

Housing Strategy



2023-2027

**Working with our communities to provide great places
where people want to live, work, thrive and prosper
in safe good quality homes that meet their needs.**

**If you would like this document
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FOREWORD

To be inserted by Holly Whitbread

Photo



Signature



INTRODUCTION

This Housing Strategy highlights the golden thread from our Corporate Plan 2023 - 2027 through to the housing related services that we provide in the District.

For Stronger communities

we will:

- safeguard vulnerable people. Our teams will support residents in need, providing support and equality of opportunity in a district that is safe for everyone.

For Stronger place

we will:

- protect and enhance our green spaces for future generations while providing decent, safe homes to meet all our needs.

For a Stronger Council

we will:

- improve customer access to our services.

We will achieve these corporate objectives through our commitment to listen, work with our partners and target our resources where they are needed most during these challenging times and make a positive impact on people's lives by:

- making every penny count,
- striving to improve services, and
- delivering value for money.

To demonstrate our commitment, we have consulted the community and agreed the following shared vision for housing in the District over the next five years:

Working with our communities to provide great places where people want to live, work, thrive and prosper in safe good quality homes that meet their needs.

We have collectively agreed five key housing priorities to focus on between 2023-2027:

Priority 1: Increasing the supply of affordable housing

Priority 2: Ensuring quality, safety and high standards

Priority 3: Promoting health, wellbeing and independence

Priority 4: Facilitating economic growth and regeneration

Priority 5: Protecting and enhancing the environment

Our Housing Strategy sets out the aims and objectives we have agreed with residents and partner organisations in the District and includes a housing delivery plan with clear measurable outcomes that we are committed to achieving and reviewing together on an annual basis or more frequently if required.

VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

The commitments we have made in our Housing Strategy are enshrined in our values and behaviours:

Trust - We will be open and honest with each other and our customers. We will treat everyone with respect and take responsibility for our actions.

Performance - We will take pride in our work and celebrate our achievements. We will learn from our mistakes and always do what we say we will do.

One Team - We will work together as One Council, supporting each other and our partners to achieve better results for everyone.

Customer - We will put our customers at the heart of everything we do, providing services that are tailored to the different needs of our communities.

Innovation – We will seek new ways of working to improve and change to meet new challenges.

CONTEXT

LOCAL CONTEXT

Epping Forest District is one of the most sought-after places to live in the UK.

Our District is one of 12 district, borough and city local housing authorities located in the County of Essex. We are classified statistically as urban with significant rural populations, covering an area of approximately 339 square kilometres, divided into 24 town and parish councils.

These are mainly rural and lightly populated in the north and east, and more densely populated in the south (bordering the London boroughs of Enfield, Waltham Forest, Redbridge and Havering).

The majority of residents live across four centres; Buckhurst Hill, Epping, Loughton, and Waltham Abbey.

In 2019 our District was ranked 200 out of 317 lower tier authorities in England in relation to six indices; income, employment, health, education, crime, barriers to housing and services, and the environment (one being the most deprived).

Our overall ranking has improved gradually achieving its highest level since 2007 when last recorded in 2019. Our total score is made up of mainly affluent geographical areas with several pockets of relative deprivation.

(source Gov.UK National Statistics English indices of deprivation 2019)

Population growth

The 2021 National Census recorded the District as having a resident population of around 135,000. This is an increase of 8.3% from around 124,700 in 2011.

We have an aging population. Over the last ten years the number of residents aged 65 years and over has increased by 16.6%, the number of residents aged 15 to 64 years has risen by 5.7% and the number of children aged under 15 years has increased by 9.6%.

(Source ONS Census 2021)

Households by tenure type

There are estimated to be 54,557 households in the District. Approximately 70% of households are owner-occupiers and about 15% rent from private landlords. Around 14% of households live in social rented housing.

The Council is the largest social landlord in the District providing homes for 11% of households. The Council's portfolio of 6,465 properties including general needs houses and flats, disability adapted properties, sheltered accommodation for older and vulnerable people and hostels for homeless households. Housing associations provide just over 3% of residential premises in the District.

Housing supply and demand

The demand for all types of housing in the District far outweighs the supply of available homes to buy or rent on the open market, through affordable home ownership schemes or social housing for rent.

The succession of recent global challenges have all negatively impacted on the national and local housebuilding aspirations due to shortages in the labour market and materials, escalating costs and environmental considerations.

The Council's emerging Local Plan shapes future development in the District up to 2033. It sets out the level and distribution of planned growth, including new homes and employment land. The Local Plan identifies a requirement for 11,400 new properties for the period 2011- 2033. This includes a requirement for 2,851 new affordable homes between 2016-2033.

Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

We will collaborate with neighbouring councils to meet the demand for new housing. 16,000 sustainable new homes are planned across Harlow and Gilston Garden Town by 2033, of which 3,900 of are proposed in the Epping Forest District local authority area.

Supporting new developments

Housing Services will continue to work with Planning colleagues to implement the Local Plan. This will include supporting the development of appropriate housing for market sale, affordable homeownership, shared ownership, rent to buy, market rent and affordable rent. And providing evidence where necessary to ensure the mix of housing on individual sites reflect the needs of the local community.

Housing need

As a local housing authority, we operate a housing register for the allocation of Council and housing association accommodation (at affordable rent or social rent) to qualifying people in emergency, urgent or moderate housing need. On 31 March 2022 there were 1,314 households on the register waiting to be rehoused. There is a high demand for properties of all sizes although the greatest need is for 2-bedroom family houses.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Housing reform remains high on the Government's agenda. This is reflected in the largescale proposals to stimulate housebuilding, policies to address climate change and legislation to completely overhaul the regulation social housing after the enquiries into the fire at Grenfell Tower, and more recently of the private rental market.

Our Housing Strategy takes account of the range of current and emerging legislation and regulatory codes identified at the end of this document, and in particular the Building Safety Act, the Care Act, the Social Housing Regulation Bill, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the Renters Reform Bill.

As a stock holding and developing local housing authority we must prepare for:

- enhanced consumer standards, greater scrutiny, and proactive regulatory inspections
- a new regulator for building safety
- new Government targets for environmental sustainability
- an uplift in energy efficiency through the Future Home Standard
- a new standard for decent homes
- a new complaint handling code and an increased role for the Housing Ombudsman
- a New-Homes Ombudsman for owners of new-build homes

Measures which come soon after a range of statutory duties that have been introduced over recent years to prevent and reduce homelessness, end rough sleeping, and generally improve health and wellbeing.

The increasingly complex statutory and regulatory requirements coincide with a succession of unprecedented challenges as the nation recovers from a pandemic, responds to climate change and the effects of the war in Ukraine and tackles a cost-of-living crisis.

By September 2022, inflation had reached its highest level in 40 years along with a notable rise in interest rates that was predicted to continue, after being very low for over 10 years.

We recognize that in this fragile geo-socio-economic environment, we must maintain agile services and flexible policies to respond swiftly to the changing needs of our community.

We have given a commitment to review and update our housing delivery plan with our named partners, at least once a year, but more frequently if necessary, to evaluate our progress and consider wider social, economic, environmental, and technological opportunities and challenges as they arise.

OUR FIVE STRATEGIC HOUSING PRIORITIES

Our Housing Strategy is made up of five priorities with associated aims and objectives and clear measurable outcomes that we aim to deliver with our partners over the next five years.

PRIORITY 1

INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Together we will:

Maximise opportunities to increase the supply of suitable affordable housing and make best use of existing housing for affordable rent and affordable home ownership in the District.

We will achieve this through:

The Council Housebuilding Programme

Delivering a **range of Council owned housing** including **new family homes** in place of old garage sites we aim to build circa **195 Council homes for rent by 2026**.

- We will actively pursue land purchase opportunities and joint ventures and have created attractive hoardings as a marketing tool to generate interest.
- We will explore the potential to develop a variety of tenure types for affordable rent and affordable home ownership.

Strong partnerships

Working in partnership with **Homes England** and **Qualis (our wholly owned company)** as well as other registered providers to augment the range of new developments that meet local need.

- We will strengthen the working arrangements with Planning Services and potential developers of affordable housing including early discussions to improve efficiency and prevent avoidable delays to scheme delivery.

Funding opportunities

Maximising opportunities to **secure funding** for a mixed portfolio of affordable housing

- We will continue to work with Homes England to submit strong timely bids for funding where it is appropriate and in the local interest to do so.
- We will generally pursue the maximum percentage of developer contributions to affordable housing on individual sites in accordance with the emerging Local Plan and any Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) where it is viable to do so.

- We will generally expect the affordable housing mix to reflect the housing market mix in terms of size of units, unless local evidence demonstrates that on some sites a different approach needs to be taken in accordance with the Local Plan and any SPD.

The private rented sector

Continuing to work with private landlords in these challenging times to improve access to **good quality affordable private rented housing** for people in housing need.

- Our Private Rented Sector Lettings Officer will liaise with landlords on an individual basis to prevent and relieve homelessness and arrange settled accommodation.
- We are preparing for the potential impact on supply of Government proposals to reform the private rented sector including the end of no-fault evictions, the introduction of a decent home standard, and changes to landlord and tenant's rights, responsibilities, and enforcement action.

Allocating accommodation

Allocating Council and housing association accommodation fairly and efficiently in accordance with our **updated Allocations Scheme for 2022- 2027**.

- We will make best use of available temporary and settled accommodation, aim to minimise the void turnaround time, and assist and incentivise people who want to move to smaller accommodation and/or sheltered housing.

PRIORITY 2

ENSURING QUALITY, SAFETY, AND HIGH STANDARDS

Together we will

Provide and maintain high quality safe housing and neighbourhoods that meet or exceed local and national quality, safety, satisfaction, and service standard and ensure residents feel respected, listened to, and have redress if things go wrong.

We will achieve this through:

Safe buildings

Complying with the new **Building Safety Act** and the **Construction Design and Management Standards**.

- We will rigorously adhere to our statutory building safety obligations and construction design and management standards for the homes we build and maintain directly and the services provided for us by Qualis Group Ltd. (Qualis) our wholly owned company, and other contractors.
- We will ensure compliance through and transparent internal and external scrutiny of the big six fire, gas, electricity, water, asbestos and lifts and all associated health and safety building regulations as they are introduced.

Decent homes

Managing our assets to ensure properties meet the new **Decent Homes Standard**

- Our Asset Management Strategy will set out how we will work in partnership with Qualis to ensure we meet and maintain the revised Decent Home Standard for our stock
- We will ensure the provision of a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service that responds to the needs of and offers choice to tenants and meets all requirements that provide for the health and safety of residents in their home.

Resident involvement

Listening and treating residents with respect, increasing opportunities for **resident involvement**, and delivering the **tenant satisfaction measures**.

- We will gather report on and respond to the nationally agreed tenant satisfaction measures covering repairs, safety, neighbourhoods, anti-social behaviour, and complaints.
- Through our Resident Involvement Strategy, we will put customers at the heart of what we do, from helping to decide on new services and estate improvements to getting actively involved with scrutinizing and improving the services we are already providing.

Customer care

Inspiring and training staff to provide **excellent customer care** and **professional high-quality** housing services.

- Through our tenant census we will gather up to date information to ensure we are equipped to provide fair access to services that are tailored to meet the diverse needs of our communities based on their circumstances.
- We will upgrade our ICT systems to increase efficiency, improve digital communication with our residents where appropriate, and for staff to provide and receive information when out and about in our neighbourhoods.
- We will continue to invest in the ongoing professional development of our staff to ensure they have the technical knowledge skills and experience to fulfil the Council's duties.

Accountability

Taking **a co-regulatory approach** to ensuring that we are adhering to the regulatory framework for social housing and supporting tenants to hold us to account.

- We will maintain an efficient review of our services and work collaboratively with residents, Members of the Council the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman, in their respective roles to make sure we operate within the Consumer Regulations and the Complaints Handling Code.

PRIORITY 3

HEALTH WELLBEING AND INDEPENDENCE

Together we will:

Promote health and wellbeing to enable residents to live safe independent lives and receive the appropriate housing related support when it is needed.

We will achieve this through:

Joint working

Actively utilising our position on the **Health and Wellbeing Board** and its focus the Robert Wood Johnson model of the wider influences on health and wellbeing and **interdependencies with housing prospects** to achieve good outcomes for residents.

- We will take every opportunity to pursue efficient partnership initiatives with Public Health, Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership, Social Care, Communities and Culture and third sector organisations in keeping with the requirements of the Health and Care Act
- We will build on opportunities to share services with other professionals, such as recent funding for co-located NHS clinicians specialising in mental health and substance abuse to help people who may also be struggling to obtain or sustain settled living arrangements.

Appropriate assistance

Offering **appropriate assistance** at the right time for people who are, or may become vulnerable, to **build resilience** and live independent lives to the best of their ability.

- We will continue to develop trauma informed services for people in housing need, and provide training for our staff to understand traumatic stress, how this can affect reactions and the complex needs of survivors.
- We will take advantage of the opportunity for multi-agency whole person support and referrals to the statutory, voluntary and business services that are available at the Community hub.
- We will pursue Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation for the service we offer for survivors of domestic abuse.

Personal housing plans

Taking a whole person approach to personal housing plans that also address individual **experiences**, and **aspirations** through the principles of **social prescribing**.

- We will incorporate the principles of social prescribing in Personal Housing Plans for people who approach the Council in housing need
- We will listen and agree a plan with practical step-by-step measures to help individuals help themselves achieve their longer-term aspirations as well as addressing their immediate needs.
- Achieving aspirations may include agreeing to join free on-line training and a saving plan to set up a small business, or planned steps to improve a credit score over several years to qualify for shared ownership or rent to buy.

Removing barriers

Actively removing barriers that may unintentionally prevent people from accessing our services.

- We will review the Housing related aspects of the National Disability Strategy and create an action plan to ensure people with mental health, physical health and learning disabilities can fully participate in consultation, that disability is included in hate-crime policies.
- We will use the learning from equalities impact assessments and health impact assessments to provide fair and equitable services.

Housing for older people

Modernising our housing services for older people and the **Sheltered Housing** that we provide to make the best use of assistive technology, disability adaptations and available properties.

- We will upgrade resident's emergency alarm systems and provide group demonstrations and question and answer sessions.
- We will review the supply and demand for our sheltered housing schemes and co-produce a strategy to meet current and future need.

PRIORITY 4

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND REGENERATION

Together we will:

Offer help and advice to bridge the gap between the cost of living and the ability of households (particularly those most in need) to meet these costs, and create great places where people want to live work and prosper.

We will achieve this through:

Tackling the cost-of-living crisis

Promoting and delivering initiatives to reduce **energy bills** and the take- up of **help** that is available to meet increasing **household costs** and **manage debts** and a time of hardship.

- We will provide up to date advice and signpost residents to services and organisations that can provide practical assistance, ranging from foodbanks to furniture schemes and help with application forms etc.
- We will review the support that is available for Council tenants who are struggling to pay their rent or are at risk of losing their home and how to access free debt advice schemes.
- We will administer short term financial assistance for a limited number of people facing urgent hardship and invest in energy efficient technologies for newbuild and retrofit dwellings for longer term solutions.

Promoting employment and training initiatives

Where appropriate, encouraging households in housing need to take up **employment, training, and apprenticeship initiatives**, to improve their economic wellbeing and address local skills shortages.

- The Council itself is one of 30 large employers in Essex known as 'Anchor Organizations' because of our investment in staff development and wellbeing.
- We will promote the 'Develop me' interactive hub to link local employers with local residents who are seeking employment or training and have secured funding for a job coach to support people experiencing multiple disadvantages (including homelessness) into work.

Estate regeneration

Creating great places where Council housing and mixed tenure estates are viewed as privileged parts of the District **where people want to live work and prosper.**

- We will continue to expand our More than Bricks and Mortar campaign to regenerate neighbourhoods - with the same ethos of engaging local residents with major planned works, and welcoming social enterprises to help raise funds and improve the look and feel of our estates.

First steps to home ownership

Promoting opportunities for residents to take their **first steps to homeownership.**

- We will actively promote the steps to buying a home or a share of a home for the first time. This will be through targeted campaigns, information on our website and during discussions with households in social housing or who are seeking housing advice about current and future schemes and initiatives such as shared ownership and rent to buy.

Local solutions

Considering local solutions such as **keyworker housing** to address local skills shortages in specific areas if there is a need and community led demand.

- We have modified the Housing Allocations Scheme 2022- 2027 to allow for local lettings plans to facilitate keyworker housing in exceptional circumstances subject to Cabinet approval on a scheme-by-scheme basis.

PRIORITY 5

PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENT

Together we will:

Preserve restore and celebrate the natural environment and the cultural heritage that is unique to the district, whilst providing decent, safe homes to meet all our needs and fulfilling our pledge to reduce carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030.

We will achieve this through:

Green spaces

Improving the look and feel of the green spaces on our council and **mixed tenure estates**.

- We will focus on protecting enhancing and maintaining green spaces through sympathetic landscaping, tree planting, and community growing schemes as part of our More than Bricks and Mortar campaign, through our Council Housebuilding and Regeneration programmes and in negotiations over developer contributions.

Sustainable homes and lifestyles

Increasing **energy efficiency**, diminishing the use of **fossil fuels** minimising the impact on **biodiversity**, creating **less waste** and reducing maintenance.

- Where possible our new-build Council housing will be to Passivhaus standards Passivhaus will also be considered for retrofitting existing stock depending on site suitability.
- We will increase the availability of sustainable transport options such as vehicle charging points (EVPs) pedestrianised areas and cycle stores for new-build Council housing and mixed tenure regeneration schemes .
- We will work collaboratively to reduce reuse and recycle more of the waste that is produced during the development and maintenance of our estates.
- We will expect other registered providers to follow the Council's Employers Requirements for well-designed sustainable housing when developing affordable housing in the District.

Designing out crime

Designing out crime and the **fear** of crime to **deter opportunity for criminal activity**, reduce vulnerability to crime and improve the **quality of life** for our residents.

- We will work collaboratively with the Community Safety Partnership to incorporate good design into new developments and estate improvement schemes
- We will maximise joint funding opportunities following the successful Safer Streets bid which included the removal of local crime generators.

Environmental health

Working in partnership to tackle **environmental health issues** such as noise and air pollution, fly tipping, anti-social and criminal behaviour, the condition of private sector stock and licencing laws.

- We will work collaboratively with colleagues and other agencies to access the full range of tools to successfully prevent and efficiently resolve environmental health issues including evidence gathering, targeting hot-spots and enforcement action where necessary.

Raising awareness

Launching campaigns to **raise awareness** of how to **protect and respect** the environment whilst **saving money**.

- We will regularly publicise hints and tips on how to reduce carbon emissions and the benefits of doing so.
- We will produce social media campaigns to reduce reuse and recycle more of the waste that is generated in local homes and on estates.

ACHIEVING THE INTENDED OUTCOMES

Monitoring arrangements and accountability:

- The actions on the delivery plan will be reviewed annually and approved by the Portfolio Holder for Housing
- Lead organisations and officers will be agreed for each action on the delivery plan
- Progress and outcomes will be tracked and recorded for each action every six months
- The lead organisation for each action will be responsible for informing partners of any issues or risks between progress updates with a view to resolution.

PARTNERS SIGNED UP TO THE STRATEGY

Add

DELIVERY PLAN

Add

GLOSSARY

Add

LINKS

The strategy pays due regard to the following

Corporate Plan 2018-2023	<p>The Strategy supports Epping Forest District Council's Corporate Plan objectives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epping Forest Corporate Plan 2023-2027(Draft)
Regulatory Standards	<p>The Strategy pays due regard to the following regulatory guidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England June 2012 as amended • Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) (Amendment) Regulations June 2021 • Future Homes (and Building) Standard • Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: Homelessness Code of Guidance • Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) • Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code July 2020 • National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) March 2012 as amended • Public Sector Equality Duty April 2011 • Regulator of Social Housing Economic and Consumer Standards • Improving Access to Social Housing for Victims of Domestic Abuse in Refuges November 2018
Legislation	<p>The Strategy supports the following legislation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 • Building Safety Act • Care Act 2014 • Children's Act 1989 and Children's Act 2004 • Data Protection Act 2018 • Domestic Abuse Act 2021 • Equality Act 2010 • Fire Safety Act • Homelessness Act 2002 as amended • Housing Act 1985 • Housing Act 1996 as amended • Housing and Planning Act 2016 as amended • Immigration and Social Security Coordination Act (ISSC) 2020 • Localism Act 2011

Emerging legislation	<p>The Strategy takes into account the following emerging legislation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill• Local Authority (Housing Allocation) Bill• Renters Reform Bill• Social Housing (Regulation) Bill
Related strategies	<p>The Strategy is linked to the following strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green Infrastructure Strategy 2021• Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027• Resident Participation Strategy 2022-2027 (Draft)
Related policies and guidance	<p>The Strategy is linked to the following policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allocations Scheme 2022-2027• Anti-social Behaviour and Hate Crime Policy• Customer Complaints Policy• Decant Policy (draft)• Domestic Abuse Policy 2022-2025 (draft)• Health Impact Assessment Guidance• Income Recovery Policy 2020• Privacy Policy• Safeguarding Policy• Sustainability Guidance 2020• Tenancy Policy 2022-2027

VERSION CONTROL LOG

Version	Date	Details of changes included in update	Author
00.01	24.10.22	DRAFT FOR APG	Janice Nuth
00.02	08.11.22	DRAFT FOR EXEC BRIEFING	Janice Nuth

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