



HOUSING Strategy

2017 - 2022





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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

This Housing Strategy assesses the District's current and future housing needs, having regard to the latest Local Plan information and sets out the Council's approach to meeting those needs. It takes account of both national and local priorities and the links between other Council and non-Council strategies that influence, and are influenced by, the Housing Strategy. It sets out a Vision for the Strategy and the aims and objectives relating to individual housing issues. It also provides a Key Action Plan for the first year of the Strategy.

Every attempt has been made to ensure that the Housing Strategy is not a "technical document", and that it meets the needs of the widest possible audience, including tenants and private occupiers, housing organisations, Council members and other interested parties. Documents referred to in the on-line version of this Strategy can be accessed through links that are shown [in dark blue text](#).

The Housing Strategy is a dynamic document, which will be continually developed and reviewed. In particular, the Key Action Plan will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. Chapter 10 gives more details about reviewing these.

The Epping Forest District

The Epping Forest District covers urban and rural areas of 131 square miles, including twelve towns and larger villages, ranging in population size of between 2,000 and 30,000, currently totalling around 131,500 people. It is an attractive Green Belt area, with good road and rail links to the capital, so it is popular with commuters. The southern parts of the District are on the borders of Greater London and are more populous and urbanised.

The total number of dwellings in the District was around 55,630 in April 2017. Of these properties, around 85% are in the private sector. Around 6,340 properties (11%) are owned by the Council, which is by far the main social landlord in the District. The number of housing association properties is steadily increasing, with around 3% of the District's dwellings now owned by housing associations.

Formal adoption of the Housing Strategy

This Housing Strategy was adopted at a meeting of the Council's Cabinet on 12 October 2017, following detailed scrutiny by the Council's Communities Select Committee.

The Strategy sets out the District's housing plans for the medium term (i.e. over the next 5 years). However, these plans have been formulated with regard to the housing objectives for the long term which, in some cases, can span a period of 30 years.

The Housing Strategy will be updated in five years' time, during 2022, unless there are significant changes required to the Council's strategic approach. The Key Action Plan will be updated annually.

Chapter 2

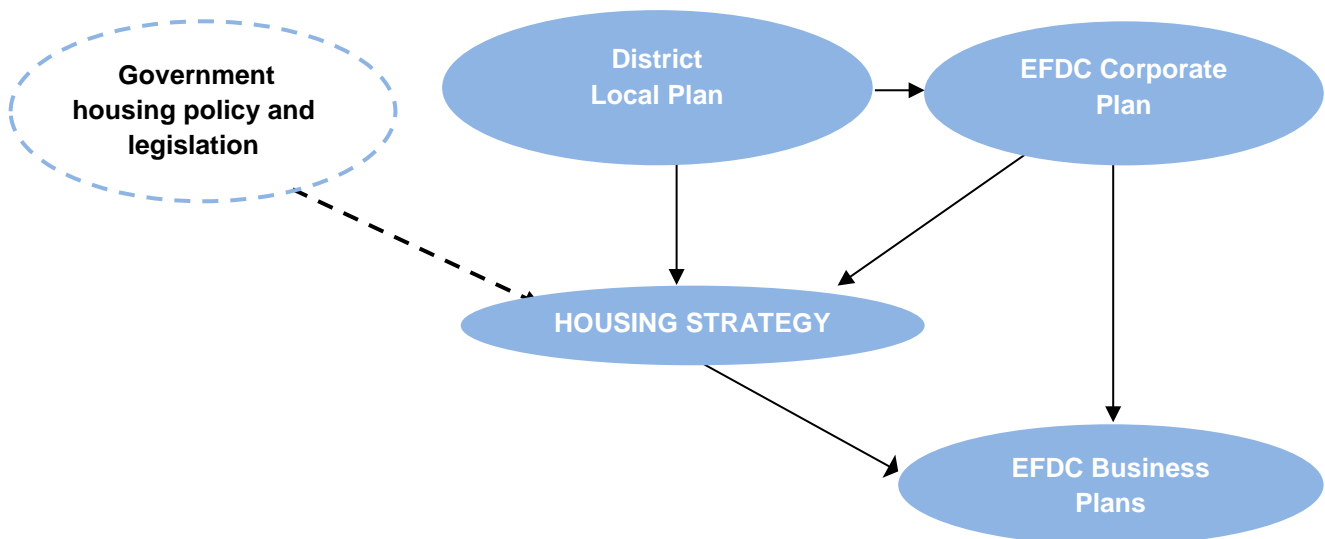
Strategic aims and priorities

Introduction

This Housing Strategy is only one of a range of complementary and inter-related strategic documents and plans produced by the Council. It is also influenced by a number of strategies produced by other agencies. In formulating the Housing Strategy, careful regard has been given to relevant corporate objectives and strategies. This section of the Strategy sets out where it sits in relation to other strategies produced by the Council and the Council's strategic housing aims and objectives.

The Council's strategic approach to housing

The hierarchy of the Council's strategic approach to housing can be summarised in the following chart:



EFDC Corporate Plan

The Council's prime strategic document, that sets out the Council's priorities for the planning and delivery of services over a five-year period (currently 2015-2020).

District Local Plan

The Council's prime town planning document that sets out all the Council's town planning policies and land allocations. The current Local Plan is in the process of being updated. A new Draft Local Plan was published for consultation in October 2016 and, following analysis and consideration of the comments received, a Pre-Submission Local Plan will be produced in Spring 2018.

Government housing policy and legislation

Clearly, the Council must comply with legislation - which is often updated and influences and affects the Council's delivery of its Housing Strategy. Similarly, Government housing policy (which often results in legislation) has an influence on the Housing Strategy

as well. The Government's latest housing policy was set out in its Housing White Paper [Fixing our broken housing market](#) published in February 2017, which has influenced this Housing Strategy.

*EFDC
Business Plans*

Each of the Council's Directorates produces an annual Business Plan, in support of the EFDC Corporate Plan, setting out the key actions and resource requirements for the forthcoming year.

Corporate Vision and Objectives

The [Council's Corporate Plan 2015 – 2020](#) recognises that the Epping Forest District is full of character and wants it to continue to be a great place to live, work, play, study and do business.

The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's Vision in 10 separate statements. The four statements that are directly related to this Housing Strategy are as follows:

- We want to make best use of existing infrastructure to meet the District's needs for development in the most sustainable locations with the least possible impact on our natural and historic environment;
- We want to keep the individual character, identity and separateness of our towns and villages by protecting the Green Belt;
- We want new homes to meet the needs of local people while also supporting economic development. The scale of development should be appropriate to the size of our towns and villages, bringing vitality and other benefits to our communities; and
- We want to build relationships with our partners to develop initiatives and service improvements with reduced costs, greater efficiency and better value for money.

Vision for the Housing Strategy

Epping Forest will be a place that has safe, decent and good quality housing, of an appropriate mix of sizes, types and tenure, that meet the local needs of those who want to live in the District.

Housing Objectives

Individual housing objectives relating to the needs and demands of different sectors of the community are given throughout this Housing Strategy.

Chapter 3

The Council's Local Plan

Purpose of a Local Plan

Every local planning authority is expected to prepare and regularly update a Local Plan. A Local Plan is normally a district-wide plan which sets out the long-term vision, objectives and policies to guide the future development of an area. It also provides the strategic context within which any Neighbourhood Plans should be developed.

Local plans are designed to identify and protect areas of value, such as areas of nature conservation and recreational importance (e.g. Epping Forest and the Lee Valley Regional Park), as well as the Metropolitan Green Belt. They are also intended to guide where future development (including for residential, employment and retail purposes) should be focused. In addition, they include policies which are used to assess planning applications as they come forward, to ensure that high quality development is delivered, and that it is supported by the infrastructure needed.

EFDC's Local Plan

The Council's current Local Plan was adopted in 1998, although some parts were subsequently replaced in 2006 by the Council's adopted Local Plan Alterations. Most of these policies are 'saved' although, since the publication of the [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) by the Government in 2012, some are now considered to be out of date and cannot be used.

To ensure that the District has an up-to-date and robust planning policy context against which to bring forward development, the Council is now preparing a new Local Plan for the period 2011 to 2033. This will set out the level and distribution of development, including for new homes and jobs.

To date, the Council has undertaken three stages of public consultation, as follows:

- [Community Visioning](#) (November 2010 to January 2011)
- [Issues and Options 'Community Choices'](#) (July to October 2012)
- [Draft Local Plan](#) (October to December 2016)

Once all the comments received during the Draft Local Plan consultation period have been reviewed, amendments will be made, where appropriate, to the Plan. The Council will then publish a 'Pre-Submission' Local Plan and seek representations on its 'soundness'. The Plan, together with the representations received from this stage of consultation, will then be submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and will be independently examined.

An important document that will form part of the new Local Plan evidence base is the Housing Implementation Strategy, which will set out how the Council will deliver the housing-related policies within the Local Plan.

Once the new Local Plan is adopted, it will be the statutory development plan for the District, and will be used to decide planning applications. As the Local Plan progresses, the Council will be able to give increasing 'weight' to its policies when determining planning applications.

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

To have a clear understanding of the number and type of homes needed, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) says that local planning authorities should prepare a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). A SHMA is a technical and objective piece of analysis to help understand the likely future housing needs of an area. It should not be influenced by current physical or policy constraints, or the capacity that may or may not exist within an area to accommodate the homes needed. It provides the 'starting point' by which a local authority, or group of authorities, can understand the likely level and type of new homes that they should be seeking to provide through their Local Plans. This is known as the Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN).

The Housing Market Area (HMA)

Government policy requires that a SHMA should assess housing need in an effective Housing Market Area (HMA). An HMA is '... a geographical area defined by household demand and preferences for all types of housing, reflecting the key functional linkages between places where people live and work.'

HMAs are defined by considering a range of matters including dwelling prices, where people choose to move to, and travel to work patterns. In practice, this means that HMAs very often cross administrative boundaries, and local planning authorities are required to work with all the other authorities within their Housing Market Area, under the 'Duty to Co-operate', including, where appropriate, through the preparation of a joint SHMA.

Technical analysis of the data on the matters set out above has identified that the Epping Forest District sits within a Housing Market Area which also includes East Hertfordshire District, Harlow District and Uttlesford District. The four authorities, together with Essex County Council and Hertfordshire County Council, have a long history of joint working on strategic planning issues, not least on assessing housing need and planning for future growth. In response to the 'Duty to Co-operate', in October 2014 the councils in the HMA established the Co-operation for Sustainable Development Member Board (the "Co-Op Board") to take a strategic approach to the delivery of housing and economic needs across the area.

Further information on the Local Plan

All of the latest documents relating to the new Local Plan, including the latest SHMA, can be accessed from the following link:

[Local Plan Documents](#)

Chapter 4

Affordable Housing

Aim

To maximise and increase the amount of good quality affordable housing in the District, in the form of affordable rented housing and low cost home ownership, to meet the assessed level of need for affordable homes.

Objectives

- a) Work with housing associations and developers to increase the number of affordable homes within the District;
- b) On developments which provide for 11 or more homes (or on land in excess of 1,000sqm gross floor space), generally seek:
 - A minimum of 40% of the homes as affordable housing through the use of agreements under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, with the affordable housing mix on such sites reflecting the private housing mix; and
 - Up to 25% of the affordable homes as shared ownership homes (not as “starter homes”), to assist first time buyers to gain access to home ownership and to meet the National Planning Policy Framework’s requirement for the provision of affordable home ownership properties;
- c) In order for shared ownership homes to be affordable to as many people as possible, ensure that:
 - Initial equity sales to individual applicants for shared ownership properties are no less than 20% and no more than 75% of the open market value of the property;
 - For development appraisals undertaken by housing associations for the purchase or development of affordable housing, the assumption used for the average initial equity shares to be sold to applicants across all of the shared ownership properties on the development is no more than 35%, and is reflected in offers made to landowners and developers;
 - Shared owners are able to purchase additional equity shares (staircase) up to full 100% ownership, except for rural housing schemes for which a maximum of 80% equity can be purchased under current Homes and Communities Agency policy; and
 - The initial rent charged for the equity retained by the housing association is equivalent to no more than 2% of the value of the unsold equity per annum, with subsequent rent increases determined in accordance with the relevant housing association’s rent setting policy;

- d) In exceptional circumstances, where the Council considers that the provision of on-site affordable housing provision would be inappropriate, seek the off-site provision of affordable housing, equivalent to at least 40% of the combined total number of properties developed on-site and off-site, or the provision of a financial contribution equivalent to the amount of subsidy the developer would have needed to contribute to the affordable housing, if it was provided on-site;
- e) Seek to ensure that housing associations and other providers charge affordable rents at no more than the level of the relevant Local Housing Allowance for the locality;
- f) Ensure that developers comply with the Council's latest [Guidance Note to Planning Applicants on the Submission of Viability and Financial Appraisals for Affordable Housing](#) and robustly assess and validate Viability Appraisals submitted for developments where developers assert that it is not possible to meet the Council's affordable housing requirements, in order to ensure that as much affordable housing is obtained as viably possible;
- g) Work with parish councils to increase the amount of affordable housing in rural areas, by granting planning permission for small scale affordable housing schemes on appropriate sites within the Green Belt, adjacent to rural settlements, as an exception to normal planning policy, where there is a demonstrable local housing need.
- h) Through the Council's Scheme of Preferred Housing Association Partners, encourage partnerships with housing associations already operating within the District, rather than with new housing associations.
- i) Seek to ensure that all new affordable homes meet or exceed the minimum internal space standards of the Government's Nationally Described Space Standards.

Key issues

Affordable housing need

The latest [Strategic Housing Market Assessment \(SHMA\)](#) assesses the current number of affordable homes to be provided in the District over the 22-year period between 2011 and 2033. The latest SHMA can be accessed from the link above.

Recent affordable housing completions

Due to the small number of housing sites brought forward in recent years, resulting from the early achievement of the previous Structure Plan targets, there have been very low numbers of affordable homes provided in recent years, as shown in the table below:

Table 4.1 – Recent affordable homes completions

Tenure	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14
Rented	0	21	26	4
Shared Ownership	0	19	43	5
Totals	0	40	69	9

Affordable housing pipeline

A further 14 developments currently have either detailed or outline planning permission and are either on-site or have not yet started. These developments will provide an additional 370 affordable homes, as follows:

Table 4.2 – Breakdown of affordable homes sites

Site	No. of Affordable Homes	Status (as at 1.6.17)
Knollys Nursery, Waltham Abbey	63	On site
Phase 2 - EFDC housebuilding sites	51	On site
Phase 3 – EFDC housebuilding sites	34	Soon to commence
Phase 1 - EFDC housebuilding sites	23	On site
Barnfield, Roydon	11	On site
Phases 4-6 EFDC housebuilding sites	58	Not yet started
Fyfield Research Park, Ongar	44	Not yet started
Hillhouse Independent Living Scheme, Waltham Abbey	24	Not yet started
Norton Heath Riding Centre, High Ongar	15	Not yet started
Pyrles Lane, Loughton	14	Outline P/P only
Stoneshot Farm, Waltham Abbey	10	Not yet started
Netherhouse Farm, Sewardstone	8	Not yet started
Happy Grow Garden Centre, Thornwood	8	Not yet started
Institute Road, Thornwood	6	Not yet started
Esperanza Nursery, Stapleford Abbots	1	Not yet started
Total	370	

Affordable housing tenure

In the Government's White Paper "Fixing our broken housing market" published in February 2017, the Government announced that it had decided not to implement its previous proposal to require local planning authorities to ensure that a minimum percentage of all affordable homes on development sites were provided as "starter homes". Instead, the Government

said that it “intends to amend the [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) to introduce a policy expectation that development sites of 11 homes or more deliver a minimum of 10% affordable home ownership units”.

The Government’s Starter Home Initiative is a mechanism to assist first time buyers between 23 and 40 years of age to purchase a new home with a discount of 20% off of the open market value, up to a maximum sale price of £250,000 outside of London. This can be compared to the more conventional shared ownership schemes, through which first time buyers can purchase as little as 20% equity initially, and pay an affordable rent to a housing association for the remaining equity. Over time, shared owners can purchase remaining tranches of equity (known as “staircasing”) up to 100% (80% in rural areas).

Whilst the Starter Home Initiative has a number of benefits, the monthly costs to first time buyers are higher than for shared ownership. Shared ownership has proved to be a very successful, tried and tested form of affordable home ownership for first time buyers in the District for many years. Moreover, developers in Epping Forest have shown little interest in providing starter homes on new developments, especially as the District borders three London boroughs, where the maximum sale price for starter homes is much higher, at £450,000, with similar build-costs.

Therefore, generally, the Council expects developers to meet the Government’s minimum 10% affordable home ownership requirement through the provision of shared ownership, and not starter homes.

The latest assessment of housing need identifies that around 80% of the required affordable homes for the District are needed as affordable rented homes. These are defined by the Government as having rent levels up to 80% of market rents, including service charges. Therefore, based on an affordable housing target of 40%, if 80% of these were provided as affordable rented housing, 32% of all the properties on developments requiring affordable housing should be provided as affordable rented housing, with the remaining 8% provided as intermediate housing (e.g. shared ownership). However, this would be less than the 10% affordable home ownership expected to be required through the NPPF. Therefore, the Council will generally require the tenure split for the affordable housing provision on developments comprising 11 or more homes (or on land in excess of 1,000sqm gross floor space) to comprise at least 75% affordable rented homes and no more than 25% shared ownership homes.

It is essential to ensure that new shared ownership homes are provided at affordable levels and meet HCA requirements, in terms of both the amount of initial equity that is sold to applicants and the rent levels charged by housing associations for the retained equity. Therefore, the Council will include requirements within Section 106 Agreements relating to the provision of shared ownership homes that meet Objective (c) set out at the commencement of this chapter.

Rent levels for affordable rented housing

In an area with high property prices, such as the Epping Forest District, it is usually the case that affordable rent levels at 80% of market rents (including service charges) would be higher than the relevant Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for the area.

The LHA is the maximum amount of rent for which housing benefit can generally be received. If a rent is higher than the LHA level, and the tenant is in receipt of housing benefit, the tenant would have to meet the difference in rent above the LHA level, which is not usually sustainable. LHA levels differ across the District, depending on the Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) in which properties are located. There are three BRMAs in the District.

For this reason, the Council will work closely with its Preferred Housing Association Partners and other housing associations to ensure that, through the use of Section 106 Planning Agreements, the rents charged by housing associations (and the Council) are no higher than the relevant LHA for the BRMA.

Viability

If it would be unviable for a development to fully comply with the Council's Local Plan and affordable housing policies and requirements, the Council would accept either a lower amount of affordable housing and/or a different tenure mix - subject to the applicant providing a detailed Viability Appraisal, with adequate and appropriate supporting evidence.

The Council has produced a ["Guidance Note to Planning Applicants on the Submission of Viability and Financial Appraisals for Affordable Housing"](#) to:

- Provide applicants with greater clarity and guidance on the application of planning policy;
- Inform applicants of the Council's approach to assessing and validating Viability/Finance Appraisals; and
- Help minimise delays in determining planning applications.

The Guidance explains national planning policies and the Council's key local planning policies relating to affordable housing and viability and sets out the Council's requirements for the submission of Viability Appraisals where the developer is of the view that it would be unviable for a development to provide the expected amount and/or tenure of affordable housing.

In such circumstances, the Council will arrange for the Viability Appraisal to be reviewed in detail by the Council's affordable housing consultants, the cost of which is met by the developer. When the Council's consultants have all the required evidence and information, they will review the Appraisal and provide the Council with a detailed report on their findings, which will comment on each assumption and will advise the Council on whether or not they are of the view that the Appraisal can be validated as being acceptable and sound and will identify any areas where individual assumptions or evidence cannot be validated or supported.

Where affordable housing proposals from developers are not considered sufficient or acceptable, it is likely that the Council will refuse planning permission.

Rural housing and rural exception sites

The lack of affordable housing in villages is likely to have a greater effect on the village community and local residents than in urban areas. The opportunities for increasing the amount of affordable housing are also generally less than in urban areas. This is because less suitable sites for development usually become available in rural areas, mainly because of the importance the Council places on protecting the Metropolitan Green Belt, which means that local residents are more likely to have to move away from their local area than residents in larger areas.

The Council has a "rural planning exceptions policy", whereby planning permission may be granted on sites that provide all (or nearly all) affordable housing, for which planning applications for market housing would be refused.

However, certain conditions must be met, including that the development must be:

- In smaller settlements that have a recognisable community, distinct and separate from the metropolitan area;
- Small scale;
- In response to a demonstrable local housing need (identified through a rural housing survey);
- Supported by the Parish Council;
- Well-related to the existing settlement; and
- Providing the majority of housing as affordable homes in perpetuity, with only small amounts of market housing provided in exceptional circumstances - where it can be proved, through a Viability Appraisal (submitted in accordance with the Council's latest [Guidance Note to Planning Applicants on the Submission of Viability and Financial Appraisals for Affordable Housing](#) that a wholly affordable housing development would be unviable.

In order to ensure that these rural affordable housing schemes only provide accommodation for local residents, applicants must be:

- Long-established local residents (i.e. those who have lived in the village for at least 5 of the preceding 10 years) requiring separate accommodation;
- Immediate family dependents of long-established local residents;
- Former long-established residents; or
- Living elsewhere, who cannot otherwise take up, or continue to, work in the village.

To date, four rural housing schemes have been provided under the rural planning exceptions policy providing a total of 26 affordable homes, namely: Manns Yard, Willingale; Houchin Drive, Fyfield; Harlow Rd, Matching Tye and School Lane, Abbess Roding.

The Council has selected Hastoe Housing Association to be its Preferred Rural Housing Association Partner, which is working with a number of parish councils to help assess their local housing needs and to provide more rural housing schemes.

Preferred Housing Association Partners and the Epping Forest Strategic Housing Partnership

For a number of years, the Council has operated a Scheme of Preferred Housing Association Partners, through which it currently has four Preferred Partners with whom the Council works in partnership to undertake all affordable housing developments in the District. This is for three main reasons:

- The Preferred Partners have a good understanding of the housing needs of the District and work closely with the Council through regular briefings, meetings and discussions;
- The Council wants to support the Preferred Partners to build up their management base within the District; and
- The Council can work with the Preferred Partners to ensure that they meet the Council's expectations and requirements in terms of, for example, viability, governance, the quality of new developments and their housing management.

The Council has therefore formed the Epping Forest Strategic Housing Partnership, which comprises representatives from the four Preferred Partners and senior Council housing officers. The Council's current Preferred Housing Association Partners are:

- B3Living
- East Thames
- Hastoe (rural specialist)
- Moat

Developers intending to undertake new developments that include any affordable housing are encouraged to seek tenders from each of the Preferred Housing Association Partners, to ensure that they obtain the most competitive price. The Council will only support bids for grant funding to the Homes and Communities Agency from its Preferred Partners, and it is a standard requirement in the Council's Section 106 Planning Agreements with developers that the affordable housing must be provided by one of the Council's Preferred Partners.

In preparation for the increased amounts of affordable housing developments that will be brought forward as part of the site allocations in the Council's new Local Plan, including strategic sites around Harlow, the Council will shortly be selecting at least a further two Preferred Partners that meet the Council's criteria and needs in the near future.

Internal space standards

The Council expects all affordable homes to meet the minimum gross internal floor areas and storage set out in the Government's [Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard \(March 2015\)](#). These are shown in the table below:

Table 4.3 – DCLG's Space Standards

DCLG's Nationally Described Space Standards Minimum Gross Internal Floor Areas and Storage (m ²)					
No. of bedrooms	No. of bed spaces	1 storey dwellings	2 storey dwellings	3 storey dwellings	Built-in storage
1	1p	39 (37')			1.0
	2p	50	58		1.5
2	3p	61	70		2.0
	4p	70	79		
3	4p	74	84	90	2.5
	5p	86	93	99	
	6p	95	102	108	
4	5p	90	97	103	3.0
	6p	99	106	112	
	7p	108	115	121	
	8p	117	124	130	

(*) Where a 1 bedroom (1 person bed space) has a shower room instead of a bathroom, the floor area may be reduced from 39m² to 37m², as shown bracketed.

Self and Custom Build

Under the Self Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, local authorities are required to hold a register of people who want to acquire serviced plots of land in their area for self and custom housebuilding. The Housing and Planning Act 2016 and subsequent Regulations have further strengthened the role and the requirements for local authorities, and require them to permission sufficient land suitable for self and custom building housing to meet the demand on their Self and Custom Build Register within three years.

The Council has received two allocations of funding from the Government, which it will be using to develop, promote and implement the requirements for self and custom build housing, as follows:

- **Community Housing Fund** – The Council has been allocated around £32,200 to support community-led housing developments. The Council is working in partnership with neighbouring East Herts, Uttlesford and Harlow Councils to pool the funding they have also received, making a total of just over £100,000, to take forward a joint project across the HMA.

The project will look at all aspects of community-led housing, including self and custom build and Community Land Trusts, to identify existing and new participants for these models of housing delivery. The research will include a series of events and will provide information to inform interested people about the potential for community-led schemes

- **Self and Custom Build Fund** - The Government has recognised that the requirements to implement self and custom build create a new burden on local authorities and has therefore made additional funding available. The Council is receiving around £96,000 over a 4-year between 2016/17 and 2019/20. The Council is therefore utilising this funding to appoint a new Affordable Housing Officer, for 3 years, to provide the required capacity to undertake this additional work – which will be reviewed towards the end of the 3-year period to assess the staffing resources required beyond this period.

Key partners

- Homes and Communities Agency
- Preferred Housing Association Partners
- Developers
- Parish and town councils

Chapter 5

The Council's Housebuilding Programme

Aim

To increase the Council's housing stock through the construction of new well-designed affordable rented homes on the Council's land and the purchase of good quality affordable rented housing from private developers.

Objectives

- a) Develop good quality new affordable rented homes on Council-owned land that meet the Council's Housing Design Standards and help meet the need for affordable rented homes within the District, funded from the following sources:
 - "One-for-one replacement" Right to Buy capital receipts;
 - Section 106 Planning Agreement contributions from developers in lieu of on-site affordable housing provision;
 - Funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (where possible);
 - The Housing Revenue Account (HRA);
 - Loans from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) (when required);
 - Any other external sources of funding that may be identified or secured from time to time; and/or
- Cross-subsidy from the sale of other development sites (if necessary);
- b) Maximise the use of "one-for-one replacement" Right to Buy capital receipts within the required timescales and minimise the amount of receipts that have to be passed to the Government;
- c) Seek and deliver appropriate opportunities to purchase new affordable rented housing from developers, at a subsidised price, through Section 106 Planning Agreements; and
- d) Charge affordable rents, up to the relevant Local Housing Allowance for the area, for all new homes that are built or acquired by the Council.

Key issues

Background

The Council has made a policy decision to undertake a modest Housebuilding Programme, to build new affordable rented homes on Council-owned land, predominantly difficult to garage sites (with more than 20% of the garages vacant and with no waiting list), and to purchase affordable rented housing from developers, at a subsidised price, through Section 106 Planning Agreements.

Since the Council had not built any general needs housing since 1985, kick-starting a major development programme without the resource and skills in place was a big challenge.

Therefore, through a competitive procurement process, the Council has appointed a Development Agent (East Thames) to oversee the development process - from the undertaking of initial development and financial appraisals, through to detailed design, planning submissions, procurement of contractors and supervision of the works. The Council has adopted East Thames' Design Standards for its new homes, with some amendments, and has produced a [Development Strategy](#) that sets out the Council's approach to its Housebuilding Programme.

The "client" role of the development process is undertaken by the Council's small Housing Development Team; the Housebuilding Programme is overseen by the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee, comprising a number of members of the Council's Cabinet.

In March 2017, the Council reviewed its available resources and identified that there are sufficient resources to continue to fund the Council Housebuilding Programme for the foreseeable future, especially whilst 30% of the costs can be funded from "one-for-one replacement" Right to Buy capital receipts. Additional borrowing would be required, although the review confirmed that such additional loans could be repaid within a reasonable period.

Site identification

With around 92% of the District falling within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and with limited suitable land owned by the Council, the Council initially identified a portfolio of 65 garage sites that were designated as 'difficult to let', that may have development potential. These "brownfield" sites are all located in existing Council estates. However, the sites are generally small areas of land with a mix of legal risks associated with access and legal rights of way. By contrast, these new homes will improve the existing environment, reduce anti-social behaviour and contribute towards the revitalisation of existing communities.

Viability of sites

A Financial Appraisal is undertaken on each site to determine whether the development is viable. This is based on a 30-year payback period, and each scheme must produce a positive Net Present Value over the same 30-years. Where the pay-back period is in excess of 30 years, some form of subsidy is required. Any sites found to be unsuitable for development are considered by the Cabinet Committee for alternative uses.

Development Programme

Following assessment of each of these sites, planning applications were submitted for 56 sites considered to have development potential. Table 5.1 sets out the current position with the planning applications for these sites (as at June 2017).

Table 5.1 – Outcome of planning applications (as at 1st July 2017)

Status	No. of Sites	No. of Homes
Sites that have received planning permission	37	166
Sites where planning applications are pending	4	34
Sites where planning permission has been refused	14	36
Totals	56	229

Following the receipt of planning permissions to date, the Council Housebuilding Programme provided in Table 5.2 has been formulated.

Table 5.2 – Council Housebuilding Programme

Phase	Location(s)	No. of Homes	Status (as at 1.6.17)
1	Waltham Abbey	23	On site
2	Loughton	51	On site
3	Epping, Coopersale, North Weald, Ongar	34	Soon to commence
4	Loughton	31 ^(*)	To be procured
5	Buckhurst Hill, Ongar, High Ongar	13 ^(*)	To be procured
6	Waltham Abbey	14 ^(*)	To be procured
Totals		166	

(*) Additional homes are expected to be included, once planning applications have been determined

Section 106 planning agreement sites

The Council has already agreed to purchase from a developer the 8 affordable rented homes required under a Section 106 Planning Agreement, at Barnfield, Roydon.

Since such homes that are subject to Planning Agreements are required to be sold at a discount, do not require any Council-owned land and do not require significant Council staff resources to develop, subject to sufficient funding being available, the Council will continue to consider such opportunities as they arise, which will usually have to be in competition with the Council's Preferred Housing Association Partners.

Funding

The Council has agreed that the Housebuilding Programme will be self-funded, without any financial support from the General Fund. The principle funding streams are as follows:

- **Capital receipts from Right to Buy sales** (referred to as 1-4-1 receipts) - The use of 1-4-1 receipts is limited to funding up to 30% of the cost of a replacement home, and is time limited to three years from receipt. Failure to use the 1-4-1 receipts within three years results in them having to be returned to the Government, with interest;
- **S106 Agreement contributions from developers in lieu of on-site affordable housing provision** - These are one-off payments from private developments where the inclusion of affordable housing has been considered to be inappropriate. The Council has agreed that all such financial contributions should be used to help fund its Housebuilding Programme. Although the Council can agree the trigger point for payment of the S106 contribution, the timing of the cash flow cannot be relied upon as the Council cannot control when the developments start on site;
- **Loans from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB)** - The Council already has significant loans from the PWLB, some of which are able to fund the Housebuilding Programme, but additional loans will be required in the future.

- [The Council's own housing \(HRA\) balances](#). Rents from its existing Council properties are able to be used to help fund the Programme.

Affordable Rent Policy

The Council has adopted an Affordable Rent Policy, which determines the rent level to be charged for properties built or acquired under the Housebuilding Programme, which is the lower of:

- 80% of market rents for the location; or
- The Local Housing Allowance within the Broad Market Rental Area in which the property is situated.

The Broad Market Rental Area (BRMA) in which the property is situated is set by the Rent Officer Service, based on the 30th percentile of market rents in the BMRA (although, due to annual freezes in LHA levels, they are now based on less than the 30th percentile of market rents in reality). The Epping Forest has 3 BMRAs. The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is the maximum amount that can be paid to a tenant in housing benefit. Therefore, any difference between the actual rent and the LHA must be paid by the tenant themselves.

Contractors

Generally, contractors are procured through the use of East Thames' EU-compliant Contractors Framework. Generally, design and build contracts are utilised but, for Phase 3, the Council has adopted an alternative procurement strategy that breaks down the eight sites into seven separate contracts, with a mixture of design & build and traditional fully-designed contracts. This was primarily to overcome the lack of interest from many developers for multi-site contracts, due to the complications and difficulties of contractors managing dispersed sites.

Key partners

- [East Thames and their consultants](#)
- [Contractors](#)
- [Public Works Loan Board](#)
- [Parish and town councils](#)

Chapter 6

Homelessness

Aim

To prevent homelessness and to respond to homelessness applications in accordance with statutory requirements, efficiently, effectively and fairly, helping homeless people to secure appropriate accommodation and keeping the use of bed and breakfast accommodation to a minimum.

Objectives

- a) Prevent homelessness wherever possible and provide appropriate advice and assistance to homeless and potentially homeless people;
- b) Carry out the Council's statutory duties and investigate homelessness applications thoroughly and fairly;
- c) Ensure that adverse homelessness decisions are reviewed, when requested, within statutory time limits;
- d) Continue to provide hostel accommodation and effectively manage the Council's hostel for the benefit of homeless people;
- e) Continue to work closely with Epping Forest Housing Aid to secure rent deposit guarantees;
- f) Provide rental loans and landlord deposits to enable homeless people to access accommodation in the private rented sector;
- g) Continue to work with Safer Places to enable victims subjected to domestic abuse to be accommodated in safe and secure accommodation and, for those who wish to do so, to stay safely in their own homes;
- h) Seek to minimise the numbers of homeless households that are in temporary accommodation at any one time;
- i) Continually explore alternative and innovative options for the provision of temporary accommodation, in order to minimise the use of bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, and seek to ensure that only single people are accommodated in B&B;
- j) Review the Council's Homelessness Strategy every three years;

Key issues

Background

Under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the Council has a statutory duty to prevent, investigate and respond to homelessness applications. When investigating applications and considering its response, the Council must consider whether or not an applicant:

- Is homeless and eligible for assistance;
- Has a priority need;
- Is homeless intentionally; and
- Has a local connection with the District.

Depending on the outcome of these investigations, the Council's duties in response range from having a "full duty" to provide or secure permanent accommodation through to only providing advice and assistance.

The focus of the Council's work will continue to be to prevent homelessness occurring in the first instance and assisting applicants to find alternative accommodation themselves before their homelessness occurring, rather than providing Council housing itself or making a nomination to a housing association.

The Council produces a detailed [Homelessness Strategy](#) every 3 years, the last one covering the period 2015-2018.

Homelessness Prevention Team

The Council has a Homelessness Prevention Team, providing homelessness advice and assistance to people presenting themselves as being homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Team work with applicants to consider all the options available which could prevent the household from becoming homeless before they make a formal homelessness application.

Homelessness Prevention Officers provide a comprehensive service with a range of initiatives at their disposal to assist them with resolving the housing difficulties of clients they are seeking to serve. However, when the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (see below) comes into force in 2018, additional duties and responsibilities will be placed upon the Team.

Table 6.1 shows the number of cases presented to the Homelessness Prevention Service over the last four years and the reasons. It should be noted that these figures do not take into account the many other enquiries made by the general public. The success of the Homelessness Prevention Service has had a direct impact on the homelessness acceptance rate, which otherwise would have been much higher.

Table 6.1 – Number of cases presented to the Homelessness Prevention Service

Prevention Action	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Mediation	2	2	1	1
Reconciliation	8	3	4	2
Financial payments from homelessness prevention fund	3	2	1	1
Debt advice	3	4	2	1
Resolving housing benefit problem	13	6	9	7
Sanctuary scheme for victims of domestic violence	5	2	9	0

Crisis intervention	4	3	4	2
Negotiation to help someone remain in the private rented sector	17	7	3	8
Providing other assistance to enable someone to remain in private rented sector	28	30	64	27
Mortgage arrears	15	5	0	5
Other homelessness prevention measure, where work has commenced but there has been no further contact and resolution is unknown	228	268	279	237
Housed in hostel or HMO	6	1	2	5
Housed in private rented sector with landlord incentive scheme	91	66	71	48
Housed in private rented sector without landlord incentive scheme	53	80	57	53
Accommodation arranged with friends or relatives	39	30	24	37
Supported accommodation	22	29	34	12
Social housing management move	9	8	6	4
Social housing: Housing Register offer	41	45	37	31
Social housing: Housing Association direct offer	10	13	13	2
Low cost home ownership scheme	1	1	1	0
Other homelessness relieved	9	4	4	14
Total cases prevented	613	615	625	497

Reasons for homelessness

There are a number of reasons why people become homeless. Table 6.2 sets out the reasons for households in Epping Forest becoming homeless over the past four years. As can be seen, one of the most common reasons for homelessness is the loss of privately rented accommodation.

Table 6.2 – Reasons for homelessness

Reason for acceptance	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Parents not willing to accommodate	16	8	13	9
Other relatives not willing to accommodate	2	6	2	0
Non-violent relationship breakdown	1	3	4	2

Violent breakdown of relationship (partner)	4	6	6	8
Violent relationship breakdown (involving associated person, such as a relative)	0	0	2	1
Racially motivated violence	0	0	0	0
Other forms of violence	1	0	2	0
Racially motivated harassment	0	0	0	0
Other forms of harassment	0	0	0	0
Mortgage arrears	3	0	1	0
Local authority rent arrears	2	0	0	0
Housing Association rent arrears	0	1	2	0
Private rented rent arrears	4	6	9	6
Termination of assured short-hold private sector tenancy	25	11	17	11
Reason other than termination of assured short hold tenancy, such as tied accommodation	5	7	12	16
Leaving asylum accommodation	0	1	0	1
Leaving prison / remand	0	0	0	0
Left hospital	1	0	0	0
Left other institution or Care	0	1	0	0
Leaving armed forces home	0	0	0	0
Other reason	1	2	1	2
Total	65	52	71	56

Categories of homeless applicants in Priority Need

Table 6.3 below provides an analysis of the applicants found to be in priority need, unintentionally homeless and owed a full homelessness duty. As can be seen, households with dependent children (including the violent breakdown of a relationship with their partner) represent the highest number of acceptances in each of the last four years.

Table 6.3 – Analysis of homeless applicants

Priority need category	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Applicant homeless because of fire, flood, storm or similar disaster	0	1	0	0

Applicants with dependent children (including violent breakdown of relationship with partner)	50	37	55	40
Applicants in priority need because of pregnancy but no other children	3	0	0	0
Applicants aged 16-17 years	1	0	0	1
Applicants formerly in care and aged 18-20 years	1	1	0	0
Applicants vulnerable due to old age	3	1	1	1
Applicants vulnerable because of physical disability	0	6	6	5
Applicants vulnerable because of mental illness or learning disabilities	6	5	7	6
Applicants vulnerable due to alcohol dependency	0	0	0	0
Applicants who were former asylum seekers	0	1	0	1
Vulnerable for other special reason	0	0	0	0
Applicant vulnerable having been in custody or remand	0	0	0	0
Applicants vulnerable for formerly being in care	0	0	0	0
Applicants with care and support needs having served in HM Forces	0	0	0	0
Applicants (with no children) vulnerable on account of violence including domestic violence	1	0	2	2
Total applicants accepted for a priority need	65	52	71	56

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 received Royal Assent in April 2017 and places considerable additional duties on local authorities nationally to prevent and reduce homelessness. The provisions will be introduced from April 2018, following the production of a new Homelessness Code of Guidance by the Government to take account of the new Act.

The Government has recognised that the provisions in the Act will make a significant call on the resources of local authorities and has said that it will provide financial support to help meet the additional burdens of the new duties. The main additional duties are (in summary) as follows:

- The period that a person can be considered to be threatened with homelessness (when the Council's new duties start) is extended from 28 days to 56 days;
- An applicant seeking homelessness support is to be automatically judged to be homeless once the period specified in a Section 21 Notice expires (which is the standard notice period provided by private landlords to tenants and is recognised as the single biggest cause of homelessness), preventing councils advising applicants to remain in occupation beyond expiry;

- An assessment of an applicant's case must be undertaken, which must be provided to the applicant with a personal housing plan in order to provide effective support;
- Applicants have a right to a review of their assessment; and
- A requirement for local authorities to secure accommodation for at least 12 months for all applicants whom the authority is satisfied are eligible for assistance, regardless of priority need.

Homelessness funding

The Council currently receives two main sources of external funding to assist with the prevention and response to homelessness, with an expectation that a third source of funding will be introduced during 2017/18.

For a number of years, the Council has received annual homelessness prevention funding from the Government. The current funding is for around £110,000 per annum, until April 2020 when the funding will be reviewed. This funding is used to fund the costs of some of the Council's Homelessness Prevention Team.

In April 2017, the Government introduced its new Flexible Homelessness Support Grant to local authorities (replacing its former Temporary Management Grant) and has committed to provide £277,000 and £313,000 to the Council in 2017/18 and 2018/19 respectively to fund homelessness services. This replaces the Council's previous Temporary Management Grant of £60,000 per annum. In June 2017, the Council's Cabinet agreed the use of some of the grant and will give consideration to the use of the remaining grant later in 2017/18, once the effects, implications and costs of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 are better known.

The Government has already recognised that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will place considerable additional duties and burdens on local authorities and, for this reason, has announced that it will provide additional financial support to local authorities to help meet the new duties. It is expected that further details will become available during 2017/18.

Avoiding bed and breakfast accommodation – increased temporary accommodation

The majority of homeless households with dependent children seeking assistance from the Council are, in the first instance, accommodated temporarily at the Council's Homeless Persons Hostels at Norway House, North Weald or at Hemnall House, Epping.

Due to the numbers of homeless households that the Council has to assist each year, it has been necessary for a number of years to temporarily accommodate some homeless people in bed and breakfast accommodation, until more permanent accommodation can be secured for them. The law says that councils should only place homeless households with dependent children in B&B accommodation in emergencies and, even then, for no more than 6 weeks. For this reason, the Council mainly uses B&B hotels to temporarily accommodate single people.

However, this form of accommodation is still avoided as much as possible since, not only is it not the most appropriate form of accommodation for homeless people (and often located outside the District), it is also costly to the Council to use. The net cost to the Council's General Fund of accommodating a single person in a B&B hotel is currently around £8,300 per year, which represents the Government penalty of reduced subsidy that the Council

receives to meet the cost of providing housing benefit to residents for using B&B accommodation.

For these reasons, the Council is continually seeking new and innovative ways to increase the amount of alternative forms of temporary accommodation for homeless people.

Two recent initiatives are:

- [The proposed provision of temporary modular accommodation](#) (referred to as “pods”) at Norway House, North Weald - to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households, at a lower cost than traditionally-built, permanent accommodation and than placing homeless households in bed and breakfast hotels.

A pilot scheme for 3 pods to accommodate 6 vulnerable single homeless people has been agreed, which is currently being procured. As a result of the saving in the housing benefit subsidy penalty and the income from the licence charges, the payback period for providing one pod is less than 4 years, since 30% of the capital costs will be funded from “one-for-one replacement” Right to Buy receipts.

- [The use of private rented accommodation at the Zinc Arts complex, Ongar to provide temporary accommodation](#) - the Council has agreed to use, for a trial period, 3 of the 25 units at the complex to accommodate homeless households who would otherwise be accommodated in B&B hotels. Under the agreement, the Council is providing “top-up funding” to the landlord of around £1,900 per annum per property. This is being funded from the Government’s Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and represents the difference between the agreed rent levels and the relevant Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for the area. Not only is this a better form of temporary accommodation than B&B hotels, it also results in net saving to the Council’s General Fund of around £6,400 per household per annum.

The success of the trial will be reviewed in due course.

Preventing homelessness initiatives

The Council has a number of initiatives in place to assist those who have either lost their home or are facing eviction. The main initiatives are set out below:

Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS)

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 damage deposit guarantees in advance of occupation, 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.

The EFHAS is a scheme for helping homeless people to access private rented accommodation by providing damage deposit guarantees to the landlords of the properties the applicant wishes to rent. All the guarantees are covered by money held in EFHAS’s bank account.

EFHA was set up as a charity in 1995 with financial support from the National Lottery Charities Board and grants of £31,500 from the Council. In addition, the Council has also

agreed to underwrite up to £60,000 of damage deposit guarantees, in order to ensure that the guarantees do not over-commit EFHAS's available resources. Since the scheme has been introduced, the Council has not been called upon to pay out any of the underwritten guarantees.

Between 1995 and 2017 EFHA has helped over 350 homeless families move into the private-rented sector who, without this assistance, would otherwise have been unable to do so. Many of these families would have had to seek accommodation from the Council direct. Currently there are 72 guarantees in place, totalling around £57,000.

All referrals to the EFHAS are made by the Council through the Homelessness Prevention Team. Assistance can also be given to applicants who do not have sufficient furniture through the Furniture Re-use Scheme based in Epping.

Rental Loan Scheme

The Council's Rental Loan Scheme was set up in 2008 and complements the EFHAS scheme (referred to above) by providing applicants with a rental loan to meet the cost of the first month's rent in advance, and/or the required landlord's deposit, when securing accommodation in the private sector. Applicants are required to repay the loan on an interest-free basis over 36 months, thereby recycling the loan to enable others to benefit from the scheme in the future.

Families who are assisted with rental loans have their new accommodation inspected by the Council's Private Sector Housing Team to ensure they are suitable and free from any significant hazards.

Housing Association Leasing Direct (HALD)

The Council set up a Housing Association Leasing Direct (HALD) scheme with Genesis Housing Association in 2010. The Council has assisted 17 households to date in accessing accommodation under the scheme, through nominations made by the Homelessness Prevention Team, who would otherwise have been homeless. Those referred to the scheme must be eligible for full housing benefit in order to qualify for assistance, with the household being able to remain in the property for two years under an assured short-hold tenancy.

Private Lease Agreements Converting Empty Properties (PLACE) Scheme

The PLACE scheme has been set up by a consortium of seven councils, including this Council, following a successful bid for DCLG funding. The Scheme offers a capital grant to owners of long-term empty properties to renovate their property to a standard suitable for letting. In return, the owner is obliged to lease the property for three years to Genesis Housing Association and the accommodation is made available to families nominated by the Homelessness Prevention Team.

Parental exclusions – mediation

Young people can sometimes have volatile relationships with their parents and can be at risk of exclusion from their home. Essex County Council's Social Services, in partnership with the Council's Homelessness Prevention Team, undertake mediation in a number of cases each year through specialist homelessness youth workers to attempt to reconcile young people with their parents in order for them to remain at home.

Young Parent Scheme

Railway Meadow in Ongar is a supported housing scheme provided in partnership with Brentwood and Uttlesford Councils to support young parents in overcoming challenges during their pregnancy and the first year of their child's life. The scheme comprises 13 self-contained flats with a communal lounge, activity area, training kitchen and office. The accommodation is offered to young mothers, fathers and couples aged between 16 and 25 years of age. The support gives young people essential parenting and life skills to enable them to move on and live independent lives.

The scheme is owned and managed by East Thames and referrals are received from the Council, and Brentwood and Uttlesford Councils, with residents being re-housed by their host authority at the appropriate time. Epping Forest District Council has nomination rights to eight of the flats.

“Sanctuary” Scheme

The Council's “Sanctuary” Scheme assists victims of domestic abuse or Hate Crime on a tenure neutral basis. The scheme provides a safe room within the victim's home. A typical sanctuary room includes a fire door with mortice locks, smoke detectors, fire blanket and two fire extinguishers. The Council's Community Safety Team works in partnership with Essex Police, Essex Fire and Rescue and Safer Places on the provision of the schemes, with all referrals made through the Homelessness Prevention Team. There are currently five “active” sanctuary rooms installed which have prevented homelessness, with 16 Sanctuary schemes installed across the District since the scheme was first introduced.

Single Accommodation for Epping Forest (SAFE) Scheme

SAFE was set up in 1983 and 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 Divisional Based Intervention Team, the Essex Probation Service, the Youth Offending Team and Family Mosaic Support. The scheme helps resolve the housing difficulties of single people across the District who would otherwise become homeless. The Council originally provided SAFE with land free of charge for the first properties and SAFE now provides 37 bedspaces across the District.

The accommodation provides a mix of both shared and self-contained housing. On average, around 20 single young people are provided with accommodation each year.

The Council also provides move-on accommodation for some SAFE residents who are unable to access the private sector, through direct offers of Council accommodation. This enables a through-put of single people assisted by the Scheme.

Rough sleeping

Generally, the Council only identifies a very small number of rough sleepers within the District – mainly, due to the work of the Homelessness Prevention Team.

Following the cessation of a DCLG grant to assist local authorities to deal with rough sleeping, through an outreach service provided by St Mungo's Broadway (a homelessness charity), the Council has agreed to continue this work and fund a local outreach service for

rough sleepers, and is currently identifying an appropriate organisation to arrange for support workers to visit rough sleepers, provide advice, arrange short-term night shelter accommodation and try to make arrangements for them to reconnect with any area with which they have an established connection.

Discretionary housing payments

Discretionary housing payments (DHPs) are paid to tenants in receipt of housing benefit who need additional help with their housing costs. Private sector tenants in particular, 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. DHPs can help such tenants meet the shortfall and prevent them going into arrears and subsequently becoming homeless. Payments are made over a short period until the tenant's circumstances improve or they obtain more affordable accommodation.

Key partners

- DCLG
- Essex Community Rehabilitation Company
- Essex Children's and Families Service
- Epping Forest Community Mental Health Team
- NACRO Community Enterprises
- East Thames
- Moat
- Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme
- Relate
- Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau
- Safer Places

Chapter 7

Supported Housing for Older and other Vulnerable People

Aim

To help vulnerable people with special housing needs to live in homes suitable for their needs, with appropriate levels of support.

Objectives

- a) Work with other statutory and voluntary agencies to enable people with special housing needs to live in homes suitable for their needs, with appropriate levels of support;
- b) Ensure that supported housing and outreach support services of the right type are provided to those in most need at an economic cost;
- c) Encourage the provision of “lifetime homes” within new developments;
- d) Undertake adaptations to Council properties to enable tenants with physical disabilities to remain in their existing homes;
- e) Deliver disabled facilities grants (DFGs) and discretionary Housing Assistance to assist older and vulnerable residents remain in their own homes;
- f) Ensure that the Council is aware of, and takes steps to meet the needs of, the ageing population in Epping Forest;
- g) Provide advice and support to older owner-occupiers needing to arrange repairs and improvements to their homes, including energy efficiency advice, through the Council’s CARE Agency;
- h) Ensure that accommodation at sheltered housing schemes meets modern standards, suitable for older people;
- i) Provide help to older people in their homes who need monitoring and emergency assistance, through the Council’s Careline Service; and
- j) Provide Handyperson Services for older people living in the District.

Key issues

Older people

Population forecasts by the Office for National Statistics suggest that the population of Epping Forest residents over 65 years of age will increase over future years. Findings of the latest West Essex and East Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

show that just over 8% of the population of this region are aged 75 years or above. This suggests that increased housing support will be required to a larger number of older people.

Table 7.1 - Current and projected population of older people

Proportion of people aged 75+	Current	Projected (2033)
Epping Forest District (ONS, 2014)	9.2%	12.3%
West Essex and Herts region, SHMA (2011 Census)	8.0%	12.4%

Study into the impact of an ageing population in the Epping Forest District

In 2016, the Council undertook a major study into the [Impact of an Ageing Population in the Epping Forest District](#). National statistics estimate that between 2015 and 2020, over a period when the general population is expected to rise by 3%, the numbers of people aged over 65 are expected to increase by 12%; the numbers aged over 85 by 18%; and the number of centenarians by 40%. This will impact on every community across the UK but, in particular, those areas already starting from an elderly demographic baseline.

The Epping Forest District falls within this category, with over 25,000 people aged 65 and older already living within the District and an additional 27,000 people aged over 50 years. In order to help the Council understand the effects and impact of an ageing population on services within the district, a Key Action was included within the Council's Corporate Plan 2015–2020, for a study to be undertaken to assess potential needs of older people over the next 10 to 20 years. The following three key priorities were chosen for the study, as they relate to services provided by the Council and local partners and are key contributors to general wellbeing and quality of life:

- [Health and Wellbeing](#) - current and future physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing;
- [Living in Epping Forest](#) – homes, services at home, services in the community, transport and accessibility and plans for future living; and
- [Communication](#) – current and future needs for receiving and sending information to the Council and partner organisations across the district.

The study included interviews with staff and councillors from across the Council, at all levels, to gain an understanding of the various issues relating to older people that are already being identified. The discussions covered issues from potential increases in the number of people requiring assisted waste collections to the impact on finance and benefit services.

Meetings were then held with a range of external partners at senior management levels, including Essex County Council's Public Health Team, the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, Voluntary Action Epping Forest, Age UK, British Red Cross (Community Agents), Alzheimer's Society and various other services from the voluntary (Third) sector.

Following the initial research, a series of focus groups and consultation workshops for older people were then held around the District, from all demographics, including people involved in high levels of physical activity and those leading more sedentary lifestyles.

One of the key focuses of the study was the levels of dementia in the District which, as can be seen from Table 7.2, is expected to increase significantly by 2025:

Table 7.2 – Forecast growth in people with dementia in Epping Forest and Essex

	2013	Projected (2025)	Growth
Epping Forest	1,855	2,553	37.6 %
Whole of Essex	20,302	29,304	44.3 %

The findings of the study confirmed that, to meet the needs of the current and future ageing and elderly population of the Epping Forest District, statutory organisations including the Council, Essex County Council, the NHS and third sector partners, need to be planning together - and 'for real' - to make best possible use of local resources. There is no room for duplication of services, or use of high-cost interventions, when there are initiatives that can produce the same results on a much smaller budget.

The study established, from discussions held with all of the older people interviewed, that most older people's aim is to try and remain in their own homes for as long as possible and that, when the time comes when they will be less mobile, they would much prefer to stay in their own homes and have adaptations and support provided to them in their existing homes. Most said that they would only seek to live in residential care homes, or even move to smaller accommodation, if they had exhausted all options for living in their existing home.

Retaining independence was highlighted as the most important aspect of their lives, followed by living near friends and/or family. Even in cases where one member of a couple has dementia or other impairment, their partners wish to keep the person in their own home for as long as they can. However, it was acknowledged that this was not always possible without support from local services and the expectation was that there would be a need for these to be gradually expanded to cope with future demands.

A detailed report on the Study was produced, which provided an overview of the work undertaken, the findings and a series of recommendations. A Key Action Plan was then formulated, comprising 32 separate actions to be undertaken by a range of local organisations, including the Council. Progress with the Key Action Plan is monitored by the Council's Communities Select Committee every 6 months.

"Lifetime homes"

It is important that a proportion of new homes provided in the District can, through the design of those homes, provide for the needs of people with, or who may develop, accessibility needs. There is an existing need for accessible housing in the District, which will continue, taking into account the ageing profile of the District's population over the period of the Local Plan. Improving housing standards to strengthen local communities and reduce the need for residential care by enabling vulnerable people to remain in their homes, or be able to have the choice to be able to move into a new home, is an important part of improving the overall housing mix within the District.

Consequently, the Council encourages developers to build new homes to Category 2 (Accessible and Adaptable Homes) Building Regulation Standards (previously referred to as "lifetime home" standards).

Sheltered housing and independent living

There has been a shift in the housing needs of older people in recent years, away from accommodation-based support, such as sheltered accommodation, towards more floating support and the provision of telecare. Table 7.3 provides details of the different types of accommodation of older people, and their numbers, in the District:

Table 8.3 – Number of schemes providing supported accommodation

Type	Number of buildings	Number of properties
Sheltered housing	13	468
Schemes for frail older people	2	99
Residential accommodation	13	469
Nursing homes	4	260
Total	32	1,296

It is clear that rented sheltered accommodation and schemes for frail older people are far less popular amongst older people than in the past; often, Council sheltered accommodation is allocated to housing applicants with quite low levels of housing need, and some schemes are difficult to let – whereas the housing need for general needs housing applicants continues to increase.

Many Council properties on housing estates that have previously been considered particularly suitable for older people, and therefore designated for older people, have had to be de-designated and let to younger people in recent years, due to a lack of demand. Therefore, there is no need to provide any more rented sheltered accommodation for older people in the District.

However, there is a need for additional rented and market independent living (or “extra care”) schemes in the District, as illustrated in Table 7.4, which is based on the latest data from Essex County Council:

Table 8.4 – Need and supply for independent living schemes in Epping Forest

Tenure	Identified Need	Existing Supply	In Development	Shortfall
Affordable Rented	84	40	24	20
Market Housing	143	0	36	107
Total	227	40	60	127

Review of the Council's sheltered housing assets

The Council has a number of sheltered housing schemes across the District, some of which are coming to the end of their operational life and will soon no longer be fit for purpose - unless significant investment is provided to bring them up to modern standards. For example, some schemes still provide bed-sit accommodation, which is no longer considered suitable for older people.

During 2017/18, the Council will be undertaking a review of its sheltered housing assets in order to determine the most appropriate approach for the future. This will include assessing the current standard, condition and lettable of, and need for, the Council's existing sheltered housing schemes and proposals for the future.

Review of the Council's Sheltered Housing Service

The Council currently provides a Sheltered Housing Service to all of its tenants in its sheltered housing schemes (who live in purpose-built accommodation and receive a daily visit from the Scheme Manager) and a reduced level of service to older people living in other designated accommodation for older people (comprising a bi-weekly, weekly or fortnightly visit from a Scheme Manager) for which charges are made.

However, there are increasing numbers of older people living in sheltered accommodation and other designated accommodation for older people who say that they do not wish to receive such an intensive support service; whilst there are other older people living in non-designated Council accommodation and private accommodation, including owner-occupiers, who are in need of this service and are willing to fund the cost.

The Council will therefore be undertaking a review of its Sheltered Housing Service in order to determine the most appropriate approach for the future. Under the Review, consideration will be given to having teams of Scheme Managers covering specified areas and visiting older people in sheltered housing schemes where the service is most needed. In addition, the provision of a Supported Housing Service to older people living in other Council properties and the private sector will be explored.

Epping Forest Careline

The Council provides a Careline Service, which offers a 24 hour, 365 days per year, emergency alarm monitoring service to older and disabled people living within the District. The Service is also offered to other vulnerable groups, including victims of domestic violence and younger people with disabilities.

The Council's own sheltered housing schemes and other designated dwellings for older people on housing estates have a hard-wired system installed in their properties with a speech module mounted on the wall and a pull cord in each of the rooms. There are currently around 2,230 properties in the District linked to the centre in this way.

Around 1,380 of the connections are in private individuals' homes, which are connected via a dispersed alarm, which has an associated neck-worn radio trigger. A range of various sensors are offered, for example on-line smoke alarms and fall/flood detectors. The Council aims to install a basic dispersed alarm for any new private client when requested on an urgent basis within two working days of receiving the application. This timescale is regularly achieved.

Council representatives regularly give presentations to local groups and other agencies promoting the service. In addition, leaflets and posters are placed at the Council's information points, libraries, and Citizens Advice Bureaux. The service is advertised in the local press, and the Council's tenants' magazine "Housing News".

In the past, annual funding for the Careline Service was provided by Essex County Council. However, following continuous reductions in funding over a number of years, this funding was totally ceased in April 2017, resulting in the Service having to be fully-funded from charges made to users from this date. However, the County Council does contribute

towards the cost of the initial provision of all telecare equipment and continues to meet the service user's Careline charge for the first 12 weeks, in order to encourage and demonstrate to users the benefits of receiving the Service.

The Careline Monitoring Service is currently provided by the Council itself. However, following a detailed review earlier in 2017, the Council's Cabinet agreed that it would be more cost effective and resilient in the long term if the Monitoring Service was outsourced to a larger third party provider. Following a competitive tender exercise, it is planned that the new third party provider will provide the service from November 2017. However, the Council will continue to take overall responsibility for its Careline Service, of which the Monitoring Service forms a part, including the installation of new equipment and updating residents' information.

Disabled adaptations to Council properties

The Council undertakes and funds adaptations to the homes of disabled and older Council tenants, based on assessments and recommendations from occupational therapists funded by Essex County Council's Adult Social Care Service, to enable them to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. Unlike disabled facilities grants (see below) the need for adaptations are not means-tested. Expensive adaptations are not provided if it would be more appropriate for the household to move to more suitable alternative accommodation

The Council spends around £400,000 per annum on major disabled adaptations and £25,000 per annum on minor adaptations.

In 2016/17, 125 minor adaptations (such as handrails and slopes) and 213 major adaptations (for example, installation of stair lifts and wet-rooms) were undertaken. On average, minor adaptations are generally undertaken within 2-3 weeks, with major adaptations undertaken within around 6-10 weeks.

Disabled facilities grants (DFGs)

The provision of disabled facilities grants (DFGs) is a statutory function of the Council. They are means-tested grants given to occupants of private and housing association properties for adaptation works to their home. In order to help meet the cost of providing them, local authorities receive an annual fund from the Government. Until 2014, this funding came direct from the DCLG but now comes by way of the Better Care Fund (BCF). This was £665,000 in 2016/17, which was around 85% more than the amount received the previous year (£360,000).

The legislation and rules governing the provision of DFGs are nationally determined. Applications are initiated by individual referrals made by Occupational Therapists funded by Essex County Council's Adult Social Care Service. This means that the number of applications received is essentially outside of the Council's control.

Demand has continued to increase year on year and balancing the funding with the level of demand has become more of a challenge since the introduction of the BCF, because of the wide variations in funding from year to year. This is in addition to the fact that the amount to be received is not generally announced until shortly before the beginning of the financial year, after the Council has already set its own budgets for the estimated amount that it must fund itself.

CARE Service (Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest)

CARE is the Council's Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service which is managed and run in-house by the Council. It helps people in need of care and support in the private housing sector, mainly those who are older and/or disabled, to live independently in the community for as long as they want to do so. The range of services provided by CARE includes:

- Housing related information, advice and practical support planning;
- Handyman services;
- The organisation of modifications to home environments, from minor alterations to complex major disabled adaptations;
- Assistance with accessing benefits and obtaining funding for improvements; and
- Signposting to additional support services.

On average, CARE deal with around 900 enquiries each year. However, a large part of its work is the administration of the majority of disabled facilities grant (DFG) applications on behalf of qualifying residents, providing invaluable technical support and assistance.

Until April 2017, CARE was funded from a combination of fees to service users, funding from the Council and £51,000 from Essex County Council's (ECC) Housing Related Support budget. However, the County Council's funding was withdrawn from April 2017. Therefore, in order to be able to continue this valuable service, the Council agreed to replace the County Council's funding with top-sliced funding from the Better Care Fund from 2017/18. For future years, the capital allocation for DFGs will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure the viability of this source of funding.

Handyperson services

All older people living in the District receive a free Handyperson Service, through which small household jobs are undertaken by professional tradesmen. Council tenants living in its sheltered accommodation receive the service through the Council's Housing Repairs Service, whilst other Council tenants and private occupiers receive the service through Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF), which is also funded by the Council.

Internal Decorating Service for Council tenants

The Council provides an Internal Decorating Service for older or disabled Council tenants who need help with decorations. Normally this is the tenant's responsibility, but the Council decorates one room of choice every 5 years, free of charge, for people who are over 65 years of age, or receiving disability benefits, with a clear rent account, living in 1 or 2 bedroom properties.

Key partners

- Essex Police
- West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group
- Voluntary Action Epping Forest
- Private landlords
- Essex Fire and Rescue Service
- Essex County Council
- Better Care Fund
- Housing associations

Chapter 8

Housing in the Private Sector

Aim

To provide good quality housing in the private sector through the provision of advice and assistance, including financial assistance where appropriate, and to ensure that minimum housing standards are met through positive engagement with owners and landlords, taking enforcement action where necessary.

Objectives

- a) Take action to ensure that the condition of privately rented accommodation meets the standards required by legislation and good practice;
- b) Deal with complaints of harassment and illegal eviction to ensure that tenants can live safely in their homes and to take enforcement action against landlords where necessary;
- c) Pro-actively identify, survey and license all houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and take appropriate action to ensure adequate standards are met for fire safety, provision of amenities, management, repair and occupancy levels;
- d) License any new park home sites and carry out annual site inspections of all existing sites, to ensure compliance with site licence conditions; and
- e) Work with the horticultural industry to ensure living conditions for on-site worker accommodation are safe and to an acceptable standard for permanent occupation.

Key issues

Private renting

The number of people renting in the private sector is increasing nationally and locally. The high cost of buying a home and the shortage of social housing means many families have to rent privately in the medium to long-term. There are now more than 9 million people renting privately in England; the private rented sector makes up 18 per cent of all households in England. Nearly 50% of the growth in the private rented sector in the last two years has come from families with children and almost half of tenants are aged 35 years and over.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) data for 2011 shows that 11% of Epping Forest District Council residents live in privately rented accommodation, which is less than the national average. Assuming the District is following national trends, this figure is likely to increase in the years ahead.

The Council's last Private Sector House Condition Survey undertaken in 2011 estimated that around 50% of properties in the private rented sector and around 21% of owner-occupied

properties did not meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard. It was also estimated that around 24% of privately rented and around 11% of owner-occupied properties have at least one significant hazard under the national Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) that is likely to affect the occupier's health and safety.

With the increasing demand for private renting, it is important to try to ensure that property conditions in the private rented sector are as good as possible and at least meet minimum standards to protect the health and safety of occupiers, many of whom are vulnerable.

The Council responds to complaints from tenants about their property conditions and enforces standards where necessary. Enforcement action is always carried out in accordance with the [Regulators' Code](#) and the Council's [Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy](#).

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 introduces new enforcement tools for local authorities to improve conditions in the private rented sector and, in particular, to deal with rogue landlords and lettings agents that flout the law. This includes the introduction of civil penalty notices as an alternative to prosecution. Therefore, the Council will be updating its Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy later in 2017/18. A staged approach is taken to enforcement wherever possible, to ensure that solutions are initially sought through advice, co-operation and agreement. However, where this is not successful, some cases require formal action, which may ultimately lead to prosecution or other summary action.

On average, the Council responds to around 280 complaints each year from tenants regarding their property conditions, which generally result in formal action being taken in around 10 cases each year.

The Council wants to work proactively with landlords. Therefore, a survey was carried out in 2016 with all known private landlords operating in the District to establish how best to keep them informed and updated on relevant issues. The survey revealed that 53% of landlords own only one or two properties and nearly 40% considered themselves to be inexperienced landlords. The Council intends to introduce a new service shortly to enable landlords to access an online resource of information on topical issues such as new legislative requirements and be signposted to other websites for additional information.

Harassment and illegal eviction

The overwhelming majority of landlords are reputable and behave in a professional manner. However, there are a small proportion of landlords who neglect their properties and exploit their tenants. While good landlords can have an extremely positive impact on the lives of their tenants, the small minority of bad landlords can have an equally negative impact.

The Council tries to address complaints of harassment and illegal eviction from tenants about their landlords. These complaints are taken very seriously and the penalties on successful prosecution include a heavy fine and possible imprisonment. Most cases can be resolved informally, so that the tenant can remain safely in their home but, on rare occasions, the matter is escalated and enforcement is necessary.

Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)

As the availability of affordable housing becomes further stretched, more people (including families) are looking towards living in shared accommodation, such as bedsits. Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) tend to attract the most vulnerable people and the accommodation often tends to be of relatively low quality - because it involves some sharing

of amenities (such as washing, toilet and kitchen facilities) and relies on good landlord management, which is not always in place. It is recognised nationally that a small but significant number of 'rogue' landlords exploit their tenants by renting sub-standard and dangerous accommodation to vulnerable tenants, sometimes in overcrowded conditions.

The Government is committed to raising standards in HMOs and, later in 2017, proposes to extend the existing mandatory licensing scheme that currently tackles the highest risk HMOs (being 3 storeys or more), to include all HMOs occupied by five or more people living as two or more households. Licensing is an effective tool for controlling the standards in HMOs to ensure that there are adequate amenities for the number of occupiers and fire safety measures in place and to limit the number of occupiers to prevent overcrowding.

Currently there are only 13 licensed HMOs in the District. A programmed survey of possible HMOs is currently being carried out to determine those properties that require a licence under the existing regime, but have not applied for one, and those properties that do not currently require a licence, but will need to apply for one when the new licensing regime is introduced.

It is an offence to operate a licensable HMO without a licence or, where an HMO is licenced, for the property to be in breach of one or more licence conditions. Enforcement action will be taken against landlords that are found to be operating a licensable HMO without a licence and who do not then take the appropriate steps to ensure their property is appropriately licenced.

In view of the significantly increased numbers of HMOs that will need to be licenced, and breaches enforced, increased number of environmental health officers will be required, funded from the increased income received from the charges that the Council is able to make for its licensing functions.

Park home sites

There are currently seven commercially-run residential park home sites in the District. The Council has a licensing function to ensure the health, safety and welfare of residents on the sites and also to protect them from any harassment or illegal eviction by site owners.

Park homes are commonly occupied by older people who have downsized to smaller, more affordable, housing. The Mobile Homes Act 2013 was introduced to address the problem that a small, but significant, number of site owners nationally were abusing their power to take advantage of, and discriminate unfairly against, certain residents - particularly those that were older and more vulnerable.

The Act introduced a number of important provisions to be enforced by local authorities against site owners, including:

- Strengthening the councils' harassment powers in relation to withdrawing or withholding services;
- Making it an offence to unfairly block the sale of a home to a potential purchaser;
- Simplifying the enforcement procedure for local authorities where a breach of a site licence condition occurs; and
- Introducing the requirement that site rules, where they exist, are fair, non-discriminatory and are only introduced following a full consultation with residents.

The Act also allows local authorities to charge for this licensing function and the Council has a fee-charging regime based on the size of the park home site. A charge is made for any

new site licence applications but, more importantly, an annual fee is chargeable to existing sites (depending on site size) which covers the costs of a full annual site inspection and the time taken dealing with complaints regarding site conditions that may occur during the year.

Nursery worker accommodation

Employees on horticultural nursery sites in the District often live and work on the sites for the growing season, in temporary accommodation, before leaving to work elsewhere in the winter months. However, concerns have arisen that some people are living and working on sites permanently (in breach of planning rules), including families with young children, in accommodation that is poor and unsafe.

The Council undertook a survey in 2015, which involved carrying out site inspections and interviewing site owners and occupiers where possible. It was found that 59 of the 73 commercial growing sites identified had employees that also lived in accommodation on site, on a permanent basis – with several sites that included families with young children.

The type of accommodation varied but, typically, the worst conditions were most commonly found in holiday-style caravans that presented issues such as severe risks of fire and explosion, electrocution, excess cold, insanitary drainage and poor drinking water quality. There were also concerns around overcrowding and the safety of young families living in inadequate accommodation on commercial sites.

In response, the Council set up a Nursery Worker Accommodation Task Group, bringing together existing services involved with the nursery worker community, to address a number of issues including:

- The Council's longer term planning objectives for the industry;
- Bringing the accommodation, amenity and environment for nursery employees and their families up to an acceptable standard; and
- Significantly improving the drinking water and drainage supply to the sites which, in many cases, is seriously defective.

A consultation exercise has taken place on local accommodation standards proposed by the Council and there has been a meeting between representatives of the Council, Lea Valley Growers Association, National Farmers Union and a small number of site owners to discuss how the requirements regarding planning, accommodation standards (including drinking water supply and drainage provision) can best be met within reasonable timescales.

The long-term objective is to work with the industry to agree an acceptable standard of accommodation for the permanent occupancy of workers on the nursery sites. In the meantime, the Council will continue to monitor conditions and enforce improvements if it is found that conditions are such that residents' health and safety is at serious risk.

Discretionary housing assistance

In addition to Disabled Facilities Grants, the Council provides discretionary financial assistance to private sector residents by way of:

- **Decent Homes Repayable Assistance** - means tested, repayable grants of up to £10,000 for work to bring properties up to the Decent Homes Standard. Applicants must be:

- At least 60 years of age;
 - Chronically sick or disabled; or
 - Be a household with dependent children.
- **Small Works Repayable Assistance** - means tested, repayable grants of up to £3,000 (to the same category of people as for Decent Homes Repayable Assistance) for work to:
 - Rectify a significant hazard under the Housing Health and Safety rating System (HHSRS);
 - Rectify any disrepair likely to damage the fabric of the property; or
 - Improve thermal comfort.
 - **Empty Homes Repayable Assistance (EHRA)** - loans of up to £10,000 (repayable on sale or disposal) to owners of long-term empty properties that intend to reside in the property themselves.

The types of assistance available and the eligibility criteria of each are set out in the [Housing Assistance Policy 2015-2017](#).

Fuel poverty

The Council carried out a [Private Sector House Condition Survey](#) in 2011 which indicated that 14% of occupiers in the private sector in the District were in 'fuel poverty'. At that time, the definition of fuel poverty applied to occupiers of dwellings where 10% of their net household income would need to be spent to give an adequate provision of warmth and hot water.

The Government's definition of fuel poverty changed in 2013 to households that have to spend more than a median amount on fuel to keep their home at a reasonable temperature and if spending that amount puts their remaining income below the poverty line.

Although it is considered, nationally, that there has been a reduction in the number of fuel-poor households under the new definition, the Council has no current data on the numbers and locations of fuel-poor households in the District. Without this data, it will be impossible to take a targeted approach to meet the Government's objective of ensuring that as many homes as is reasonably practicable achieve a minimum energy efficiency rating of B/C by 2030.

The Council is therefore undertaking a desktop exercise to collect information, which will hopefully result in a source of data from which fuel-poor households can be identified, and targeted, in order to improve their ability to heat their homes at reasonable cost.

Key partners

- [Essex County Fire and Rescue Service](#)
- [Essex County Council](#)
- [Lea Valley Growers Association and National Farmers Union](#)
- [West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group](#)

Chapter 9

Empty Homes in the Private Sector

Aim

To bring long-term empty properties back into use and, in so doing, increase the supply and range of housing, enhance the environment, help tackle homelessness and help reduce anti-social behaviour.

Objectives

- a) Make effective use of information on empty homes within the District;
- b) Maintain effective partnership working within the Council and with external partners to support empty homes initiatives;
- c) Raise awareness of the issues associated with empty homes in the District and encourage action to bring them back into use;
- d) Offer financial assistance where applicable to renovate empty properties so that they are in a condition suitable for occupation;
- e) Enhance the character of the local community through the improvement and re-use of empty homes; and
- f) Take enforcement action to bring empty homes back in to use, where appropriate and where resources permit.

Key issues

Introduction

Recent governments and the Council have recognised the value of reducing the number of empty properties, as part of an overall ambition to provide additional homes.

In order to achieve this, various incentives and options have been introduced nationally, to encourage local authorities to take positive action. These include the New Homes Bonus (which rewards councils for bringing empty properties back into use) and allowing councils local flexibility to charge up to 50% extra council tax on property that has been unoccupied and unfurnished for two years or more.

This, together with an upturn in the housing market following the financial crisis in 2008, has contributed to a marked reduction in empty properties both nationally and locally. The official statistics on empty homes for England show that the recorded figures for the total number of empty homes peaked in 2008 at 783,119 but dropped to 448,999 by 2015.

The Council maintains a database of empty homes using information from council tax and other areas of the Council, supported by information from owners and other individuals. This information is used to prioritise empty homes for action where required. This data shows a similar downward trend locally in the District, as shown in Table 9.1 below.

Table 9.1 Total numbers of empty homes in Epping Forest District (2008-2017)

Status	2008	2014	2015	2017
All empty homes	1,500	1,391	607	706
All long-term empty homes (for more than 6 months)	611	431	347	436
Empty more than two years	Not recorded	124	122	129

The Council seeks to effectively publicise the opportunities there are to help bring empty properties back into use and to encourage property owners to take these up. Communities are also made aware of the role that the Council can play.

Approach to service delivery

In order to develop an effective strategy for dealing with empty properties, it is important to understand why properties are left empty for long periods of time, so that time and resources can be better directed to tackle those issues that prevent homes being returned to use more quickly.

Common reasons why properties are not returned to use when they are empty have been identified (both nationally and locally) as:

- A previously rented property now needs refurbishment before it can be let again and the landlord is unable to finance this;
- A property has been inherited on the death of the owner and it has not been possible to reach a decision quickly on what to do with it;
- Properties that have been bought to refurbish and the work is taking a long time to complete;
- Properties that are being held empty as an investment or to pass on to their children. There are some very high value properties in the District that have been empty for more than two years;
- The property owner has died but probate has not been granted for a variety of reasons (such that it is not being progressed because it is not in the financial interest of the person that will inherit the estate); and
- Flats over commercial units can be difficult to occupy by anyone other than the owner of the commercial element, either for security reasons (for example, a pharmacy) or suitability (such as a pub). However, if the owner resides elsewhere, the flat stays empty.

While it is recognised that any empty property can be a problem, and therefore all owners of long-term empty properties should be pursued, it is sensible to concentrate limited time and resources on those properties that have been empty for the longest time.

Evidence shows that a significant number of properties in the District identified as long-term empty (i.e. those that have been empty for six months), come back into use within two years. Therefore, in considering the Council's priorities for action, the focus of more significant work is on those properties that have been empty for more than two years, or are the subject of

complaint. In these cases, the Council risk-assesses properties to produce a target list for focused action based on an annual process of prioritisation.

The aim to reduce the number of empty properties must be balanced against the fact that it is not an offence to leave a property empty. In the first instance, the Council's strategy is to try and engage with property owners in a positive and co-operative way to encourage them to return their property to use, helping them find solutions and offering financial support where appropriate. This may be through:

- [The Council's PLACE \(Private Leasing Agreements to Convert Empties\) Scheme](#) - which is administered by a consortium of 5 local authorities, including the Council. The Scheme provides financial assistance to owners of long-term empty properties that need renovation before they can be brought back in to use; or
- [Empty Homes Repayable Assistance](#) – which is a loan provided by the Council, of up to £10,000 (repayable on sale or disposal), to owners of long-term empty properties that intend to reside in the property themselves.

However, the Council will take enforcement action where the consequences of the property being left empty may give rise to issues that justify this. The process followed is set out in the Council's [Housing Service Strategy on Empty Homes in the Private Sector](#). Enforcement action is always carried out in accordance with the [Regulators' Code](#) and the [Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy](#), which is regularly updated.

Empty homes are prioritised for action if they are problematic in their local neighbourhoods (e.g. through anti-social behaviour) and could meet particular housing need;

Types of enforcement action considered are:

- [Compulsory Purchase Orders](#) - local authorities have the power to acquire land and property compulsorily where the owner is not willing to sell by agreement.
- [Empty Dwelling Management Orders \(EDMOs\)](#) - allow local authorities to take management control of certain empty properties for a period of up to seven years during which time the owner retains ownership.
- [Enforcing improvements to the property](#) - various statutory provisions (such as the Housing Act 2004) are available where a property is defective or causing nuisance to others. The action may not in itself lead directly to the property being brought back into use but it may focus the mind of the owner.
- [Enforced Sale](#) - the Law of Property Act 1925 gives local authorities the power to enforce the sale of a property on which it has a registered debt. The debt is recovered from the proceeds of the sale.

Key partners

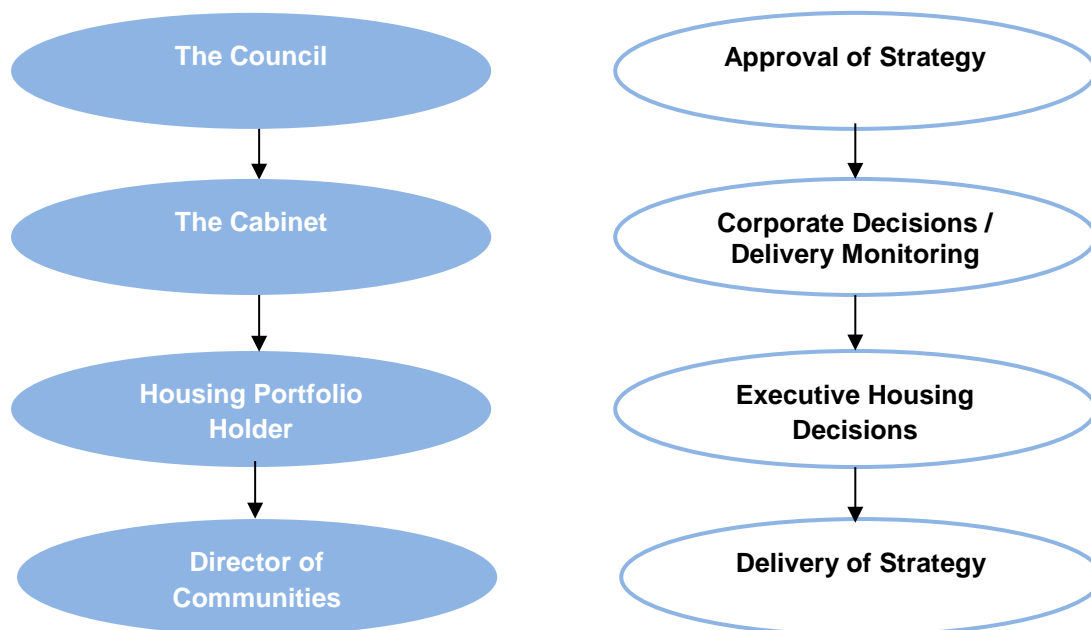
- [Consortium for the PLACE Scheme \(Chelmsford City Council, Harlow Council, Uttlesford District Council, East Herts District Council and Hertsmere Borough Council\)](#)
- [Genesis Housing Association](#)

Chapter 10

Monitoring delivery of the Strategy

Framework for delivering the Strategy

In view of its strategic importance, this Housing Strategy was adopted by the Council's Cabinet, following pre-scrutiny by the Council's Communities Select Committee. However, responsibility for the delivery of the strategy rests with the elected Housing Portfolio Holder and the Director of Communities. The decision-making hierarchy can be summarised as follows:



Key Action Plans

An important part of this Housing Strategy is its Key Action Plan. The Housing Strategy's first Key Action Plan is attached as an Appendix.

For each of the actions, the Action Plan sets out:

- The relevant category;
- The person responsible; and
- Target date for completion.

Subsequent Key Action Plans will be produced on an annual basis and will be approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder, on the recommendation of the Communities Select Committee, who will consider the Draft Key Action Plan in detail.

Reviewing and monitoring the Housing Strategy and Key Action Plan

Progress on the Housing Strategy Key Action Plans will be formally monitored by the Communities Select Committee every six months.

The Housing Strategy itself will be reviewed during 2022, or earlier if the need for significant revisions is identified.

Appendix

Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2017-18

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale																		
1	Affordable Housing	Work in partnership with Epping Town Council and a development partner to commence a regeneration scheme for the St Johns Area of Epping, which includes an appropriate amount of market and affordable housing.	Director of Neighbourhoods	September 2018																		
2	Affordable Housing	Develop and promote the Council's Self and Custom Build Register and work in partnership with East Herts, Uttlesford and Harlow Councils to pool Community Housing Funding from the Government, to undertake a joint project to consider all aspects of community-led housing, including self and custom build and Community Land Trusts	Director of Communities	July 2018																		
3	Affordable Housing	Appoint a new Affordable Housing Officer for an initial 3-year period, to provide additional capacity to respond to increased planning applications for affordable housing as a result of the Local Plan and to undertake the additional work to develop the Council's approach to self and custom build housing	Director of Communities	July 2018																		
4	Affordable Housing	<p>Work with housing associations and developers to complete the development of 175 new affordable homes, with planning permission, for rent and shared ownership at the following non-Council owned sites:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>a) Knollys Nursery, Waltham Abbey</td> <td>63 homes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>b) Fyfield Research Park, Ongar</td> <td>44 homes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>c) Hillhouse Independent Living Scheme, Waltham Abbey</td> <td>24 homes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>d) Barnfield, Roydon</td> <td>11 homes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>e) Stoneshot Farm, Waltham Abbey</td> <td>10 homes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>f) Netherhouse Farm, Waltham Abbey</td> <td>8 homes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>g) Happy Grow Garden Centre, Thornwood</td> <td>8 homes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>h) Institute Road, Coopersale</td> <td>6 homes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>i) Esperanza Nursery, Stapleford Abbots</td> <td>1 home</td> </tr> </table>	a) Knollys Nursery, Waltham Abbey	63 homes	b) Fyfield Research Park, Ongar	44 homes	c) Hillhouse Independent Living Scheme, Waltham Abbey	24 homes	d) Barnfield, Roydon	11 homes	e) Stoneshot Farm, Waltham Abbey	10 homes	f) Netherhouse Farm, Waltham Abbey	8 homes	g) Happy Grow Garden Centre, Thornwood	8 homes	h) Institute Road, Coopersale	6 homes	i) Esperanza Nursery, Stapleford Abbots	1 home	Director of Communities	September 2018
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h) Institute Road, Coopersale	6 homes																					
i) Esperanza Nursery, Stapleford Abbots	1 home																					

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale
5	Affordable Housing	Re-tender the contract for the provision of specialist affordable housing viability advice.	Director of Communities	March 2018
6	Affordable Housing	Review and revise the Council's Tenancy Policy to implement the introduction of 5-year fixed term tenancies for all new tenants, to meet the requirements of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and subsequent Government Guidance.	Assistant Director (Housing Operations)	July 2018
7	Affordable Housing	Review and revise the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme, to ensure that Council and housing association accommodation continues to be targeted at those assessed as being in the most need.	Assistant Director (Housing Operations)	July 2018
8	Affordable Housing	Increase the number of Preferred Housing Association Partners, to ensure that there are a sufficient number of social landlords operating in the District to deliver the number of affordable homes required by the Local Plan.	Director of Communities	December 2017
9	Affordable Housing	Prepare for the sale of "high value" Council properties to fund the proposed levy to the Government to meet the requirements of the Housing and Planning Act 2016.	Assistant Director (Private Housing & Communities Support)	April 2018

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale
10	Affordable Housing	Continue to work with Hastoe Housing Association and Parish Councils to investigate the development potential for rural housing schemes in villages, through the Council's Rural Planning Exceptions Policy.	Director of Communities	September 2018
11	Council Housebuilding	Complete the development of 51 new affordable homes for rent at Burton Road, Loughton, under Phase 2 of the Council's Housebuilding Programme.	Assistant Director (Housing Property & Development)	June 2018
12	Council Housebuilding	Complete the development of 34 new affordable homes for rent at North Weald, Ongar, Epping and Coopersale, under Phase 3 of the Council's Housebuilding Programme.	Assistant Director (Housing Property & Development)	September 2018
13	Council Housebuilding	Market and sell the Council-owned development site at Pyrles Lane Nursery, Loughton with a requirement that the required 40% affordable homes are sold to the Council on practical completion for letting to applicants on the Council's Housing Register.	Assistant Director (Housing Property & Development)	March 2018
14	Council Housebuilding	Obtain additional loans from the Public Works Loan Board to fund Phases 4-6 of the Council Housebuilding Programme.	Director of Resources	March 2018

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale
15	Homelessness	Undertake a pilot scheme to provide 3 modular units of temporary accommodation at Norway House, North Weald to accommodate 6 single vulnerable homeless households and review the success of the pilot scheme after 12 months' occupation.	Director of Communities	Pilot Scheme – December 2017 Review – December 2018
16	Homelessness	Review the success of placing 3 homeless households at Zinc Arts, Ongar, for a trial period to consider if further placements should be made for homeless households.	Assistant Director (Housing Operations)	September 2017
17	Homelessness	Review the level of staffing resources required to meet the new duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.	Assistant Director (Housing Operations)	March 2018
18	Homelessness	Produce a new Draft Homelessness Strategy, ready for consultation.	Assistant Director (Housing Operations)	March 2018
19	Homelessness	Identify and commission an appropriate organisation to arrange for support workers to visit rough sleepers, provide advice and arrange short term night shelter accommodation.	Assistant Director (Housing Operations)	October 2017
20	Homelessness	Increase the staffing levels at Norway House, the Council's Homeless Persons Hostel in North Weald, by 0.5FTE to assist with increased workloads and improved on-call coverage.	Housing Options Manager	September 2017

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale
21	Homelessness	Undertake a further review of the Council's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, to ensure that it is used to meet the highest priorities of need	Assistant Director (Housing Operations)	December 2017
22	Homelessness	Consider the provision of shorter (2-year) non-secure fixed term tenancies to homeless households accommodated in Council properties, with a clear requirement for the tenants to find alternative accommodation during the tenancy period, as part of the review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	Assistant Director (Housing Operations)	July 2018
23	Supported Housing – Older & Other Vulnerable People	Progress the Key Action Plan from the Council's study into the Impact of an Ageing Population in the Epping Forest District.	Assistant Director (Community Services & Safety)	July 2018
24	Supported Housing – Older & Other Vulnerable People	Undertake a review the Council's sheltered housing assets with a view to remodelling or redeveloping sheltered housing sites that are no longer fit for purpose.	Director of Communities	March 2018
25	Supported Housing – Older & Other Vulnerable People	Undertake a review of the Council's Sheltered Housing Service in order to determine the most appropriate approach to future delivery.	Assistant Director (Housing Operations)	July 2018

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale
26	Supported Housing – Older & Other Vulnerable People	Work with Essex County Council to facilitate the provision of a new Independent Living (Extra Care) scheme for older people at Hillhouse, Waltham Abbey, comprising both market housing and affordable rented homes.	Director of Communities	September 2018
27	Private Sector Housing	Deliver the Action Plan formulated by the Nursery Workers Accommodation Working Party and consider and adopt a corporate protocol for dealing with unsuitable living conditions within agricultural and nursery accommodation, from a housing, planning, legal and economic development perspective.	Assistant Director (Private Housing & Communities Support)	June 2018
28	Private Sector Housing	Introduce a new service to provide an on-line resource of information on topical issues for private landlords.	Private Housing Manager (Technical)	March 2018
29	Private Sector Housing	Prepare for the Government's proposed extension of the mandatory licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), including the recruitment of sufficient additional environmental health officers to respond to the increased workload.	Assistant Director (Private Housing & Communities Support)	June 2018
30	Private Sector Housing	Undertake a desktop exercise to provide a source of data to identify and target fuel-poor households, to provide information on improving their ability to heat their homes at a reasonable cost.	Assistant Director (Private Housing & Communities Support)	June 2018

**For alternative formats contact
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September 2017

