



Housing

Homelessness Strategy 2009/10 - 2011/12



Epping Forest
District Council

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Executive Summary

1. Foreword

- 1.1 Under section 1(3), (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, Local Authorities have a duty to review and publish their Homelessness Strategy on at least a 5 yearly basis. As this area of work regularly changes it was agreed that the Council's Strategy would be reviewed every three years. The Strategy links with the Council's Housing Strategy, Allocations Scheme, the Housing Services Strategy on Housing Advice and Allocations, and the Council Plan. The Strategy sets out achievements since 2006 and incorporates the needs and demands on the service and actions that need to be undertaken over the coming three years.
- 1.2 The homelessness function is provided through the Housing Directorate's Housing Options Section. A staffing structure chart is shown at Appendix 2.
- 1.3 The Council's Housing Directorate continues to be accredited for the ISO 9001:2000 quality assurance scheme by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance. Housing was also successful in retaining the Charter Mark Standard for Customer Service Excellence for the second time in August 2007.
- 1.4 In 2007, the Council's homelessness service was inspected by the Government's Special Advisor on Homelessness who found that the service was being managed in an effective manner. In addition, in 2008, the Government's Champion Authority inspected the Council homelessness service and found that a range of good practices were in place.

2. Background

- 2.1 The last three years have seen a change in emphasis to Homeless Prevention, which has led to a high number of cases being prevented. There has also been a significant drop in homelessness applications and a decrease in those accepted for a full housing duty.
- 2.2 At the time of this Strategy being produced the Country is in recession. This has led to an increase in demand on the prevention service where people are seeking resolutions to their housing difficulties. This is especially prevalent amongst owner occupiers who are having problems maintaining mortgage repayments.

3. Housing Advice

- 3.1 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 support those faced with housing difficulties. Stronger Links have been formed and a signed protocol is now in place and has been developed in conjunction with the National Homeless Advice Service. Following a successful bid to the Lotteries Board, the Epping Citizens Advice Bureau now has funding for an Outreach Worker. In this respect, they are able to assist vulnerable households at the Council's homeless hostel, Norway House, North Weald, by holding regular monthly surgeries and assisting residents with debt and housing related issues.
- 3.2 The Housing Options Section within the Housing Directorate provides advice and information leaflets. General information on Housing Services can be obtained through the Council's website, from which housing applications can be down-loaded. Applicants can also seek information on accessing accommodation in the private rented sector, advice on dealing with domestic violence issues etc.

4. Homelessness Prevention

- 4.1 The development of the Homeless Prevention Service has been significant during the last 3 years. This has resulted in a total change in how Housing Advice is provided. The objective has been to reduce the number of households, making a homeless application by providing effective prevention measures. However, the Council continues to be committed to ensuring that if homelessness cannot be prevented for any reason, we will accept a homeless application in order to decide what statutory duty may be owed to the household.

5. Recession Planning

- 5.1 Due to the current economic climate, the Council has put in place a number of plans to assist those who are experiencing housing difficulties and may be faced with losing their homes. Generally, these initiatives are under the heading of Recession Planning and are as follows:

Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS)

- 5.2 The Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS) is a registered charity which operates on a voluntary basis to provide rent deposit guarantees (equivalent to one months rent) to landlords on behalf of applicants to assist them in securing accommodation in the private rented sector.
- 5.3 Due to increased demand, the Cabinet agreed that it would increase its financial support to the scheme in order for further rent deposit guarantees to be granted to applicants. It was further agreed that an amount of £7,500 received from Government under its "recession busting" grant would be passed on to EFHAS.

Rental Loan Scheme

- 5.4 The Council was awarded an additional grant of £10,000 in 2007/2008 from the Communities for Local Government (CLG) in recognition of excellent performance in prevention work. As a result, the Rental Loan Scheme was set up in order to assist applicants in securing accommodation in the private rented sector. Under the scheme, a loan is granted to meet the cost of the first month's rental in advance, repayable interest free over a period of 24 months. The Cabinet agreed a further budget of £20,000 for the scheme from 2008/2009. An applicant can potentially benefit from both a rental loan and a rent deposit guarantee.

Relate

- 5.5 Since September 2004, cases have been referred to Relate who undertake family mediation in order to prevent family exclusions. Relate have trained Counsellors who meet with the client and seek a resolution to family difficulties. Around 18 cases are dealt with each year with an 80% success rate.

Sanctuary Scheme

- 5.6 The Council set up a Sanctuary Scheme for victims of domestic violence or Hate crime in April 2007. This scheme is an effective tool in the prevention of homelessness for high risk cases of domestic violence. The intention of the scheme is to provide a safe room within the victim's home. The Housing Options Section works in partnership with Safer Communities, Essex Police, Essex Fire and Rescue and Harlow Women's Aid. All referrals to the scheme are made through the Homeless Prevention Service. The Scheme is funded jointly by the Safer Communities Team and the Housing Directorate and is available to people on a tenure neutral basis, e.g. tenants, owner occupiers, private rented sector etc.

Single Accommodation for People in Epping Forest (SAFE)

- 5.7 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 the Council, Epping Assessment and Child Protection Team and Essex Probation Service (EPS).
- 5.8 It provides 36 bed spaces across the District in a mix of shared houses and individual units. Around 80% of all referrals are through the Housing Directorate, Learning and Social Care, and Essex Probation Services. In addition, 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, although others are accepted depending on circumstances.

Mortgage Rescue

- 5.9 In January 2009, the CLG announced the introduction of the Mortgage Rescue Scheme. The main intention of the scheme is to assist the most vulnerable households that are under the threat of homelessness on account of mortgage arrears or repossession. Referrals can only be made where householders have no more than 20% negative equity, and the value of their property is less than £200,000. Referrals are made as a last resort (where all lender "hardship tools" are exhausted) to the local agent, Moat Homes Limited following consultation with the CAB debt advisor. Any assessment ensures the scheme is targeted and criteria based. If accepted, Moat Homes Limited would consider if the person would be eligible for either mortgage to rent, or an equity loan which would be dependant upon the available equity, with the lender being required to freeze any possession action. The Council has been congratulated by Government on its involvement with the scheme and having the first cases to be referred.

Homeowner Mortgage Support

- 5.10 The CLG has made funding available to assist all households that may be experiencing mortgage arrears due to a temporary "income shock". Households who are having difficulties meeting their mortgage repayments due to loss of employment or relationship breakdown, will be considered for support by their lender and have up to 70% of their mortgage interest payments frozen for 24 months, although not all main lenders have signed up to the scheme.

6. The Role of Essex County Council's Social Care

- 6.1 The Housing Options Team work closely with Essex County Council's Social Care who have specialist teams dealing with issues relating to families and homelessness, including the Child Protection Team, Leaving and After Care Team and the Team around School Children in the Community (TASCC).
- 6.2 An agreed protocol between the Housing Directorate and Social Care for dealing with 16 and 17 year olds and intentionally homeless households is in place as an effective tool for both teams.
- 6.3 Some young people who may be at risk of homelessness who would benefit from short-term assistance are placed in Norway House whilst attempts are made to restore young people back into the family home. An alternative measure may be to secure accommodation with Single Accommodation for Epping Forest (SAFE).
- 6.4 Households with children deemed to have become homeless intentionally are referred, with parental agreement, to the Assessment and Child Protection Team who maybe able to assist in accessing accommodation in the private rented sector.

7. Services for People Involved in Drug and Alcohol Abuse

- 7.1 The Housing Options Section deals mainly with referrals from the Community Drug and Alcohol Team (CDAT). However, there is also occasional contact from the Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Service (ADAS) and the Essex Young Peoples Drug and Alcohol Service (EYPDAS).
- 7.2 All ADAS clients are assessed with complex cases being 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 offers outreach services in Loughton and Waltham Abbey. Clients are referred through a number of sources, including hospitals, ADAS, GPs, family members and self-referrals. The minimum age for clients is 16 with no upper age limit. All CDAT clients are risk assessed. All clients have a physical assessment and a community care plan. A panel meets monthly to prioritise cases.
- 7.4 Homelessness is commonly a problem for CDAT clients. Since the Council has closer links with CDAT, a local protocol has been agreed to enhance good partnership working. The tenancy support scheme has been a valuable resource for assisting this vulnerable group.
- 7.5 EYPDAS is based in Chelmsford but offers services across Essex. 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.
- 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.

8. Assessments, Decisions, Notifications and Reviews

- 8.1 The process of assessing homelessness applications is complex and governed by the provisions of Part VI1 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). Careful attention is given to the Code of Guidance issued by the ODPM and homelessness case law. Legislation on immigration is also observed.
- 8.2 All homeless applications are processed by Housing Officers based within the Housing Options Section. In processing these applications the Code of Guidance is complied with.
- 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 The Council 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 and Reviews Panel, which comprises 5 District Councillors. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the decision made at the statutory review, they are advised they have the right to pursue an appeal, on a point of law, through the County Court.

9. Interim and Temporary Accommodation

- 9.1 The Council uses a variety of interim and temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast accommodation for households without children, self-contained flats at Hemnall House, Epping, a Housing Association private leasing scheme, a Women's Refuge move on scheme and rooms at the Norway House hostel, where housing-related support is provided.
- 9.2 The Government sets targets for all local authorities to have no families with children (or expectant mothers) in bed and breakfast accommodation. If they were housed in exceptional circumstances in bed and breakfast accommodation, this can only be for a period of no more than six weeks. The Council currently has no expectant Mothers or families with children in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 9.3 The government has also set a target that all local authorities must ensure that by March 2010, there is a 50 per cent reduction in households placed in any interim or temporary accommodation. The Council met the target in April 2008.

10. Epping Forest District Council's Allocation Scheme

- 10.1 The Council operates a HomeOption choice based lettings scheme and has its own Housing Register in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Allocations Scheme, which is reviewed annually by the Cabinet.
- 10.2 The Scheme includes vacancies in the Council's own housing stock and housing association properties for which the Council has nomination rights. Applicants are able to "express an interest" in properties advertised through a fortnightly freesheet.
- 10.3 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.

11. Consultation

- 11.1 A consultation exercise on the Strategy has been undertaken with all partner agencies, Town and Parish Councils, the Tenants and Leaseholder's Federation and the Housing Scrutiny Member Panel. The Strategy was approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder in August 2009.

12. Action Plans

- 12.1 The Action Plan sets out the actions required to implement this Strategy, identifying officers responsible for progressing those actions and setting targets for completion.

Foreword

1. Introduction

- 1.2 Under section 1(3), (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, Local Authorities have a duty to review and publish their Homelessness Strategy on at least a 5 yearly basis. As this area of work regularly changes it was agreed that the Council's Strategy would be reviewed every three years. The Strategy links with the Council's Housing Strategy, Allocations Scheme, the Housing Services Strategy on Housing Advice and Allocations, and the Council Plan. The Strategy sets out achievements since 2006 and incorporates the needs and demands on the service and actions that need to be undertaken over the coming three years.
- 1.2 The homelessness function is provided through the Housing Directorate's Housing Options Section. A staffing structure chart is shown at Appendix 2.
- 1.3 This Council's Housing Directorate continues to be accredited for the ISO 9001:2000 quality assurance scheme by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance. The Housing Directorate was also successful in retaining the Charter Mark Standard for Customer Service Excellence for the second time in August 2007.
- 1.4 In 2007, the Council's homelessness service was inspected by the Government's Special Advisor on Homelessness who found that the service was being managed in an effective manner. In addition, in 2008, the Government's Champion Authority inspected the Council homelessness service and found that a range of good practices were in place.

2. Background to the Council's Homelessness Service

- 2.1 The homelessness service is provided by the Housing Directorate's Housing Options Section. The Council works within the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, follows the guidance set out in the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice in Rented Housing and the requirements of the Council's Equality Impact Assessments.
- 2.2 In March 2007, all local authorities were issued with guidance on the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). The draft SHMA for the London Commuter Belt (East) shows that the average price of a property in the Epping Forest District in 2008 was £365,000. Although this will have reduced during the current financial climate, many local residents will find it difficult to secure and retain owner occupied accommodation. The draft SHMA predicted that there will be a shortfall of 5,000 homes in the Epping Forest District during the period 2007 and 2021.
- 2.3 As at April 2009, the Council has 4,383 homeseekers on its Housing Register, and has a housing stock of 6,600 properties. The Housing Directorate is working hard to identify potential sites for development, in response to the Local Development Framework (LDF); the Council has issued a call for sites from all land owners seeking land that may have potential for all development purposes over at least the next 15 years. As a major landowner, the Council is also reviewing its own land holdings and identifying any sites that can be put forward for consideration.

Statistical analysis of homelessness

1. Incidence of Homelessness

- 1.1 Local housing authorities are required by Government to complete quarterly Housing Activity Returns, which include statistical information on homelessness. These include the information given in the table below on homelessness decisions made by the Council in the last four years.

Information	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Total number of homeless applications processed	477	249	136	120
Number of applicants found to be not homeless	139	58	38	24
Number of applicants found to be ineligible for assistance	8	6	0	0
Number of applicants found not to be in priority need	111	73	13	15
Number of applicants found to be intentionally homeless	12	4	5	10
Number of applicants to whom a full housing duty is owed	207	108	80	71

- 1.2 As can be seen, the number of homeless applications has substantially reduced which is due to the success of the Homelessness Prevention Service which was fully introduced in 2006. Statistical information on this area of work is set out under the Homelessness Prevention section of the Strategy.

- 1.3 Information on the ethnicity of homeless applicants, which is reported to the Housing Scrutiny Panel is set out in the table below.

Ethnicity/Year	2005/06 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2008/09 (%)
White	86.6	86.4	88.3	77.5
Black	3.8	3.2	2.2	3.3
Asian	0.8	0.4	0.7	3.3
Other (e.g. mixed ethnicity)	1.5	1.2	0.7	1.7
Not given	7.3	8.8	8.1	14.2

- 1.4 The 2001 Census showed that ethnic minorities made up just under 5% of the population of the District at that time. It is considered that the statistics do not raise any concerns about any particular group being discriminated against. The Council undertakes Equality Impact Assessments across all of its front-line services. All Equality Impact Assessments are being reviewed this year.
- 1.5 Although Gypsies and Travellers are not identified as a group on Housing Activity Returns they do face particularly problems when homeless due to their 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. There are currently 18 Gypsy and Traveller sites across the District totalling 95 pitches. Eleven of the sites include 75 pitches in Roydon and Nazeing. One site at Stanford Rivers is public sector and is owned Essex County Council. The remainder are on privately owned land. National Policy requires that there is a significant increase in the number of gypsy and traveller sites in appropriate locations, with a focus on increased provision over the next 3-5 years. The Council, under a government directive, will be required to provide an additional estimated 34 pitches by 2012.

2. Analysis of Priority Need

- 2.1 Priority need is determined by statute and prescribes categories of persons for whom local housing authorities must secure accommodation if they are homeless, provided they have not become intentionally homeless.
- 2.2 Set out in the table below is an analysis of priority need categories, taken from the Council's Housing Activity returns. These form part of the Government's PI (E) return (statistical information which is completed by all authorities) confirming those households the Council has accepted as being in a priority need and the reasons:

Category	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Applicant homeless because of fire, flood, storm or similar disaster	1	0	0	0
Applicants with dependent children	85	45	47	50
Applicants in priority need because of pregnancy but no other children	13	16	12	1
Applicants aged 16/17	17	2	4	6
Applicants formerly in care	0	0	0	1
Applicants vulnerable due to old age	10	7	1	0
Applicants vulnerable because of physical disability	4	11	3	3
Applicants vulnerable because of mental illness or disability	28	14	10	6
Applicants vulnerable due to alcohol/drug abuse	17	6	1	1
Applicants who were former asylum seekers	0	0	0	0
Vulnerable for other special reason	10	4	0	0

Reason	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Applicants vulnerable for formerly being In Care	0	0	0	0
Applicants vulnerable having served in HM Forces	0	0	0	0
Applicants vulnerable on account of violence including domestic violence	22	3	2	3
Total applicants accepted for a priority need	207	108	80	71

2.3 The analysis of priority need groups shows that the largest household group accepted as being in a priority need for accommodation are households with dependant children. There is a reduction in the number of applicants found vulnerable due to domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse, which can be attributed to robust homelessness prevention measures.

3 Reasons for Homelessness

3.1 Information on reasons for homelessness acceptances in priority need groups is set out in the table below:

Reason for Acceptance	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Parents no longer willing to accommodate	49	25	29	17
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	23	8	3	0
Violence or harassment (all categories, including domestic and racial)	33	7	9	9

Reason	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Breakdown of relationship with partner (non-violent)	15	6	6	10
Mortgage arrears	8	5	2	2
Local housing authority repossessions due to rent arrears	0	2	0	0
Registered social landlord repossessions due to rent arrears	0	6	2	1
Private Sector rent arrears	9	0	2	2
Loss of rented or tied accommodation for other reasons, for instance, end of Assured Short-hold tenancy	51	39	24	22
Discharge from hospital, residential home, prison, H.M. Forces etc	4	3	1	5
Homeless for reasons not shown above (for example, returning from abroad)	10	7	2	3
Total	202	108	80	71

3.2 The figures show that the two most common reasons for acceptances of homelessness were on account of parents no longer or willing to accommodate and loss of rented accommodation including, the end of an Assured Short-hold Tenancy and the loss of private rented accommodation

Housing Advice

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Local housing authorities have a statutory duty to offer advice and assistance on homelessness and the prevention of homelessness. They also have a duty to ensure that an Allocations Scheme for determining priorities for allocating social housing is available for inspection and that a summary of that scheme is available, on request, free of charge.
- 1.2 Landlord authorities have a duty to provide their tenants with information on the express terms of their tenancies, including their statutory rights in respect of assignments, successions and assignments by way of mutual exchange.
- 1.3 The Housing Options Section works with the Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP) for the Epping Forest District which enables the provision of good legal advice to homeless applicants and was launched in June 2002. This multi-agency partnership includes Voluntary Action Epping Forest, Age Concern, CABx, some privately practicing solicitors, Essex County Council 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.
- 1.4 Advice and assistance on homelessness and the prevention of homelessness can encompass a wide range of issues, many of which require specialist knowledge. Some of these, for example debt management, are referred to the CAB. The CAB has a dedicated expert who deals exclusively with debt referrals from the Homelessness Prevention Team. Some cases may be referred to other agencies included the Council's Benefit Division.
- 1.5 Advice is given on a range of other matters including:
 - Harassment
 - Illegal evictions by private landlords
 - Properties in need of repair, including those which are unfit for habitation
 - Houses in Multiple Occupation
 - Charitable organisations assisting homeless people (including victims of domestic violence)
 - Securing private rented accommodation
 - Access to shared ownership schemes
 - Property rights in cases of relationship breakdown or other domestic issues
 - Interim and temporary accommodation
 - Nominations to other local housing authorities

2. Provision of Information

- 2.1 A range of advice and information leaflets are made available, some produced by the Housing Directorate, others published by the National Homeless Advice Service and the CLG. Where English is not the first language of the client, assistance can be obtained through approved agencies or documents can be translated in appropriate cases. For the visually impaired, literature can be made available either in large print or by audio cassette or Braille. The Council will also be publishing its Housing Application form in an easy-read format to meet the need of any applicants who have learning disabilities. Where a profoundly deaf client is a sign user, the Council can arrange "signing" through an approved agency. A loop system for people with hearing difficulties is available at the Civic Offices and at the Area Housing Office (South) at The Broadway, Loughton. Home visits will be made in appropriate instances.

2.2 Under the HomeOption choice based lettings scheme, fortnightly free-sheets are produced and distributed to various locations across the District giving details of properties in which homeseekers can express an interest. Free-sheets can be provided to vulnerable homeseekers by way of postal subscription.

2.3 The tenant's magazine "Housing News" is sent to all tenants 3 times each year, and when appropriate, to all homeseekers providing advice on a range of Housing services.

3. Liaison with the Citizens Advice Bureau

3.1 The 3 CABx in the District are based in Epping, Waltham Abbey and Loughton. The Council has a Service Level Agreement with the three bureaux to provide a range of advice and to support those who have difficulties expressing their needs effectively. The Council contributed £114,000 from its General Fund in 2009/10 towards CAB running costs.

3.2 The Council has formal arrangements for referring cases and, in addition to front-line liaison on a case by case basis, the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) the two Area Housing Managers and the Housing Options Manager, meet with the Bureaux Managers each quarter.

3.3 The Epping CAB will arrange to visit residents at the Council's hostel Norway House, North Weald. A home visiting service is provided 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 their dedicated solicitor.

Homelessness Prevention

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Homeless Prevention Team is an integral part of the Housing Options Service. The team is led by the Assistant Housing Options Manager (Homelessness) and the Senior Homeless Prevention Officer.
- 1.2 The work has proved highly effective which is explained at paragraphs 1.1 & 1.2 of the Statistical Analysis of Homelessness Section of the Strategy. As previously reported this has not only seen a huge reduction in the level of acceptances, it has also led to a high number of people being able to remain in their current homes.
- 1.3 The number of cases being dealt with through homelessness prevention now exceeds the number of cases being dealt with as homeless. This approach has ensured that any unnecessary homeless applications will no longer occur. However, despite this “gate keeping”, approach, the Council will ensure that all its statutory duties are met under the Housing Act 1996 PT VII as amended and will always arrange for a homeless application to be received from a person who will require that safety net

2. Statistics

- 2.1 Homelessness Prevention Officers now provide a comprehensive service with a range of initiatives at their disposal to assist them with resolving the housing difficulties on clients they are seeking to serve.
- 2.2 The table below shows the number of cases that presented to the homelessness prevention service and the reason, with the numbers of cases prevented set out in the final column:

Reason for Presenting	Case numbers 2005/06	Case numbers 2006/07	Case numbers 2007/08	Case numbers 2008/09
Notice to Quit privately rented accommodation	105	123	149	89
Family/friends no longer willing to accommodate	114	175	167	163
Domestic violence, harassment	61	59	83	71
Relationship breakdown non violent	79	37	50	54

Reason for Action	Case numbers 2005/06	Case numbers 2006/07	Case numbers 2007/08	Case numbers 2008/09
RSL/Council tenancy at risk	55	32	46	30
Repossession, affordability	143	69	44	92
Other	49	71	114	126
Total cases	606	566	653	625
Total prevented	460 (76%)	516 (91%)	523 (80%)	460 (74%)

2.3 During the period set out in the above table, the prevention service dealt with a total of 2,450 cases of which 1,959 (80%) have been prevented. This has been a considerable achievement. These results have had a direct impact the homelessness acceptance rate which has significantly reduced during the same period.

3. Preventing Homelessness Initiatives

3.1 The Council has a number of initiatives in place to assist those who have either lost their home or are facing eviction. All of these initiatives are set out in this section of the Strategy and form part of the Council's plan to assist homeless applicants through the current financial climate and to prevent re-possession.

4 The Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS)

4.1 One of the difficulties that homeless and other housing applicants have in accessing the private rented sector, (especially those in receipt of housing benefit), is to provide a rent deposit in advance, which is routinely required by private landlords. Because of this, many homeless applicants have no alternative but to seek accommodation from the Council. If they are in a priority need category, the Council then has a legal duty to provide accommodation. In some circumstances, single homeless applicants have to be accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation in the first instance, which is not only inferior to normal residential accommodation, it is also at great cost to the Council's General Fund.

4.2 The Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS) is a scheme for helping homeless people to access private rented accommodation. It was set up in 1995 by a specially-created voluntary organisation as a registered charity, with financial support from the National Lottery Charities Board and the District Council, the respective contributions being £20,000 and £5,000. In early 2005, EFHAS learnt that their bid to the Big Lottery Fund for additional capital funding of £20,000 had been successful, which increased their funds to around £40,000 at that time.

4.3 EFHAS is able to help homeless people by providing guarantees to the landlords of the properties the applicant wishes to rent against the tenant's misconduct, to the value of one month's rent. All the guarantees are covered by money held in EFHAS's bank account.

- 4.4 Between 1995 and September 2008, EFHAS helped over 200 homeless families move into the private-rented sector in this way, who would otherwise probably have been unable. Many of these would have had to seek accommodation from the Council direct. All applicants to EFHAS come from within the Epping Forest District and are referred to EFHAS by the Council's Housing Directorate.
- 4.5 Due to the current financial climate, and in order to ensure that the guarantees did not over-commit EFHAS's available resources, the Cabinet agreed in July 2009, that the Council would increase the amount it underwrites to £60,000 of rent guarantees at any one time. It was further agreed that £7,500 received from the CLG's "Recession Busting" fund would be passed to EFHAS to further support their work.

5 The Rental Loan Scheme

- 5.1 The Rental Loan Scheme was set up in 2008/2009 following the Council receiving a grant of £10,000 from the CLG in recognition of its excellent performance in preventing homelessness. The scheme compliments the EFHAS scheme and provides applicants with a rental loan to meet the costs of the first months rent advance when securing accommodation in the private sector. Applicants are required to repay the loan on an interest free basis, thereby re-cycling the budget to enable others to benefit from the scheme in the future. In December 2008, the Cabinet agreed that an additional £20,000 would be made available for the scheme in order to assist applicants during the current financial climate.

6 "RELATE" Family Mediation

- 6.1 In 2004/05 the Council accepted a full housing duty to 87 households due to applicants being excluded by family or friends. However, by 2008/09 this acceptance rate had reduced to 17. The reduction can be directly attributed to the work undertaken by Relate. They have trained Counsellors who receive referrals and seek a resolution to family difficulties. Generally across all cases referred, Relate have an 80% success rate.

7 Epping Forest District Sanctuary Scheme.

- 7.1 The Council's "Sanctuary" scheme assists victims of domestic violence or Hate crime on a tenure neutral basis, e.g. owner occupiers, tenants etc. The scheme provides a safe room within the victim's home. A typical sanctuary room would include a fire door with mortice locks, smoke detectors, fire blanket and two fire extinguishers. The victim would be supplied with a mobile phone to dial 999. The Council works in partnership on Sanctuary schemes with the Safer Communities Team, the Essex Police Hate Crime Unit, Essex Fire and Rescue and Harlow Women's Aid. All referrals to the scheme are through the Homeless Prevention Team. Since its introduction, five Sanctuary rooms have been installed and have prevented homelessness.

8 Single Accommodation for Epping Forest (SAFE) Project.

- 8.1 SAFE is managed by NACRO Community Enterprises, a registered housing association and charity, which offers supported accommodation to single people. The scheme works in partnership with Social Care's Assessment and Child Protection Team, the Essex Probation Service, Connexions, the Youth Offending Team and In-Touch Support. The project is used in resolving the housing difficulty of single people across the District who otherwise would become homeless. SAFE was set up in 1993 with funding from the Housing Corporation, the Council and the Probation Service. The Council provided land free of charge for development in North Weald and two developments in Roydon which provide 36 Units of accommodation. This is in a mix of accommodation which is either shared or self contained.

8.2 Properties in the scheme are furnished and managed by SAFE, which lets them under a licence or an assured short-hold tenancy. Most residents are at the scheme for around one year. The scheme is managed by a Project Manager, supported by a Deputy Project Manager and three House Managers. Around 35% of all referrals are made by the Council with the balance being made from other key agencies. The main client group is 16-18 year olds, although people up to the age of 25 are accepted. Those referred are assessed by one of the House Managers with a report on each case being referred to the SAFE Panel (comprising representatives from key agencies) for consideration. Those not accepted onto the scheme can appeal against the decision. On average there are 20 admissions annually to the scheme.

9 Mortgage Rescue

9.1 In January 2009, the Communities for Local Government (CLG) announced that nationally £60 million was to be made available to assist local authorities with implementing the new mortgage rescue scheme. The intention of the scheme is to assist the most vulnerable households that were under the threat of homelessness on account of mortgage arrears or repossession. Mortgage rescue can only be used to assist certain clients and is target and criteria based. It will only be used as a last resort where all lender "hardship tools" have been exhausted. People can only be nominated to the scheme if they have under 20% negative equity and the value of their property was valued below £200,000. The Council works with the local agent, Moat Homes Limited, and the CAB's Debt Advisor from the Epping Citizens Advice Bureau. Subject to a client being accepted onto the scheme, they would be entitled to either mortgage to rent or an equity loan, dependent upon the available equity, with the lender being required to freeze any possession action. The Council has been congratulated by the Government for its work on Mortgage Rescue and had the first cases in the Essex sub region.

10 Homeowner's Mortgage Support

10.1 The CLG has made available £200 million nationally to assist households that may be experiencing mortgage arrears due to a temporary "income shock". Assistance is given by way of freezing up to 70% of mortgage interest payments for up to 24 months. The Council will maximise the use of homeowner's mortgage support. However, one of the main concerns at the moment is that not all main lenders have signed up to the scheme.

11 Preventing Repossession Fund

11.1 The CLG has notified the Council that it will be receiving a grant of £47,500 at the end of June 2009, to enable the Council to extend small loans to families at risk of homelessness through repossession or evictions, who are at risk of increasing as a result of the recession. The Government has issued guidance on the use of the grant and is keen that it supports the maximum number of households in need of financial assistance thus enabling them to remain in their own homes.

11.2 Under the Government's guidance, financial assistance through small interest free loans ranging from £1,000 to £3,000 per household capped to a maximum of £5,000 available interest free will be made available. This will allow the money to be re-cycled to help other households in the future. Final decisions on how the money is deployed rest with the Council and should be based on individual local need and circumstances. In addition to homeowners, the funding should be used to assist residents in all forms of tenure that are struggling with their rental payments and face eviction.

11.3 Loans are agreed by senior officers and are repayable by the applicant over a period of 1-5 years depending upon the size of the loan and the circumstances of the applicant. Only those households who, following investigations, are found to be genuinely unable to pay their rent or mortgage, due to income shock caused by loss of earnings where there is no history of previous arrears, will be able to benefit.

11.4 Loans will only be agreed, when the recipient is prepared to act on debt advice to make repayments more affordable following the intervention of an advisor. They will be provided where lenders cannot apply forbearance measures due to the level of arrears, but will freeze possession action as a result of the loan and will be on the basis that all parties are prepared to compromise on the debt owed and should be made to recover the position, (rather than fully clear arrears) where all other options have failed. Loans will not be made where there are other ways to resolve the problem. For example, if the arrears are caused by housing benefit delays assistance should be given in dealing with the matter. Loans will only be made where it would enable a household to remain in place where no other option would lead to this outcome.

12. Discretionary Housing Payment

12.1 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are sums of money paid to people who need help with their housing costs. Private sector tenants who have a change of circumstances, such as a loss of employment, may find that their contractual rent is higher than their housing benefit entitlement. Discretionary Housing Payments can help private sector tenants meet the shortfall and prevent them going into arrears and subsequently becoming homeless. Payments are made over a short period until the tenants circumstances improve or they obtain more affordable accommodation. In 2008/2009, £22,000 in Discretionary Housing Payments was allocated.

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. There are two floating support schemes being Harlow Women's Aid Floating Support Scheme and In Touch Support.

2. Harlow Women's Aid Floating Support Scheme (Stay Safe)

- 2.1 This is known as the 'Stay Safe' scheme and was launched in January 2003 funded through Essex County Council's Supporting People Team and can assist up to 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. 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 placed in a refuge. There is access to a 24 hour emergency help line with contact being made at least once each week. Risk assessments are undertaken and, if it is safe, meetings take place in clients' homes. Otherwise, local drop-in centres are used. On average, the support worker will spend around 3 hours per week on each case. Plans are made, setting out the action required to provide the practical support, information, advice and guidance needed in each case. These are kept under review with 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 Team.
- 2.4 Applicants can visit the drop-in centres and have access to a solicitor, if required. They can also attend various support sessions.
- 2.5 Stay Safe has a full-time Support Worker in the District who reports to an area co-ordinator based in Harlow and is also responsible for managing three Support Workers at similar schemes in East Hertfordshire, Broxbourne and Harlow.

3. Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

- 3.1 The Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) draws together key agencies in a local forum to co-ordinate actions and resources towards addressing the highest risk victims of domestic violence. The Housing Options Team participates in the MARAC process and attends meetings.

4. The Tenancy Support Scheme

- 4.1 The Council works with Supporting People's appointed provider of housing related support, In Touch Support to provide support for up to 12 single homeless vulnerable people who are housed in Council accommodation.
- 4.2 The Council is represented on a Panel of Stakeholders including, In Touch Support, the Community Mental Health Team, and Community Drug and Alcohol Team which meets monthly to discuss prospective referrals and operational issues.
- 4.3 Once a person is accepted onto the scheme, they receive support from the floating support worker until they have sufficient skills to live more independently.
- 4.4 This is the only scheme of its kind in Essex.

5. In Touch Support

- 5.1 In addition to providing floating support through the Tenancy Support Scheme, In Touch Support provides floating support to vulnerable people irrespective of tenure across the Epping Forest District.
- 5.2 The service provides a high level of support to homeless applicants placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 5.3 The Support Worker provides agreed levels of support with the client. This will include acting as a key link with other agencies and preparing the client to acquire the skills needed to sustain a permanent tenancy.
- 5.4 Support Workers also provide a service to people whom the Council does not owe a duty under homeless legislation. All referrals to the scheme for those living in bed and breakfast accommodation are through the homeless assessment officers.
- 5.5 The Assistant Housing Options Manager (Homelessness) meets on a monthly basis with In Touch Support Managers to discuss contact and service delivery matters.

6. Mediation

- 6.1 Housing Officers report an increase of anti-social behaviour incidents. The Council introduced a new Introductory Tenancy Scheme in April 2006, which has assisted in bringing this problem under control.
- 6.2 The Council uses a specialist mediation service to undertake mediation to resolve neighbour disputes where Conditions of Tenancy are being breached and secure tenancies are at risk. Qualified arbiters and trained mediators work with tenants on an impartial basis at neutral venues to construct solutions and reach agreements.

7 Essex National Probation Service

- 7.1 The Housing Options Section works with the National Probation Service's Housing Liaison Officer on cases referred by the Service. If a full housing duty is owed to the person referred, then the Council will continue to work with the Probation Service to ensure that they are able to sustain any permanent accommodation offered. A Protocol is in place between the Council and the Probation Service which sets out the way in which the service will be delivered effectively.

8 North Essex Mental Health Partnership

- 8.1 The Housing Options Section works in partnership with the North Essex Mental Health Partnership to ensure that housing advice and assistance is provided to people who are suffering from mental illness. The Council will arrange to visit clients either at their current place of residence or in hospital to discuss their housing situation. Clients may be provided with bed and breakfast accommodation in the first instance with a referral being made to In Touch Support so that housing related support is provided from the outset. The Mental Health Team carry out their own assessment of the client's ability to live independently. A Protocol is in place between the Council and the Mental Health Partnership which sets out the way in which the service will be delivered effectively.

The Role of Essex County Council's Social Care

1. Introduction

- 1.1 There have been significant changes in the operational approach within Social Care across Essex. In August 2007, the Social Care Team has merged with Child Protection to become the Assessment and Child Protection Team (ACPT). There was also the formulation of the Team around School Children in the Community (TASCC) in October 2007. The only team that has not seen such a significant change is the Leaving and After Care Team. The homeless service has forged strong links with all these teams to ensure good standards of service delivery are maintained.

2. The Assessment and Child Protection Team

- 2.1 The Homeless Team works in partnership with ACPT within an agreed protocol, ensuring their statutory duties are met under the terms of the Housing Act 1996 Part VII as amended and the Children's Act 1989.
- 2.2 Following a recommendation from the Essex Safeguarding Children's Board (ESCB), the ACPT, in partnership with the Council, have developed a draft County-wide protocol for dealing with homeless families and young people, which will be considered by ESCB before becoming an operational County document for both Housing Authorities and Social Care Teams across Essex.

3. The Leaving and After Care Team

- 3.1 The number of cases referred by the Leaving and After Care Team has been low. This may largely be on account of the small number of children in the District being placed into care.
- 3.2 The Homelessness Team took part in a Local Area Agreement led by the County Council, which resulted in an improvement in the housing outcomes for care leavers during the three years 2006 to 2009.
- 3.3 The Housing Options Manager meets with representatives from the Leaving and After Care Team and other authorities in Essex on a regular basis.

4. The Team Around School Children in the Community (TASCC)

- 4.1 There are two TASCC teams based in the Epping Forest District. Both the Homeless Team and TASCC teams work jointly to seek to prevent homelessness on appropriate cases. The Homeless Team attend local TASCC meetings when housing related cases are to be discussed.

Services for people involved with drug and alcohol abuse

1. The Community Drug and Alcohol Team (CDAT)

- 1.1 The Community Drug and Alcohol Team (CDAT) are based in Harlow.
- 1.2 The team assists clients suffering with drug and alcohol abuse. The staff includes a Clinical Psychiatrist, Clinical Psychiatric Nurse and a Social Work and Administration Team.
- 1.3 Clients are referred to CDAT through a number of channels including hospitals, ADAS, GPs, family members and self-referrals; with a minimum age for client's being 16 and no upper age limit. People with alcohol problems far outnumber those with drug problems.
- 1.4 All CDAT clients are risk assessed, with particular attention being paid to any risks linked to abuse, for example, mental health problems, risk of violence to self or others, and neglect. All clients have a physical assessment and a community care plan. A Panel meets monthly to prioritise cases.
- 1.5 Some clients may be referred for rehabilitation, which may be residential, usually for 6 months, or may be day attendance based. Both services are provided outside the local area, which is seen as beneficial to clients.
- 1.6 There is an agreed protocol for the provision of the service. There is a high success rate which resulted in low levels of repeat homelessness with many clients being able to sustain a permanent tenancy.

Homelessness Assessments, Decisions, Notifications and Reviews

- 1.1 Around 95% of homelessness interviews are conducted by prior arrangement, helping staff to manage workloads and clients to avoid long waiting times. Home and hospital visits are offered when appropriate. Where English is not the first language of the client, staff are able to call upon interpretation services. A 'point card' can be used to establish which language is required and immediate translation can be effected by telephone. Document translation can also be arranged in appropriate cases.
- 1.2 The process of assessing applications is complex and governed by legislation. As Homelessness law is always changing, all staff are kept up to date on any case law that may affect the decision-making process.
- 1.3 The Council adopts a firm but fair approach to homelessness, placing applicants in accommodation when statutorily required to do so. Referrals are only made to Homelessness Assessment Officers if the Homelessness Prevention Team has explored every avenue in preventing homelessness. This approach has brought about a significant drop in homeless referrals.
- 1.4 Investigations include 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.
- 1.5 These duties rest with Homelessness Assessment Officers, who arrange interim and temporary accommodation as necessary. All homelessness decisions are signed off by the Assistant Housing Options Manager (Homelessness) prior to the applicant being notified of the decision. The Government have recommended in the past that homelessness decisions are completed within 33 days. However, due to the increasing complexity of cases, it has been accepted that it is more important that decisions are sound. The Council aims to complete around 75% of all decisions within 33 days.
- 1.6 Due to the shift in emphasis to prevention, the Homeless Service was re-structured in 2006, with the number of homeless caseworkers being reduced by one full time post, which enabled the Homelessness Prevention Team to have one additional member of staff. This resulted in a ratio 1:3 between Homeless Case Workers and Homelessness Prevention Officers which is the national norm.
- 1.7 Progress of homeless applications is monitored and overseen by the Assistant Housing Options Manager (Homelessness). The Director of Housing chairs quarterly Performance Management meetings which the Housing Options Manager attends to discuss performance over a range of indicators including homelessness.

2 Out of Hours Service

- 2.1 The Council provides a 24 hour 365 day per year emergency out-of-hours homeless response service. Members of the Homelessness Team are on call on a duty rota and will respond to cases where a person, for example, could become homeless due to fire or flood.

3. Reviews

- 3.1 Following any homeless decision, applicants are advised of their legal right to request a review of the decision and agencies that can assist them in the review process including the CAB and Shelter.

- 3.2 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 request a review outside of the deadline, the Council may offer additional time depending upon the circumstances.
- 3.3 Statutory reviews are carried out by an officer senior to the person who took the original decision and had not been involved in the original decision. The Code of Guidance is observed with all reviews.
- 3.4 Decisions on non-homeless and intentionality are considered by the Housing Appeals and Reviews Panel which comprises five District Councillors. All other decisions are taken by senior officers. 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 a representative from Shelter or the CAB.
- 3.5 All statutory reviews are completed within the statutory 56 days, unless otherwise agreed with the applicant. Ample time is given to applicants to provide documentary evidence prior to any decision being made. It is usually the applicant rather than the Council that seeks an extension of time.
- 3.6 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 decision letters.
- 3.7 Where a homeless applicant is in priority need and not intentionally homeless but has no local connection with the District, they may be referred to another local authority where they do have a connection. Should there be any dispute between local authorities on who owes the duty; an accredited arbitrator may be appointed by mutual agreement to resolve the matter. Since 2005, the Council has only appointed an arbitrator on one occasion when the case was found in the Council's favour.

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. This duty arises under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996 Part VII as amended. 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. This duty arises under Section 193.
- 1.2 The Council uses a variety of interim and temporary accommodation including its hostel, and small block of self contained flats at Hemnall House, Epping where tenants receive out-reach support from hostel staff. The Council works in partnership with East Homes to provide the "Fresh Start" scheme, East Homes lease private rented accommodation and sub-lets to homeless households nominated by the Council in return for a weekly management charge. Over recent years, the numbers of homeless applicants placed in the Council's own housing stock has substantially reduced due to other options being available. The Council nominates homeless applicants to its Domestic Violence Scheme and on rare occasions, for management reasons, provides Bed and Breakfast accommodation to single people.
- 1.3 The table below shows the distribution of households between the different types of temporary accommodation.

Year	Norway House	Hemnall House	Fresh Start	Non-secure tenancies	Brook Haven	Women's Refuges	B&B	Total
2005/06	31	7	11	135	5	9	29	227
2006/07	37	7	12	91	5	2	12	166
2007/08	31	7	13	12	5	4	11	83
2008/09	22	7	13	4	4	0	10	60

- 1.4 The Government set all local housing authorities a target of reducing the number of households living in temporary accommodation to at least 50% (of 2004/05 figures) by 2010. In order to reach the target, a reduction to 102 households was required and was met, two years in advance, in 2008/09

2. Homeless Persons' Hostel Norway House, North Weald

- 2.1 The Council's hostel, Norway House, North Weald (a Grade II listed building) underwent a major refurbishment and improvement scheme in 2004/05.

- 2.2 The hostel has a number of facilities including an enclosed garden which provides a play area for children under 5 and a play area for older children 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. The Supporting Epping Forest Families in Temporary Accommodation (SEFFTA) was formed in 2001. It works mainly with families at Norway House but undertakes some outreach work for homeless applicants living in self-contained temporary accommodation. SEFFTA organise play schemes, outings, fun days, cookery lessons, buggy walks and barbeques. During the year 2008/09, SEFFTA was phased out. The main reason for this was mainly attributed to the difficulty in attracting trustees to the scheme. However, during 2009, stakeholders will meet to discuss the continuation of the schemes set up by SEFFTA and will include representatives from the Housing Directorate, Community Services and other relevant agencies.
- 2.3 Norway House has ample parking facilities and a large secure store for residents' furniture, should they be unable to accommodate all their possessions in their rooms. Homeless households in other accommodation can also benefit from the storage.
- 2.4 There are 32 rooms on the ground and first floors which are let individually or as suites, as necessary. Four attic rooms have been refurbished, with their own private facilities. Two additional rooms are reserved for night and week-end emergencies, with beds made-up ready for use. Residents have use of communal kitchens, common rooms and laundry facilities. The current shared bathroom facilities are in the process of being converted to self contained facilities for each family.
- 2.5 Work is planned to convert the former Caretaker's accommodation to provide three separate rooms for 16-17 year olds in order to meet the Government's requirement to stop the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for this younger age group. Residents provide their own furniture, but where necessary basic items of equipment such as beds can be supplied from hostel stores.
- 2.6 The CAB provides an important outreach service with advice being available to all hostel residents.
- 2.7 In 1992, in response to an increase in homelessness at that time, five chalets providing accommodation for 10 families, were built in the grounds to the rear of the main hostel.
- 2.8 The hostel has 5 staff supervised by the Assistant Housing Options Manager (Homelessness). The hostel team includes the Manager, two Deputy Managers, a Caretaker and a part-time Cleaner. Hostel Management staff have a small office near to the entrance of the main building with a service reception area for residents enquiries.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 Office opening hours are 9 am 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 are on call on a 24 hour, 365 day basis to deal with emergencies.
- 2.11 On admission to the hostel, residents are given a 'welcome' pack, which includes information about local schools, health services etc. They are helped to apply for housing benefit, if necessary, and a Supporting People Tenant Support Plan is maintained.
- 2.12 Residents have a licence agreement which sets out the conditions by which they live at the hostel.

2.13 A newsletter is published on a two-monthly basis to keep hostel residents informed on matters of general interest.

3. Hemnall House, Epping

3.1 Hemnall House comprises 10 units of accommodation on two floors, mainly small studio flats with shared facilities, although there are some larger self-contained units.

3.2 The flats are occupied on a non-secure tenancy with the accommodation being carpeted and the kitchens equipped with refrigerators and cookers. Residents have use of a communal laundry room.

3.3 Staff offer support to tenants on an out-reach basis and visit the scheme each week. The flats are let to families with no more than 2 children (because of the limited size of the flats) who are able to live more independently than those at the hostel.

3.4 Some residents may be referred to In Touch Support where additional assistance is needed.

4. The Fresh Start Scheme

4.1 The Council works in partnership with East Homes to operate an open market leasing scheme, whereby the housing association would lease up to 20 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 East Homes' remit is to provide support to the tenants, to reduce the risk of repeat homelessness. The tenancies are assured 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 East Thames to be low. The Council has entered into an agreement with East Homes and pays a weekly management charge on each property.

4.3 Representatives from the Housing Options Service meet with East Homes on a six monthly basis to review performance.

5. Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

5.1 Following a competitive tendering exercise, the Council has appointed a number of hotels both within and outside of the District to provide bed and breakfast accommodation. All hotels used have been inspected to ensure that they provide adequate living conditions and meet all health and safety requirements.

5.2 EFDC has on average 8 single people living in bed and breakfast accommodation who are generally housed there as a last resort for management reasons. The vast majority of occupants receive housing benefit.

6 Women's Refuges

6.1 The Council, in partnership with East Living provided the first Women's Refuge in the District, which opened in April 2005. It has a wide range of facilities and is supervised by a Scheme Manager and a part-time assistant.

6.2 It comprises 3 x 1 bedroom and 2 x 2 bedroom self-contained flats with their own kitchens and bathrooms. A Health Visitor attends regularly and the Scheme Manager ensures that all the tenants have access to a G.P. Legal advice is provided by a visiting solicitor. The Scheme Manager helps with training residents and assisting with issues such as returning to work with good links with local schools and nurseries being established.

- 6.3 Residents have assured short-hold Tenancies that can be renewed if they are not ready to move on. In order to be accepted on the scheme, residents must have been accepted for either the interim or full homelessness duty by the Council, The scheme was awarded an “excellent” rating at the recent Supporting People inspection.

Consultation

1. A consultation exercise on the Strategy has been undertaken with all partner agencies, the Tenants and Leaseholder's Federation, the Housing Scrutiny Member Panel and Town and Parish Councils. The Strategy was approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder in August 2009.
2. The Council undertakes periodic consultations with its customers including customer interview exit surveys. The homelessness service forms part of the three yearly tenant's satisfaction survey with all Housing services.
3. The Housing Scrutiny Panel will review the Action Plan on a regular basis.

3. Action Plans

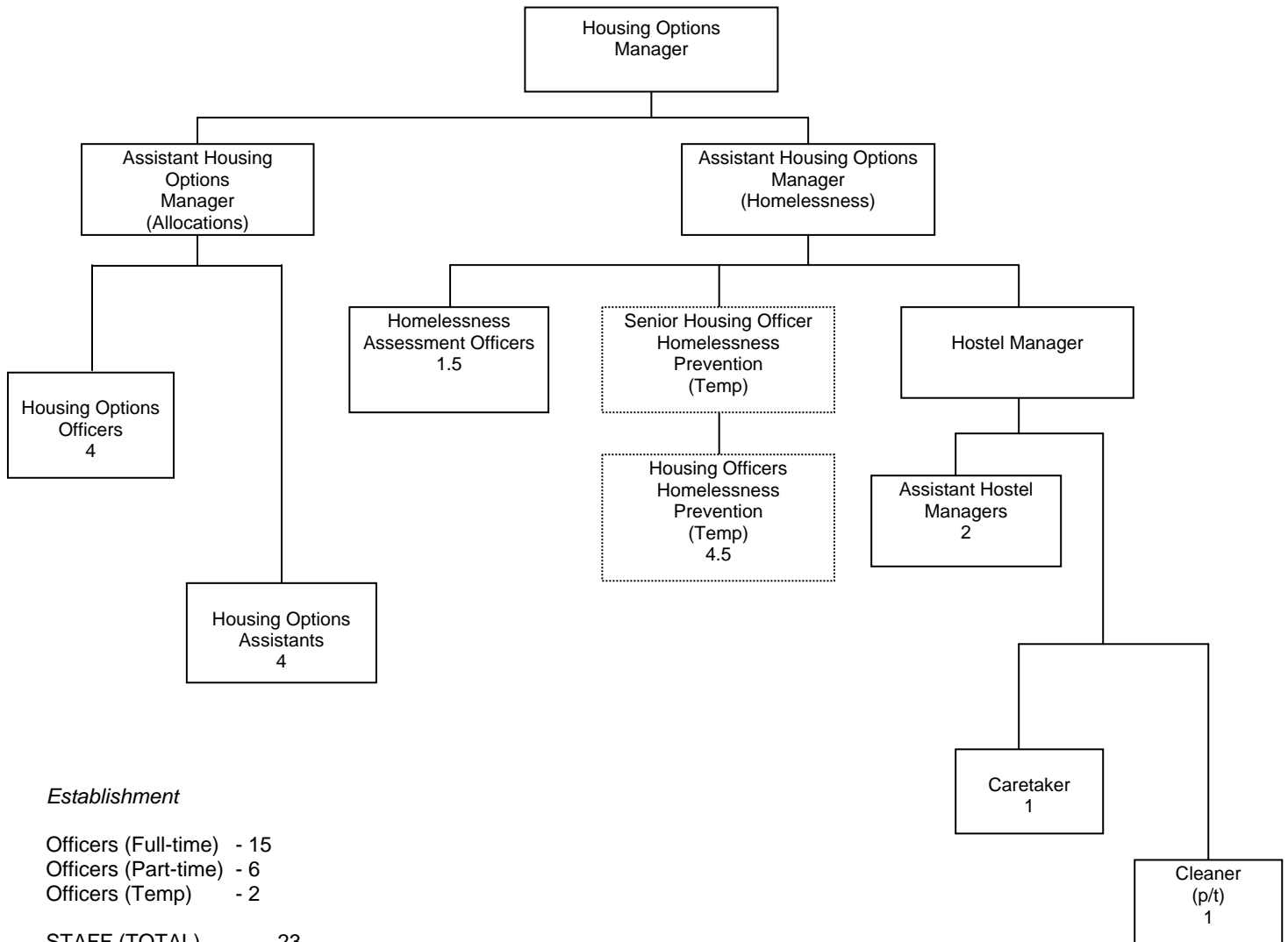
APPENDIX ONE

Action	Priority	Target Date	Comments	Responsibility
Continue to keep the number of households in temporary accommodation to a minimum and within the Government's target	High	On-going	The Council met the Governments target 3 years before the 2010 deadline	Housing Options Manager
Continue to keep the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for the single homeless to a minimum	High	On-going	Bed and Breakfast accommodation will only be used for the single homeless where there are severe management difficulties	Asst Housing Options Manager (Homelessness)
Undertake a fresh tendering exercise for the Leader Lodge development scheme	High	December 2009	As the proposal to develop the site with L&Q on shared ownership basis has fallen through, the scheme must be re-tendered	Director of Housing
Work with Brentwood and Uttlesford District Council to investigate cross boundary provision for young parents	High	December 2009	Site identified in Ongar. Funding agreed. Preferred partner East Living has been appointed	Director of Housing
Continue to ensure 40% affordable housing on development sites	High	On-going	This now achieved through local plan	Director of Housing
Work with Essex County Council and other partners on the delivery of appropriate provision for travelling families	High	March 2011	Work has commenced on a "Delivery Strategy" which will form part of the Epping Forest Gypsies and Travellers Plan, due to be finalised late 2009. the estimated number of pitches required by 2012 is around 34	Director of Housing
To continuously review the financial support to given to the Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme	High	On-going	This is essential in tackling homelessness	Housing Options Manager

Action	Priority	Target Date	Comments	Responsibility
Develop the use of the recently introduced Mortgage Rescue Scheme	High	On-going	Key to this objective is maintaining a good working relationship with Citizens Advice Bureau and Moat	Housing Options Manager
Expand the "Sanctuary" Scheme for victims of domestic violence and hate crime	Medium	On-going	5 schemes currently in place	Housing Options Manager
Convert the former Caretaker's flat for rooms for homeless 16-17 year olds at Norway House	Medium	September 2009	No comments	Asst Housing Options Manager (Homelessness)
To develop small scale "night stop" scheme where young single homeless people stay in private accommodation	Medium	December 2009	Prospective "volunteer" households need to be identified	Asst Housing Options Manager (Homelessness)
Report to Cabinet for consideration to be given for the Council to fund the homelessness prevention service, should the Government not continue to provide funding	Medium	December 2010	Awaiting decision from the Government	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)
To continuously review the budget for Rental Loan Scheme	Medium	On-going	This is essential in tackling homelessness`	Housing Options Manager
Keep under review the possibility of additional chalets at Norway House	Low	March 2011	This no longer a priority on account of fewer numbers of households in temporary accommodation	Director of Housing
Improve percentage of homeless decisions within 33 days to 75%	Low	On-going	This no longer a priority on account of the complexity of cases dealt with	Housing Options Manager

HOUSING DIRECTORATE

Housing Options Section



Establishment

- Officers (Full-time) - 15
- Officers (Part-time) - 6
- Officers (Temp) - 2

STAFF (TOTAL) - 23

(Dotted Box – Temporary Posts)

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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE