

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference:

C-040-2023-24

Date of meeting:

5 February 2024



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Housing and Strategic health Partnerships (Cllr Holly Whitbread)

Subject: Independent Living for Older People Strategy, 2023 to 2028

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

1. To comment upon and consider the Independent Living for Older People in Epping Forest Strategy 2023/24 to 2028/29 as in Appendix A
2. To comment upon and consider approve the Annual Delivery Plan, summarised within the appendices of the strategy document

Executive Summary:

The Strategy gives direction and a framework to the Independent Living Service for modernising housing services for older people and, the independent living schemes that we provide.

The Strategy aims to make best use of assistive technology to help older people remain independent for as long as possible.

Report:

1. Background

What is Independent Living? - The Council's independent living is accommodation for people who are over the age of 60. It is suitable for those who are capable of living on their own but feel more secure with the support of an Independent Living Officer and access to digitally enabled services e.g., Telecare services.

Independent Living Schemes can be the ideal solution for older people who want to keep their independence, without the worry of maintaining a large property. As people age, some older people appreciate living in a smaller, easier to manage self-contained accommodation with added security and the opportunity to make new friends and socialise.

Epping Forest District Council is the largest social landlord in the district providing homes for 11% of households. Housing Associations provide just over 3% of residential premises in the district.

EFDC currently manages 12 Independent Living schemes providing a total of 463 homes, mostly one-bed homes, mainly occupied by single people.

Between the 2011 and 2021 census the population of Epping Forest increased by around 10,300 to around 135,000. The population of people aged over 65 has increased in the same period from 22,550 to 26,269 (around 1.4%), with the biggest increase being in those aged 65 to 74 years.

In response to the changing demographics, needs and aspirations of our older population, and furthering a piece of consultancy carried out in 2022, it is timely and appropriate for EFDC to develop a strategy for our older people service.

The Strategy also contains a high-level delivery Annual Delivery Plan which is to be further developed in 2024.

2. Key Objectives of the Strategy

1. Work towards providing aspirational accommodation for older people
2. Make best use of assistive technology to help older people remain independent for as long as possible
3. To keep the delivery model under review
4. Engage with residents to improve the quality, suitability and desirability of our Independent Living schemes
5. Carry out options appraisals for poorly performing stock in the Asset Management Strategy
6. Future housing provision for older people to be reflected in the Asset Management Strategy and stock condition survey.

3. Priorities and Delivery of the Strategy

The Independent Living for Older People in Epping Forest Strategy aligns with the Councils Housing Strategy.

The strategy contains a series of high-level priorities detailed on pages 5 and 6, these are summarised below. The strategy also contains a more detailed Annual Delivery Plan (Appendix 2, Pages 14 and 15) which, will be continually monitored and, reviewed annually to ensure the objectives of the five-year Strategy are met.

Priorities – to support strategy objectives:

Priority 1: Increasing the supply of affordable housing

Refurbishments of our independent living schemes and changing underused lounges into homes.

Priority 2: Ensuring quality, safety, and high standards

Upgrade our emergency alarm system and procure a new monitoring provider.

Priority 3: Promoting health, wellbeing, and independence

To keep our delivery model for supporting residents under review.

Priority 4: Facilitating economic growth and regeneration

To undertake an options appraisal for poorly performing stock.

Priority 5: Protecting and enhancing the environment

Continue to promote and hold an annual Flowers in Bloom competition.

4. Consultation undertaken:

The Strategy has been formulated in consultation with representatives of the Epping Forest District Council Tenants and Leaseholders' Panel and, sets out how the strategy will delivered over the next five years.

The Strategy was formally presented to EFDC Tenant and Leaseholder Panel on 5th December 2023. The panel were supportive of strategy and noted this as being a good piece of work.

Specific comments from the Panel and, through 'chatterbox' sessions at EFDC's Independent Living Schemes include the following, and have been incorporated into the draft strategy:

- We (EFDC) should be clear about how often the support model will be reviewed. We have added, under the section 'Our delivery model' on page 7, a commitment to review the delivery model at least every two years.
- We should include reference to the move to a "stay-put" policy in respect of fire safety evacuation as recommended by both the fire service and through the Fire Risk Assessment (FRA). This will be the approach following completion of fire protection compartmentalisation work. An additional sentence has been included in the paragraphs under Priority 2 on page 5.
- Residents were also keen to see refence to bicycle storage on Independent Living Schemes, this has been added.

5. Scrutiny Comments:

The Committee:

- Welcomed the Strategy
- Were advised that WIFI was not currently available in communal areas, though we are rolling it out in 2 schemes shortly.
- Suggested that preparation for the implications of digital and BT PSTN switch off and the impact for individual resident's telephone lines should be considered, and that a wider older person strategy could be revisited.
- Were happy to see the residents have been listened too and Independent Living officers have returned to the schemes a minimum of two days per week.

Resolved:

The Committee considered, commented and commended the report to Cabinet

6. Resource implications:

There are no additional resource requirements within the scope of this report.

7. Legal and Governance Implications, Relevant Statutory Powers: None

8. Corporate Plan Implications:

The Strategy aligns with the higher-level Corporate Plan strategic aims and the Housing Strategy 2023-2027 key priorities: Stronger Communities, Stronger Place and Stronger Council.

9. Background Papers: None

10. Risk Management: N/A

11. Equality:

An Equality Impact Assessment for the Independent Living for Older People Strategy 2023/24 to 2028/29 has been completed and is available on request.

12. Key Decision: (if required): None.