

# Annual Report to Tenants 2011



# Annual Report to Tenants 2011

**Welcome to our 2011 Annual Report to Tenants,** we hope you find it interesting. In this report you will find a lot of information about our performance over the last year and our future aims. The year has presented us with many challenges following some changes in housing regulation last year. We have also been looking closely at our spending due to the ongoing economic situation which has affected all councils, housing providers and our tenants.

Last year we produced the first annual report for some years. The national housing regulator, currently the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), expected us to do this. This latest report tells you how we are performing as a housing service, across all the main areas, and how we will deliver on the commitments we have made to you. It also covers the five national standards considered as priorities under the national regulatory framework. These are:

1. Tenant involvement and empowerment
2. Home
3. Tenancy
4. Value for money
5. Neighbourhood and community

Over the last year we have moved forward on some major projects. A “Repairs Refresh” Programme is well on the way to completion, with a new management structure for our Repairs Service in place.

Families in real need of housing are being forced to wait on the Housing Register, sometimes for years, due to the lack of council housing. A new Housing Fraud Pilot Scheme aims to prevent people from ‘jumping the queue’ by making fraudulent applications for housing. A Housing Fraud Investigator has been appointed to deal with fraudulent applications and tenancy fraud, including illegal sub-letting and non-occupation.

A ‘local offer’ is now in place, including a set of service standards, our Housing Charter and a tenant-agreed action plan. The offer was developed with your Tenants and Leaseholders Federation which meets regularly with us to discuss housing and estate issues. We have continued to encourage a high level of tenant involvement, and a new group has been formally set up over the last year at Ninefields, Waltham Abbey. The Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group is playing a highly active role in developing the Repairs Refresh Programme.

This Annual Report was produced in consultation with the Tenants Reading Group, and we would like to thank them for their time. We look forward to receiving your feedback as well. Page 19 tells you how you can do this.



**Councillor Maggie McEwen,**  
*Housing Portfolio Holder*

## Our key achievements in the last year

- Our Repairs Refresh Programme is nearing completion. There is a new management structure which divides the Housing Repairs Service into North and South areas. We also appointed Mears Direct as a Management Contractor to oversee our repairs service. The new structure will help us to improve the way we respond to requests for repairs and carry out the work. We will be using the latest technology, and providing appointments for all repairs. Our operating costs will be reduced and overall we expect to save at least £30,000 per year.
- A continuing programme made sure that works were carried out to keep all our council homes in a decent condition, according to the ‘Decent Homes Standard’. We achieved the standard for all council properties last year, and are ensuring the standard is kept this year.
- Epping Forest Careline achieved accreditation with the Telecare Services Association’s Code of Practice for Social Alarms Services. This demonstrates sound management of the service and will enable us to monitor alarms for other councils and housing associations (which would bring further income to help fund the service).
- We published our ‘local offer’ which sets out our housing commitments to you. This has three parts including our Housing Service Standards, the Housing Charter and a Tenant-Agreed Action Plan. This sets out a number of agreed tasks for the year, and we will monitor our progress against those tasks.
- A £300,000 budget has been made available to tackle the problem of parking on housing estates. Off-street parking schemes given

# A view from the Federation



2011 marks the end of an era for me. For 10 years I have been the Chair of your Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. I have also been actively involved in OHERA, the Oakwood Hill Estate Residents Association.

This year I am stepping down and, although I will continue as a member of the Federation, I will no longer be the chair. I am pleased to report that Steve Hyde, a member of the Roundhills Residents Association, was elected as the new Chair in September.

I am very proud of the Federation's achievements over the years. We have been actively involved in many decisions, large and small. Our regular meetings with the Council have looked at a huge range of issues such as rent setting, housing allocations, responsive repairs, maintenance programmes and estate issues. Working alongside

Housing's management we have looked at some of the really big issues. Most importantly, we have tried to make sure that tenants and leaseholders can have their say in shaping the housing service. As Chair of the Epping Forest Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, I have been able to see, at first hand, how tenant involvement has made a difference.

My final message to you is keep supporting your local tenants or residents group!

If you haven't got an association then perhaps you could think about starting one, or get involved in another way. It's your housing service and the Council offers a range of ways for you to get involved - you don't have to attend meetings! Phone Richard Jones, Tenant Involvement Officer, on 01992 564524 or email [involvetenants@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:involvetenants@eppingforestdc.gov.uk).

**Molly Carter**

*Chair of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation*



priority by the Council's Cabinet include: Colebrook Gardens, Loughton; School Lane, Abbess Roding; and Hillcroft, Loughton. Further schemes are proposed for Loughton (Chester Close, Harvey Gardens and Audley Gardens) but work will not start until a review of the Capital Programme is carried out in October 2011.

- We launched a new "Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme" to our housing applicants, in partnership with Broxbourne Housing Association (BHA). Shared ownership - or "part rent, part buy" - is usually only available on newly-built developments. Within certain qualifying criteria, our special scheme allows applicants to select any one or two bedroom



property available for sale locally on the open market, on a shared ownership basis. This makes the cost of home ownership much cheaper.

- We reviewed our 'Housing Allocations Scheme' and decided to introduce a penalty scheme to help reduce long-term vacancies. Long vacancies reduce rental income and are unfair on homeseekers in extreme need of housing. The penalty applies if a homeseeker refuses two offers of accommodation, for which they have made "bids" through HomeOption, in any three month period. They will not be allowed to express an interest in any further properties for a period of six months.

# Our local offer

In March this year we published our 'local offer' which sets out our housing commitments to you and has three parts.

1. **Our Housing Service Standards**
2. **The Housing Charter**
3. **A Tenant-Agreed Action Plan**



## Housing Service Standards

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is currently the national housing regulator. Our local offer will help tenants to check that we meet the TSA's national housing standards. For example, how we consult you, manage your neighbourhoods or estates, allocate properties, or run your repairs service. We also have our own set of local housing standards which explain how we will deliver the services we provide, over the next year.

Last year we sent you a leaflet called 'Our Service Standards'. It sets out in detail what the Council will do in order to meet the national standards and our own. The Housing Standards cover the services provided to council tenants and leaseholders, and other areas such as private sector housing and the Right to Buy.

Every year the Council looks at the Housing Service Standards and the Housing Charter with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, and your elected councillors. Following a detailed review by our Housing Scrutiny Panel of councillors, it was agreed that there was no need to make any changes to the Standards or the Housing Charter for the forthcoming year.



## The Housing Charter

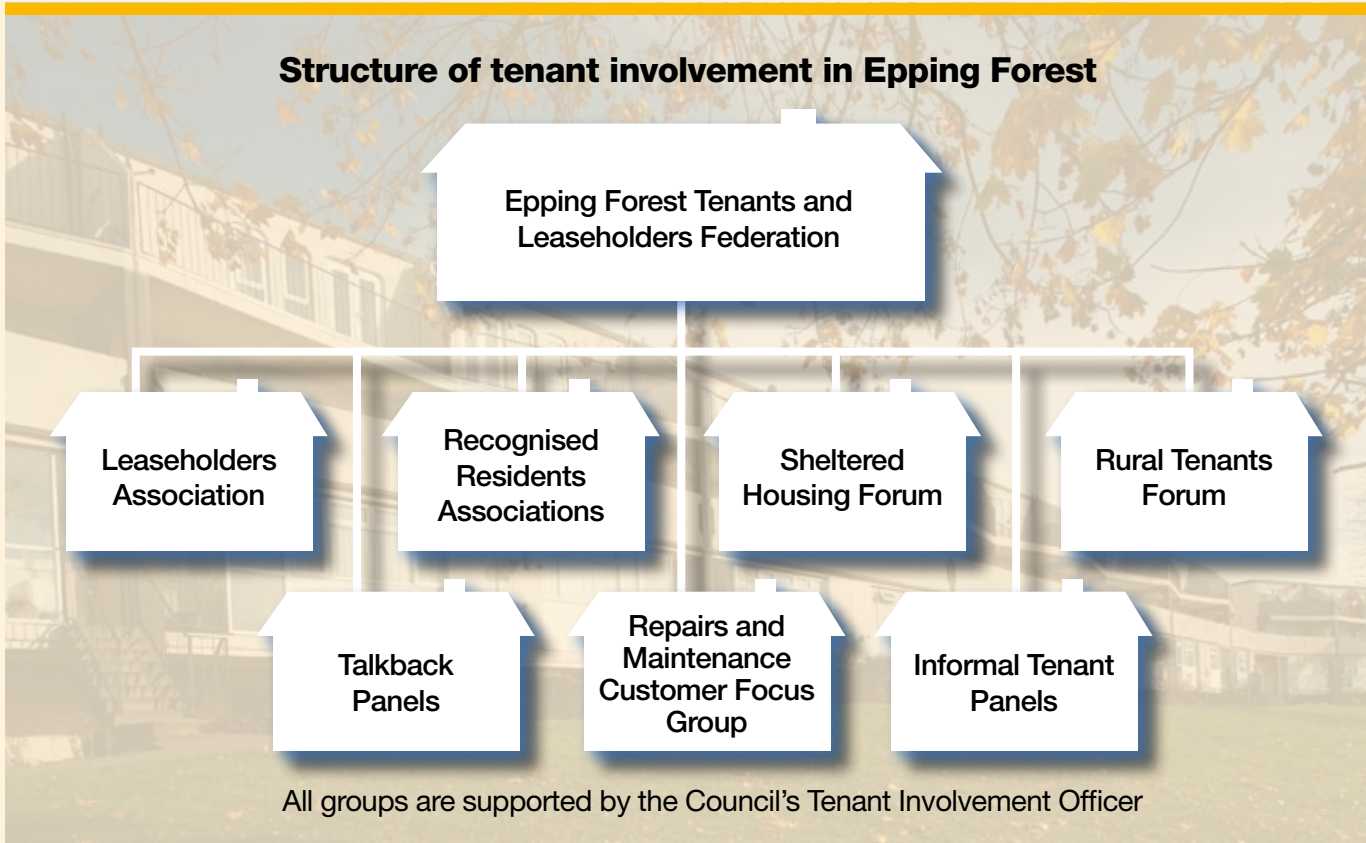
The Charter sets out ten commitments to clients in terms of housing service provision. You can find the Housing Charter on our website [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing) and it was published in the Spring 2011 Housing News.



## Tenant-Agreed Action Plan

The Tenant-Agreed Action Plan sets out a number of tasks agreed with your Tenants and Leaseholders Federation for the following year. This year there are 16 agreed actions relating to repairs and improvements, parking, estates, sheltered housing, energy efficiency, relet times, housing applications and tenant involvement. We monitor our progress against the plan with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. See the plan for yourself in the tenant participation area of our website: [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing).

# Involving our tenants



**Tenant involvement is about giving choices, and encouraging tenants to have a say in how their homes are managed. Giving tenants a voice is very important to us and 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment' is one of the national standards.**

The role of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation is to represent tenants, leaseholders and other residents and to consult with the Council on housing issues that may affect them. The Federation holds regular meetings with the Council and in the last year has discussed a whole range of matters such as:

- the Government's proposals for the future of social housing

- appointing a private Repairs Management Contractor
- the 2011 rent increase
- parking enforcement on housing estates
- performance against the published Housing Services Standards

Each of the six recognised residents associations are entitled to two places on the Federation. There are also places for tenant panels, the Leaseholders Association, the Rural Tenants Forum and the Sheltered Housing Forum. We have a dedicated Tenant Involvement Officer, whose job is to help tenants get involved in the delivery of the housing service, as much or as little as they wish.

- We formally recognised a new group called the 'Ninefields Residents Panel' to represent residents of Ninefields in Waltham Abbey.
- The Federation is consulted on all 19 Housing Directorate Service Strategies which are reviewed and updated every three years.
- A Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group meets quarterly with officers to discuss both responsive repairs and planned maintenance issues.
- We use surveys to ask tenants to tell us whether they are satisfied with services, including responsive repairs, planned maintenance, lettings and the Careline emergency alarm service.
- The Federation has a representative on the Council's Housing Scrutiny Panel which considers and reviews a range of housing issues.
- Property Information Packs, empty property standards and the Repairs Refresh Programme are among the many issues that have been

discussed with the newly established Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group.

- We set up a regional training consortium which will help members of our associations to be even more effectively involved. By arranging shared sessions and courses we can reduce the costs of training.
- Members of the Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group received training on 'Tenant involvement in day-to-day repairs' along with residents from other social landlords in the region.
- We are helping the Federation set up a Tenants Scrutiny Panel, to look in detail at how we perform, and to undertake detailed reviews of specific housing services.
- By working in partnership with Uttlesford District Council's tenant participation worker we have been able to share good practice and training costs.
- Our Tenant Participation Impact Statement explains what we hope to achieve with the Federation as a result of our tenant involvement initiatives, and it includes an agreed action plan. The Impact Statement sets out the various ways that we

formally consult with tenants and explains how residents can influence the decisions that we make.

- We consult locally on major issues that will affect residents, such as recent improvements to the Limes Farm Community Hall in Chigwell. We also give choice on smaller schemes, such as colour schemes for new kitchen installations.
- Working with South Essex Homes we plan to recruit and train a group of tenants to carry out 'mystery shopping' of how we deal with housing enquiries from tenants.

### ★ Working towards...

- We haven't consulted tenants on the best way of involving them in the governance and scrutiny of our housing management service for a few years – we will do this within the next year.
- Normally we carry out a tenant satisfaction survey every two years. The last one was carried out in 2008 but we were unable to survey our tenants in 2010 due to changes in national guidance. Now we have new guidance and we will carry out a survey over the next 12 months.

## Meeting the diverse needs of tenants

- Our Housing Charter promises to treat clients equally in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 which targets unlawful discrimination.
- We comply with the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Race Relations Code of Practice (Housing), and the Good Practice Standards for Social Landlords on Tackling Harassment.
- We are building a profile of our tenants to help us allocate resources to the right areas and shape the services we provide.
- Every year we look at the ethnic profile of people both applying for housing, and homeseekers we have housed, to help us check that we are treating people fairly.
- Housing staff are required to attend equality and diversity training.
- We carry out customer impact assessments to assess how different people will be affected by our policies and strategies.
- Arrangements are in place for communicating with people with diverse needs. For example we can provide large print publications for people with poor sight, and translation services for people whose first language is not English.
- The Sheltered Housing Forum is very well attended and represents older council tenants living in sheltered housing across the District.
- A dedicated Housing Officer supports tenants with disabilities who require adaptations to their properties.
- We refer some tenants to 'In Touch', a local organisation that offers support to vulnerable tenants, to help them keep to the terms of their tenancy.
- In Touch has trained staff that can assist vulnerable tenants with issues such as: neighbour disputes; managing their home; letters and forms; health needs; rent arrears; debt and budgeting advice; and benefit advice.
- The Epping Forest District Safer Communities Partnership's Hate Incidents Panel looks at cases of hate crime within the district, and considers ways to tackle issues such as supporting victims, investigating incidents and taking action against perpetrators. Hate crime is a crime against a person, or property, that is motivated by an offender's hatred of someone because of their ethnicity, faith, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

# The Careline Story



Since 1984, Epping Forest Careline has offered a 24-hour emergency alarm service to older and vulnerable people throughout the district. All of the Council's sheltered housing schemes are linked into the service. Currently we have around 3,000 users, including around 1,250 users in the private sector who pay an annual rental, which brings extra income to the Council. We also provide a service for housing associations with properties in the district.

We had outgrown our Careline Centre in Loughton, and in 2008, our Cabinet agreed that the premises should be extended. They were enlarged using a house previously occupied by the Scheme Manager who no longer lives on site. Work was completed in September 2010.

The Centre now has space for additional computer stations to deal with the rising number of alarm connections. There is also more space to store "telecare" sensors. Sensors – such as flood and fall detectors – have enhanced the Careline service greatly. They offer a way to manage all the risks to a vulnerable person's health and home environment. Two new Careline packs give all the information needed by applicants and users.

With the extension complete, our Careline Centre can provide other services too. Staff will be able to monitor the CCTV systems at the entrance to Council-owned sheltered housing schemes.

We are also considering if we could

- Provide 24 hour monitoring of Council staff working on their own
- Extend the routine repairs reporting service for tenants from 5pm to 8pm on each working day, and
- Monitor alarms for other councils and housing associations (which would increase our income and help fund the service to tenants and other residents).

## Accreditation for Careline



This year, Epping Forest Careline achieved accreditation with the Telecare Services Association's 'Code of Practice for Social Alarms Services'. Accreditation gives an assurance of good quality service and officially recognises service providers that comply with the Code. To meet the standard, we needed detailed procedures and we had to show that Careline always works to them. We were audited independently, and we will continue to be audited every year.

## Facts and figures

In the last year (July 2010 to June 2011) we have:

- responded to over 99% of Careline calls within 1 minute
- answered calls within 6.5 seconds on average
- installed 426 alarm packages
- installed 100% of urgent basic telecare packages within 5 days
- carried out a survey of users and 95% said they were satisfied with the monitoring service



Epping Forest Careline is for anyone vulnerable who wants to feel more secure at home. Once the alarm unit is installed, clients can use a pendant - worn round their neck, wrist or waist - to contact our Careline Centre from their homes.

**If you want to know more, please contact Epping Forest Careline on 020 8532 1065 or email: [careline@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:careline@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)**

# Housing maintenance

Our Housing Assets Section and Housing Repairs Service aim to provide decent quality accommodation and keep your homes in a reasonable state of repair. The Government has set a standard of decency for all social housing, and property maintenance is included in the national 'Home' standard.

Under the Decent Homes Standard, all council properties should be in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and services, and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort. All our properties continued to meet the standard at the end of the year.

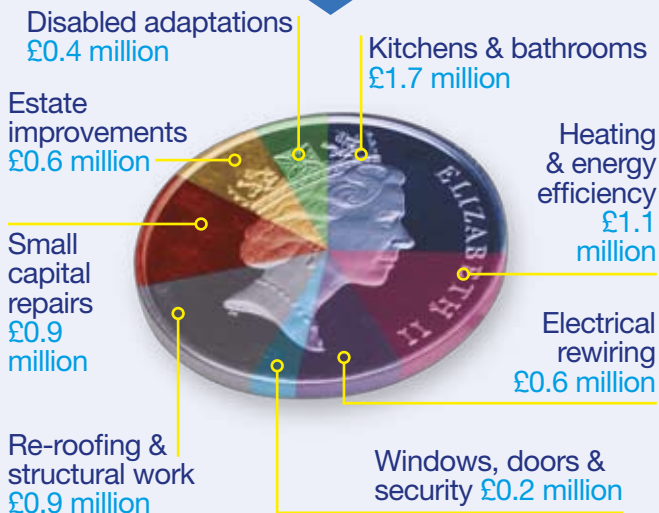
We produce a Housing Business Plan every year, which includes a forecast of how much we will have to spend on repairs and improvements over the next 30 years. Plans are in place, and money allocated, to ensure that no homes become non-decent in future years.



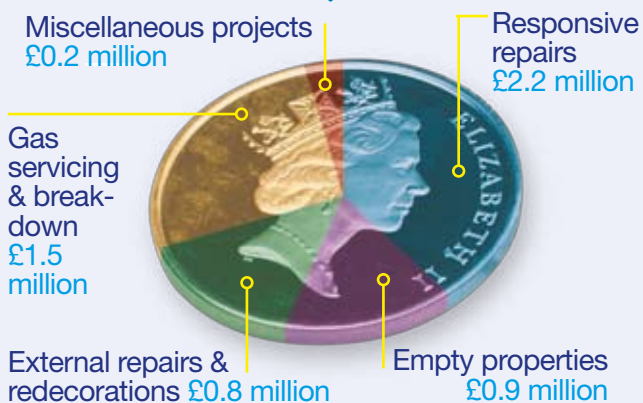
Properties receiving planned maintenance works in 2010/11	Number of Properties
Springfields Improvement Scheme	96
Kitchen and bathroom replacements	370
New heating installations, welfare heating, boilers or heating upgrades	204
Electrical testing, electrical upgrades and rewiring	448
Re-roofing	152
Structural repairs	151
Disabled adaptations (major and minor)	230
New front entrance doors and door entry installations	192
New uPVC double-glazing	50
External repairs and redecorations	859
Asbestos removal	42
Communal and individual cold water storage tanks	50
Internal re-decorations for older tenants	96
Energy efficiency measures	150



Capital expenditure is the money we spend to improve your properties. The chart below shows the expenditure for capital works broken down by category in 2010/11:



Revenue from rents, or other income, is used to pay for responsive repairs, servicing, empty property works and other works. The chart below shows expenditure for revenue works, by category, in 2010/11:



#### Adaptations to council properties for people with disabilities, included:

- 107 major adaptations including level access showers, and stairlifts
- 144 stair, hand and grab rails
- 31 ramps, steps and other improvements to access
- 31 bathroom and shower adaptations
- 8 installations of sensory equipment and lighting

## Housing repairs

Following a Council restructure in 2008, a Repairs Refresh Programme was launched and the former Works Unit joined forces with the Housing Repairs Team in Epping. Many other changes have been implemented, and a new management structure for housing repairs is in now in place.

We appointed Mears Direct as a Management Contractor to oversee our repairs service. The aim was to bring skills and expertise from the private sector to help make further improvements. Our existing staff all continue to work for the Council because we believe they have a lot to offer.

Some challenging targets have been set for the new Management Contractor, to speed up the completion of responsive repairs and the time taken to carry out works on empty properties.

The Management Contractor will work with suppliers and sub-contractors to achieve better value for money for the Council. We are already saving £182,000 per year, having slimmed down the direct workforce (without the need to make anyone redundant). Overall, the new structure will save around £30,000 per year.

The 'Repairs and Maintenance Customer Focus Group' is a group of tenants and leaseholders which meets quarterly with the Council. Members have been actively involved in the Repairs Refresh Programme. Other issues considered by the Focus Group have included empty property standards, re-charges to tenants and proposals for new 'Property Information Packs'.

The Housing Repairs Team dealt with around 12,850 requests for repairs last year.

Over 99% of tenants, surveyed after their repair work was carried out, said the general standard of the repairs service was good or satisfactory.

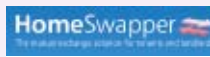
Council tenants wanting to request a repair should phone 01992 564199 or email: [housingrepairs@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:housingrepairs@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

# Housing applications, lettings and rents

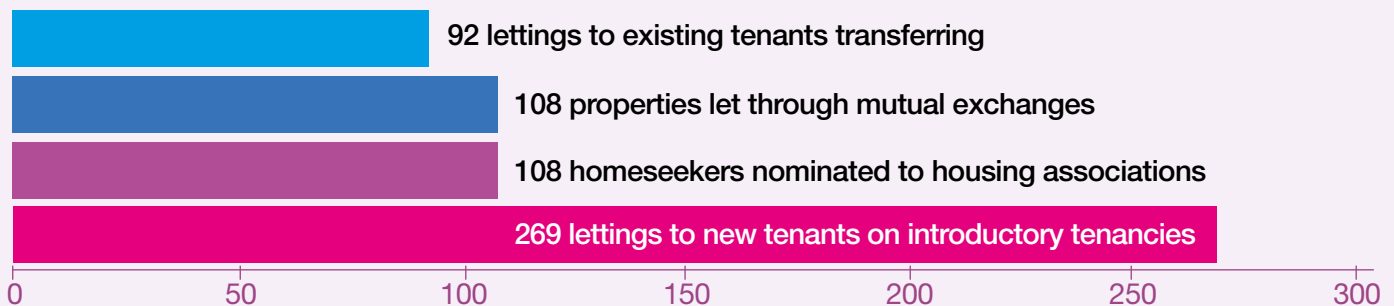
**Our Housing Options Section maintains a Housing Register and deals with lettings. The amount of rent charged for each property is based on a Government formula. Housing allocations and rents are part of the 'Tenancy' national standard.**

## Allocating properties

- Currently we have around 5,700 homeseekers on the Housing Register.
- Homeseekers can choose each fortnight which homes they would like to be considered for, using the HomeOption "choice based lettings scheme"
- Over 60% of all homeseekers on our Housing Register made expressions of interest (or 'bids') last year.
- We received over 54,500 bids for vacant properties, an average of over 90 bids per property.
- We allocated 469 vacant council properties to homeless applicants and other homeseekers, and we nominated a further 108 households to vacant housing association properties (see the graph on the next page).
- On behalf of our tenants we subscribe to the HomeSwapper mutual exchange service and last year 771 of our tenants were registered with HomeSwapper.
- We reviewed our Housing Allocations Scheme to make sure that our policies are fair and meet current needs. Tenants and homeseekers were consulted on the changes, through Housing News, and we received around 1,000 responses.
- Under the latest Allocations Scheme, homeseekers are now penalised if they refuse two offers of suitable accommodation for which they have expressed an interest, in any 3 month period. The penalty system aims to avoid lengthy vacancies which reduce rental income and are unfair to people in severe need of housing.
- We have an "Under-occupation Strategy", which explains how we try to avoid tenants having larger Council homes than they need (such as giving financial incentives, and a high priority in our Allocations Scheme, to tenants willing to "downsize"). We also give re-housing priority to people who are overcrowded.
- We are introducing 'computer kiosks' at our Area Housing Offices in Epping, Loughton and Limes Farm. Homeseekers can use these to search for vacant properties on HomeOption, our choice based lettings scheme. They can also use the kiosks to view the Council website and to search for mutual exchange properties available on HomeSwapper.



## Lettings of council properties and nominations to housing association 2010-2011



If you want to apply to join the Housing Register, phone the Housing Options Team on 01992 564107 or visit our website: [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing)

### Facts and figures

Last year we collected 98.4% of the rent due to us. Our performance was in the top quarter of all housing providers according to Housemark (a national 'benchmarking' club we use to compare performance)

Actions we took against tenants in arrears included:

- 1,277 interviews
- 600 home visits
- 405 'Notices of Seeking Possession' issued
- 57 possession orders obtained through the courts
- 16 eviction warrants issued when other actions had failed to recover the arrears

### Tenancy management

- New tenancies are given on an 'introductory' basis and provided they keep to their tenancy conditions for at least one year, tenants are then granted "secure tenancies" which give them lots of additional rights.
- A Housing Management Strategy explains our approach to managing tenancies, and the Tenants Handbook explains how we support tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions.

We introduced a Housing Fraud Pilot Scheme, to combat fraudulent housing applications, illegal sub-letting and non-occupation of Council homes. A new Housing Fraud Investigator was appointed.

### Setting and collecting the rents

- The average council rent in this District this year is £87.67 per week. Our 2011 rent increase averaged 7.2%. Although this increase was higher than we would have liked, it still makes our rents lower than housing association rents in the District. We consulted the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation on the increase and explained the reasons in Housing News.
- We offer a wide range of ways to pay the rent and encourage tenants to pay by Direct Debit which reduces our costs. We are planning to offer rent payments by credit card.

When tenants fail to pay their rent we act quickly. Some tenants in financial difficulties may need advice to help them clear the arrears. Where a tenant is continually in arrears we will take action to recover the money.



# Keeping our neighbourhoods clean and safe



**Under the Council's "Safer Greener Cleaner" initiative, we aim to keep our neighbourhoods and communal areas clean and safe. Our Housing Management Officers work closely with tenants to make sure their homes and estates are kept in a good standard, and that the rent is paid. They provide advice on a whole range of issues – from abandoned vehicles to rubbish – and deal with anti social behaviour. 'Neighbourhood and community' is one of the national standards.**

## **Our achievements over the last year**

- Parking enforcement measures have been carried out at Valley Hill, Loughton and Shelley Close, Ongar. To prevent parking on grass verges,



*New parking areas have been constructed at Hillcroft, Loughton to help reduce parking problems in the area.*

works have included shrub planting, jockey rail installation and bollards.

- More residents can apply for off street garden parking under new rules which allow the removal of 12 metres of grass verge (although a consultation is carried out first for any proposed 'crossover' in excess of 6 metres).
- We consulted with residents of Torrington Drive in Loughton about the problem of commuters parking on grass areas close to Debden Station. This resulted in the installation of jockey rail fencing to prevent parking in these areas.
- At Harveyfields in Waltham Abbey we provided a new bin area and installed new bins following a consultation with residents. The area is now cleaner, and we are saving money because the number of special collections of refuse have been reduced.
- An additional budget of £300,000 was made available to fund further off-street parking schemes. Schemes given priority by the Council's Cabinet include: Colebrook Gardens, Loughton; School Lane, Abbess Roding; and, Hillcroft, Loughton. Further schemes are being considered for Loughton (Chester Close, Harvey Gardens and Audley Gardens).
- We updated our Tenants Handbook, which includes eleven leaflets giving tenants all the information they need on the Council's housing service.

## Other ways we support your neighbourhoods

- Our Safer Communities Partnership operates

a scheme called “Safe & Sound” which aims to reduce the number of falls by older people in their homes, while making sure the property is secure and safe against intruders.



- The Council's housing management teams carry out annual estate inspections. Representatives of tenants associations are invited to accompany Housing Officers on these inspections, which are recorded and used to identify estate problems as well as any issues of concern to residents.

- Housing management officers liaise closely with our Environment and Street Scene Directorate to investigate fly-tipping incidents and take appropriate action; to act in noise nuisance cases; and to deal with complaints about dogs.

- The Anti-social Behaviour Working Group is a group of agencies (including the Council, Police, youth and community workers, Social Care) that works together to deal with cases of anti-social behaviour throughout the district.

- The Area Housing Managers attend Joint Action Group meetings, chaired by the Police, which discuss issues for the district and report back from the local Neighbourhood Action Panel meetings. Co-ordinated approaches to problem-solving are agreed at these meetings.

### ★ Working towards...

- We do not currently have a published Estate Management Strategy, explaining how we will maintain and improve our estates, including communal areas. Work will start on this in November and we plan to complete the Strategy by March 2012, in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

## Facts and figures

Last year (July 2010 to June 2011):

- We referred 11 tenants to ‘In Touch’, a local organisation that offers support to help vulnerable tenants maintain their tenancies.
- We carried out 89 inspections to check that our housing estates and communal areas are clean and well maintained.
- 16 abandoned vehicles were reported to us and were referred to our Environment and Street Scene Directorate.
- Our Scheme Managers visited around 630 properties on our estates, designated as suitable homes for older people.



# Value for money

**We continually seek to provide value for money, and to become even more efficient, in delivering our housing service. The Council has a Value for Money Strategy, which explains our approach. 'Value for money' is one of the five national standards for council housing providers.**

- Our Director of Housing meets with all our housing managers, individually, every three months to discuss and monitor ways of working more efficiently - either to save money or to get more for the same cost.

- We work with other organisations to save money by sharing costs. For example, we work jointly with five local housing providers to operate the HomeOption choice based lettings scheme.
- We aim to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet the needs of tenants and people who may become tenants in the future. We continuously seek ways to improve our services while achieving efficiency savings for the Housing Directorate. In the 3 years from 2009/10 to 2011/12 we have estimated that we will save £2.9 million.

## Here are a few notable efficiency savings we have made:

### One-off savings last year included:

£228,133	More use of 'Framework Agreements' with contractors, with lower rates, instead of using individual arrangements for responsive repairs and vacant property repairs.
£33,547	Grant collected from British Gas for Energy Efficiency measures undertaken to Council homes.
£17,086	Thermal comfort works provided under the Herts and Essex Energy Partnership project.
£10,000	Using lighter weight tipper trucks that can carry a heavier payload (fewer journeys and reduced tip fees).
£8,000	Voice recording incorporated within the Careline computer system.
£6,800	Targeted approach to the undertaking of the Private Sector House Condition Survey, through partnership with other councils.
£6,500	Using recycled communal refuse bins instead of purchasing new ones.

**£310,066 Total saving**

### Ongoing savings – some of the amounts we saved last year and will continue to save in future years

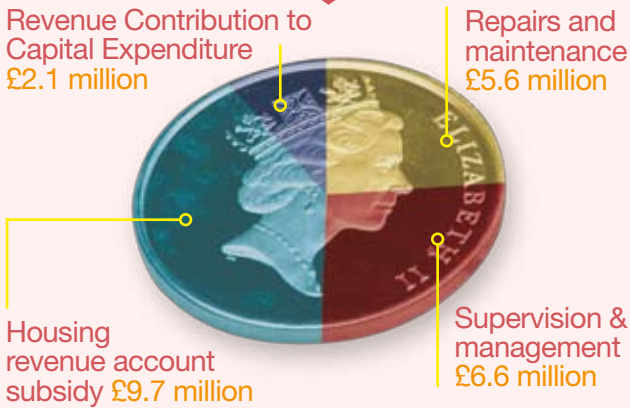
£224,896 per annum	Improved contractor efficiencies enabling price reductions.
£31,067 per annum	Restructure of the Housing Repairs Service.
£20,000 per annum	Reduced accommodation costs for the Housing Directorate as a result of office moves.
£4,375 per annum	Advertising vacant homes on the HomeOption website and printed lists rather than providing glossy freesheets.

**£280,338 Total saving per annum**





## How your money was spent last year



This chart shows how the money in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was spent. The HRA is a separate account where all the Council's rent money is kept and used to pay for housing services.

### Repairs and Maintenance

£5.64 million spent on responsive repairs and works to vacant council properties.

### Supervision and Management

£6.60 million spent on the day-to-day management of your housing (such as estate management and dealing with tenancy issues).

### Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

£9.73 million we must pay to the Government based on a number of factors, such as the number and type of properties that we own.

### Revenue Contribution to Capital Expenditure

£2.16 million contributed to major works, such as structural works, roofing and heating systems.

## Checking our performance

Our performance is checked in a number of ways, both internally and externally.

1. The Housing Directorate is accredited to ISO 9001:2008, a quality management system assessed by internal auditors and by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance.
2. We have achieved the Government's Customer Service Excellence award which tests in great depth those areas that research has indicated are a priority for customers.
3. Auditors visit all councils to verify their accounting systems and performance data, and we have internal auditors.

## Housemark Report



We subscribe to Housemark, a national benchmarking service. Housemark is an independent company that provides comparison reports on the costs and performance of many councils and housing associations. Every year they produce a helpful Value for Money Summary. This places our performance within one of four 'quartiles'. A council in the Best Quartile is within the top 25%.

### A report produced in March 2011 put us in the top 25% in three performance areas:

- Respondents (to a survey) who felt staff were able to deal with their problem
- Tenants satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service
- Dwellings that meet the Decent Homes Standard

### We were in the top 50% for 5 others:

- Tenants satisfied that their views are being taken into account
- Tenants satisfied with the overall quality of their home
- Tenants satisfied with the overall service provided
- Current rent arrears as a percentage of the rent due
- Tenants satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

We were only in the bottom 50% in one area – the average time in days to re-let empty properties. The new penalty scheme (see page 10) aims to reduce the re-let times by penalising homeseekers who refuse offers of accommodation that they have 'bid' for. Also, a challenging target has been set for the new Repairs Management Contractor to speed up the completion of repair works on empty properties.

# How are we performing?

**Housing uses lots of ‘indicators’ to monitor its performance on a quarterly and annual basis. Some are monitored internally by the Director of Housing, while others are scrutinised by the elected councillors.**

The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have agreed some ‘Tenant Selected Indicators’ with us which are monitored quarterly. These are in the key areas considered by the Federation to be most important to tenants.

This table shows the tenant selected indicators and our performance in 2010-11:



Indicator	Target	How we performed 2009-10	How we performed 2010-11	<span style="color: green;">↑</span> Above target <span style="color: orange;">→</span> On target <span style="color: red;">↓</span> Below target 2010/11
Alarm calls to Careline which were responded to within 30 seconds (including routine calls from Scheme Managers and test calls)	99%	New 2010-11	99.6%	<span style="color: green;">↑</span>
Average time taken to respond to Careline calls	10 seconds	8 seconds	6.4 seconds	<span style="color: green;">↑</span>
Amount of council rent collected as a proportion of rents owed	97%	97.5%	98.14%	<span style="color: green;">↑</span>
Number of estate inspections completed	82	73	94	<span style="color: green;">↑</span>
Repairs appointments kept	95%	97%	98%	<span style="color: green;">↑</span>
Average time to complete urgent repairs (working days)	5 days	4 days	5 days	<span style="color: orange;">→</span>
Average time to complete non-urgent repairs	42 days	56 days	18 days	<span style="color: green;">↑</span>
Emergency repairs completed within target time (24 hours)	99%	99%	98%	<span style="color: red;">↓</span>
3 day priority repairs undertaken within target time	95%	98%	98%	<span style="color: green;">↑</span>
Urgent repairs completed within target time of 5 working days	95%	Not available	69%	<span style="color: red;">↓</span>
Routine repairs completed within target time of 6 weeks	95%	95%	92%	<span style="color: red;">↓</span>
Tenant satisfaction with the general standard of the repairs service	98%	99%	99%	<span style="color: green;">↑</span>



Indicator	Target	How we performed 2009-10	How we performed 2010-11	 Above target  On target  Below target 2010/11
Total number of repairs where tenants have expressed "poor" satisfaction	None	7	7	Not applicable
Number of complaints upheld where the tenant was dissatisfied (excluding minor)	None	0 upheld	0 upheld	Not applicable
Average overall empty property period (excluding properties defined as 'difficult to let')	30 days	33 days	31 days	
Minor adaptations (properties adapted for tenants with disabilities) - time from the Council's decision to completion of work	28 days	22 days	21.5 days	
General adaptations - time from the Council's decision to completion of work	90 days	244 days	69 days	
Tenant satisfaction with gas servicing (percentage excellent or good)				 
(a) Gracelands (Contractor)	96%	98%	99%	
(b) Kinetics (Contractor)	96%	97%	97%	
Number of annual gas safety certificates lapsed (over 12 months) Graceland & TA Horn (Contractors)	0	98	101	
Overall satisfaction with the kitchen and bathroom programme - Mears (Contractor)	96%	100%	100%	
The proportion of council homes which are classed as 'non decent' according to the Government's standard for Decent Homes	0%	0%	0%	

# Complaints and compliments

All complaints are recorded and reviewed with managers on a quarterly basis, to see if there are any trends, or improvements that could be made. We report complaints to the Federation on a regular basis, including lessons learnt.

A panel of councillors called the Housing Appeals and Review Panel looks at appeals against certain decisions made by Housing. Decisions may also be reviewed by an Assistant Director of Housing.

We operate a clear and simple Compliments and Complaints Scheme, with four steps. You should make a complaint if you are not happy about the way we provided a service, or if we have failed to do something that was our responsibility. These are the steps:

- Step 1** Try and sort out the matter with a member of staff or the manager - most complaints are resolved at this stage.
- Step 2** Take your complaint to the relevant Assistant Director of Housing.
- Step 3** Make a complaint to the Chief Executive – it will be investigated by the Corporate Complaints Officer.
- Step 4** Explain your complaint to the Complaints Panel of councillors.

**Please contact us if you would like this Annual Report to be provided in any other way, as a large print version for example.**

- Last year Housing dealt with 131 Step 1 complaints, compared with 137 in 2009-10.
- We received 17 Step 2 complaints in 2010-11.
- 8 complaints progressed to Step 3, and none reached Step 4.
- The Housing Appeals and Review Panel dealt with 13 cases.

The Council's 'Compliments and Complaints' leaflet is available at all Council Information Desks. There is also a link on our website [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk). You will find a leaflet called 'Housing appeals, homelessness reviews and complaints' in your Tenants Handbook. This explains how you can make a complaint, or appeal against a decision we have made about you. To request a copy, please phone the Housing Information Team on 01992 564292 or email [housinginfo@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:housinginfo@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

We need to know when we've got things wrong - and when we've done something well. By investigating any complaints we can continually improve our services, and compliments help us identify areas of good practice which can be shared.



**Epping Forest District Council**  
Housing Directorate, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ

**Telephone:** Epping (01992) 564000  
[www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing)

# Tell us what you think

This Annual Report was produced in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. We would also like to thank Arthur Anderson, Molly Carter, Wyn Marshall and Maureen Sherrin of the Tenants Reading Group who met with us and helped us to agree the content and layout.



We have included a lot of information in this Annual Report, and we have tried to use plain language, but your feedback will help us when we produce future reports.

We would be pleased if you could give us your opinion on just 3 areas of this report, by filling in the form below and returning it to us. If you prefer to give your opinion by email, please respond to: [housinginfo@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:housinginfo@eppingforestdc.gov.uk) – or you can phone 01992 564292.

## Our housing standards

We gave details on progress in relation to our standards in five areas: 'Involving our tenants', 'Housing maintenance', 'Housing applications, lettings and rents', 'Keeping our neighbourhoods clean and safe' and 'Value for money'.

Was this information clear?      Yes       No

Do you disagree with anything we said? If you do, please explain why:

Is there anything missing that you wanted more information about? If yes, please give details:

## Our performance

We showed how we are performing in a number of areas

Do you think our performance is acceptable overall?      Yes       No       Don't know       Unable to tell

Are there any areas that particularly concern you? If yes, please give details:



# Tell us what you think (continued from overleaf)

## What do you think of the Annual Report overall?

Too long

Too short

About right

Too much information

Not enough information

About right

Very well presented

Fairly well presented

Hard to follow

Very easy to understand

Fairly easy to understand

Difficult to understand

Thank you. Now please give us any general comments that could help us when we produce next year's Annual Report.

### Please return your completed feedback form to:

The Housing Information Team  
Housing Directorate  
Epping Forest District Council  
Civic Offices, High Street  
Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ

### Or, you can drop the form into your Area Housing Office at:

The Civic Offices, Epping; The  
Broadway, Loughton; or Limes  
Farm Estate, Chigwell.



**Epping Forest District Council**  
Housing Directorate, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ  
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[www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing)