before they enter temporary accommodation.	*	December 2003	Completed. New documentation conforms to Supporting People requirements	HNM
15. To circulate copies of 'The Applicant' at more frequent intervals	*	December 2003	Completed. Items of interest to applicants on the Housing Register included in 'Housing News' which is published quarterly.	HNM
Improvement in homelessness decision making times				
16. To decide 95% of all homeless applications within 33 days	***	March 2006	Ongoing. Carry forward to 2006/07 – 2008/09 Action Plan. Decision times have improved but not yet to stated level.	HNM
17. To seek the allocation of additional staff resources to homelessness decision making at the appropriate time.	***	March 2004	Completed. Part – time officer now assists 2 full time officers.	AHHS(S)
Specialist Schemes				
18. To work with the Epping Forest Foyer project to examine the feasibility of establishing a Foyer in the District.	*	March 2006	Ongoing. Carry forward to 2006/07 – 2008/09 Action Plan.	AHHS(S)
19. To explore opportunities for developing a scheme to assist homeless applicants with mental health problems.	**	March 2005	Delayed. Initial plans not viable. New plans linked to 4. above. Carry forward to 2006/07 – 2008/09 Action Plan.	AHHS(S)
Resources				
20. To explore opportunities for increasing the funding available for homelessness initiatives.	***	December 2003	Completed. Increased funding secured for Fresh START Scheme.	HHS

3. Action Plan 2006/07 – 2008/09.

3.1. This table shows the proposed **Action Plan 2006/07 –2008/09**.

Action	Priority	Target date	Comments	Responsibility
<i>Increase provision of quality temporary accommodation/ reduce use of B&B</i>				
1. Double the number of properties in the Fresh START scheme by March 2006	***	April 2006	Funding through General Fund agreed. (off-set savings from expenditure on B&B).	HNM
2. Complete feasibility and decide on best method of procurement for hostel at Leader Lodge, North Weald to cater for single homeless people and to include a 'crash pad'.	***	Dec 2006	Accommodation to include a 'crash pad'.	H of HS
3. Work with an RSL to consider the additional provision of temporary accommodation specifically for victims of domestic violence.	**	Dec 2006	This target is supported by the fact that at any one time the Council still has around 6 households to whom it has accepted a full housing duty in refuges outside the District.	H of HS
4. Work with Brentwood B.C. and Uttlesford D.C. to investigate cross-boundary specialist provision for young parents.	**	June 2006	Bids for capital funding have been made to the Housing Corporation and Essex County Council. ESPCB has guaranteed revenue funding.	H of HS
5. Work with RSL to introduce a 'qualifying offers' scheme.	**	Oct 2006	Cabinet will need to agree funding for the scheme.	HNM
6. Consider at appropriate time, use of first floor of Hemnall House for temporary accommodation	*	March 09	Depends on occupancy by existing elderly tenant.	AH of HS (O)
7. Keep under review the possibility of additional chalets at Norway House	*	March 08	Additional chalets may not be required but they are an option.	AH of HS (O)
Outcome		Dec 2006	Cease use of B&B as temporary accommodation by stated date and for interim accommodation by March 2007.	
<i>Prevention of Homelessness and Repeat Homelessness</i>				
8. Make one or more full time homeless prevention officers' posts part of permanent establishment	*	March 08	Depending on continuing availability of funding from ODPM.	AH of HS (O)
9. Consider appointing an additional homelessness prevention officer to work with single applicants in priority need of accommodation.	***	June 2006	Number of homelessness caseworkers may be reduced at a later date.	AH of HS (O)
10. Work with RSL to extend provision of floating support for new Council tenants who were previously homeless.	*	Sept 2006	Bid for funding to Essex Supporting People Commissioning Body	AH of HS (O)

11. Work with Relate to provide specialist counselling for potentially homeless 16/17 year olds.	**	June 2006	Work with Relate to secure funding from the Big Lottery	HNM
12. Explore possibility of introducing a 'Sanctuary' Scheme for victims of domestic violence.	*	Oct 2006	If the scheme is for Council tenants only, provision may be made in the HRA budget. If it is for other tenures, General Fund provision may be necessary.	AH of HS (P&A)
13. Work with Epping Forest Foyer Project to examine the feasibility of a foyer scheme.	***	June 06	Capital and some revenue funding needs to be secured.	HNM
Outcome		Dec 2006	Reduction in levels of homelessness, particularly amongst young people and victims of domestic violence	
General Improvement to Service				
14. Improve the percentage of homelessness decisions made within 33 days to 85%	***	March 2007	Performance has been improving but this needs to continue	HNM
Outcome		March 2007	85% of all homelessness decisions to be made within 33 days	
Increase Housing Provision for Disadvantaged Households				
15. Ensure 40% affordable housing on development sites	***	June 2006	Current requirement is 30%. Proposal to increase to 40% when Local Plan Altered.	H of HS
16. Work with other authorities in Essex to explore appropriate provision for travelling families	***	March 2007	Liaison with local housing authority planners and other agencies essential.	H of HS
Outcome		March 07	Additional resources available to address housing need	