

# Homelessness Strategy

**2018/19 to 2020/21**

*Epping Forest District Council*

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# Executive Summary

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## 1. Foreword

- 1.1 Under section 1(3), (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities have a duty to review and publish their Homelessness Strategy on at least a 5 yearly basis. As this area of work regularly changes it was agreed that the Council's Strategy would be reviewed every three years. The Strategy links with the Council's Housing Strategy, Allocations Scheme, and the Corporate Plan. The Strategy sets out achievements since 2015/16 and incorporates the needs and demands on the service and actions that need to be undertaken over the coming three years. It also sets out the way in which the Council will meet with its new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into force on 3 April 2018.
- 1.2 The homelessness function is provided through the Housing Options Section. A staffing structure chart is shown at Appendix 2.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The last three years have seen a high demand upon the Homelessness Prevention Team. The Service has been very successful in preventing homelessness in many cases. This has been possible due the Team maximising the use of the range of tools available, in particular, those set out in the Homeless Prevention Section of the Strategy.
- 2.2 There are a number of people across the Epping Forest District in Housing Need with people seeking resolutions to their housing difficulties. This is especially prevalent amongst households who are having problems sustaining and securing accommodation across the Private Rented Sector.

## 3. Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- 3.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the associated Code of Guidance has brought major changes to the way in which services are provided to homeless applicants. The considerable additional duties placed upon authorities came into force on 3 April 2018. The Council's approach to meeting with the new duties are set out in detail within this Homelessness Strategy.
- 3.2 Under the Act, and the new associated Homelessness Code of Guidance the new duties placed upon authorities nationally to prevent and reduce homelessness are (in summary) as follows:
  - The period that a person can be considered to be threatened with homelessness or it is likely that they will become homeless is extended from 28 days to 56 days
  - An applicant is threatened with homelessness at the point the Section 21 Notice (the standard notice period provided by private landlords to tenants), has been served as opposed to at the end of the notice period. This prevents councils advising applicants to remain in occupation beyond expiry
  - Placing an emphasis on services preventing homelessness from occurring thereby strengthening the duties on local authorities to provide advice, secure accommodation or offer other assistance
  - Ensuring services meet the needs of groups at particular risk to reflect their complex needs and vulnerabilities
  - A duty to carry out an assessment of an applicant's case notifying the applicant of the assessment in writing and providing a Personalised Housing Plan in order to give effective support
  - The applicant's right to a Review in accordance with the legislation

- The ending of the homelessness duty if the applicant “is unreasonably refusing to co-operate”
- The requirement to secure accommodation (under the new “Relief Duty”) for at least 6 months for all applicants who the authority is satisfied are eligible for assistance

#### **4. Duty to Provide Advisory Services**

- 4.1 The Council provides free homelessness advice and information services to all residents including advice designed with certain vulnerable groups in mind.
- 4.2 The Council has a rolling Service Level Agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in the District to provide a range of advice and support to those faced with housing difficulties. In addition, a signed protocol has been developed in conjunction with the National Homeless Advice Service.
- 4.3 The Housing Options Section provides advice and information leaflets. General information on Housing Services can be obtained through the Council’s website. Housing applicants are able to make an application to join the Council’s Housing Register via the Council’s Choice Based Lettings administrator’s Locata Housing Service’s (LHS) Website at HomeOption.org Applicants can also seek information from the Housing Options Section on accessing accommodation in the private rented sector and advice on dealing with difficult issues including domestic abuse etc.

#### **5. Homelessness Prevention**

- 5.1 The Council takes all reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any at risk eligible applicant regardless of their priority need. This may include assisting them to stay in their current accommodation, or helping them to find a new place to live.
- 5.2 The Homeless Prevention Service has been very successful in preventing homelessness during the last 3 years. The objective of reducing the number of households making a homeless application by providing effective prevention measures continues to be met. However, the Council is committed to ensuring that if homelessness cannot be prevented for any reason, it will accept a homeless application in order to decide what statutory duty may be owed to the household.

#### **6. Personalised Housing Plans**

- 6.1 The Council will undertake an assessment of the circumstances and needs of all eligible applicants who are homeless, or threatened with becoming homeless within 56 days. A Personalised Housing Plan will be drawn up which sets out the “reasonable steps” the Council and the applicant will take, including other appropriate agencies, in order to prevent homelessness.

#### **7. Homelessness Relief Duty**

- 7.1 Under the “Homelessness Relief Duty” the Council will take reasonable steps to help eligible applicants (not just those who are in priority need) to secure suitable accommodation using all of the tools available set out in this Homelessness Strategy. The Relief Duty will come to an end when the applicant has suitable accommodation available for occupation for at least 6 months. There are other circumstances for ending the duty which are set out in detail under the relevant section of this Homelessness Strategy.

## **8. Review of Certain Decisions**

- 8.1 Applicants have a right to request a review of certain decisions made by the Council. Information on the process is set out under the Homelessness Reviews Section of this Strategy.

## **9. Duty to Refer**

- 9.1 Under the Homelessness Reduction Act a duty to refer will be placed upon appropriate agencies from October 2018 to refer to the Council those at risk of becoming homeless. Such agencies include hospitals, prisons; job centres probation services and NHS Trusts.

## **10. Housing Options Planning**

- 10.1 Due to the demand on the Housing Options service, the Council has a number of initiatives to assist those who are experiencing housing difficulties and may be faced with losing their homes and are as follows:

### ***Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS)***

- 10.2 The Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS) is a registered charity which operates on a voluntary basis to provide damage deposit guarantees (equivalent to one month's rent) to landlords on behalf of applicants to assist them in securing accommodation in the private rented sector.

### ***Rental Loan Scheme***

- 10.3 The Rental Loan Scheme assists applicants in securing accommodation in the private rented sector. Under the scheme, a loan is granted to meet the cost of the first month's rental in advance, repayable by the applicant interest free over a period of 36 months. An applicant can potentially benefit from both a rental loan and a rent deposit guarantee.

## **11. Preventing Re-possession Fund**

- 11.1 The Council's preventing re-possession assists by providing small loans to families at risk of homelessness through repossession or evictions. Financial assistance consists of small interest free loans ranging from £1,000 to £3,000 per household available interest free repayable over a period of three years depending on the amount of the loan. The loans are to assist residents in all forms of tenure who are struggling with their rental payments and face eviction. Only households who, following investigations, are found to be genuinely unable to pay their rent or mortgage due to "income shock" caused by loss of earnings where there is no history of previous arrears are able to benefit and are only agreed when the recipient is prepared to act on debt advice to make repayments more affordable following the intervention of an advisor.

## **12. Mediation - Parental Exclusions**

- 12.1 Young people can sometimes have volatile relationships with their parents and can be at risk of exclusion from their home. Since 2004, "Relate" have undertaken mediation in a number of cases to attempt to reconcile young people with their parents in order for them to remain at home. The Council also works with Essex County Council's Homelessness Response Team who also mediates with families.

### **13. Single Accommodation for Epping Forest (SAFE)**

- 13.1 SAFE is part of NACRO Community Enterprises, a registered housing association and charity, and offers temporary accommodation with support to single homeless people. It works in partnership with the Council, Epping Assessment and Child Protection Team and Essex Probation Service (EPS).
- 13.2 It provides 37 bed spaces across the District in a mix of shared houses and individual units. Around 80% of all referrals are made by the Communities Directorate, Learning and Social Care, and Essex Probation Services. In addition, some self-referrals are made. Applicants must be single and homeless or at risk of homelessness. The target age group is 18 to 25 years, although others are accepted depending on their circumstances.

### **14. The Role of Essex County Council's Social Care**

- 14.1 The majority of children's services are now provided on a 'quadrant basis' (Essex has been split into four geographical areas with each area being a quadrant). Children in the Epping Forest District receive services from the 'West Essex Quadrant'.
- 14.2 The Leaving & After Care Team takes casework responsibility for children up to the age of 15 years and six months. The team provides support whilst the young people are in care. The team also provides aftercare support according to the specific provisions of the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children Leaving Care Act 2000.
- 14.3 The Council's Homelessness Prevention Team are notified by the Leaving and After Care Team prior to a young person leaving care in order that their housing needs can be assessed. In general, the Council will arrange for the SAFE Scheme through NACRO to accommodate young people leaving care to give them extra preparation for independent living. The Council then re-houses the young person when they move on from SAFE into Council accommodation often with Floating Support.

### **15. Services for People Involved in Drug and Alcohol Abuse**

- 15.1 The Housing Options Section deals mainly with referrals from the Community Drug and Alcohol Services known as "Choices". The service works with clients of all ages with their funding coming predominantly through the Essex Drug and Alcohol Partnership (EDAP) whose commissioning function is managed by the Essex Drug and Alcohol Action Team based at Essex County Council's offices in Chelmsford.
- 15.2 Some referrals are dealt with by the Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Services (ADAS). ADAS clients are assessed and complex alcohol cases are then referred to the Community Drug and Alcohol Team (CDAT) with Choices dealing with drug only cases. Client with Alcohol problems far outnumber those with drug problems.
- 15.3 Homelessness is a common problem with drug and alcohol clients. In order to deal with the problem, the Council has entered into a local protocol with treatment providers to ensure effective working arrangements.

### **16. Interim and Temporary Accommodation**

- 16.1 The Council uses a variety of interim and temporary accommodation, including self-contained flats at Hemnall House, Epping, a Women's Refuge move-on scheme and rooms at the Homeless Persons' Hostel Norway House, North Weald where support is provided. Bed and breakfast and other similar accommodation for households without children are sometimes provided.

## **17. Epping Forest District Council's Allocations Scheme**

17.1 The Council operates a HomeOption choice based lettings scheme and has its own Housing Register framed in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Allocations Scheme, which is reviewed periodically by the Cabinet.

17.2 The Scheme includes vacancies in the Council's own housing stock and housing association properties for which the Council has nomination rights. Applicants are able to "express an interest" in properties advertised on the website and also through a fortnightly Property List.

17.3 The Council has reviewed its Housing Allocations Scheme. The revised Scheme comes into force on 1 July 2018 and can be downloaded from the Council's website at: [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing)

17.4 Under the Scheme, applicants accepted by the Council as homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless under the Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended who are living in:

- bed and breakfast accommodation (or similar accommodation) secured by the Council, but excluding those in the process of being referred to another local housing authority under S.198 of the Housing Act 1996
- the Council's Homeless Persons Hostel (Norway House or Hemnall House), a Women's Refuge or non-secure tenancies in the Council's own housing stock
- homeless applicants living in the Council's Refuge for 6 months and have been served with a S 21 Notice (giving notice of ending the assured tenancy), where the Manager of the Refuge has notified the Council that the tenant is ready to move on.

Will be housed in accordance with Paragraph 17.6 below.

### ***Applicants Living in Supported Housing***

17.5 Persons to whom the Council does not owe the full homelessness duty, who and have been placed by the Council under its nomination rights or with the support of the Homelessness Prevention Team for a least 9 months and are ready to move on, at either the:

- S.A.F.E. (Single Accommodation for Epping Forest "NACRO") Project;
- Young Parent Scheme at Railway Meadow, Ongar
- Supported housing scheme for vulnerable adults at Tolpuddle House, Ongar
- Supported housing scheme at Elm Court, Theydon Bois
- NACRO scheme for those with mental health issues
- Young parent and child scheme at Bartletts, Chelmsford

Will have a lesser Residency Criteria of 2 years, and be housed in accordance with Paragraph 17.6 below.

17.6 Those accepted as homeless or persons placed in supported housing schemes in accordance with Paragraphs 17.4 & 17.5 above, will be made one offer of suitable accommodation after receiving their S.184 decision letter, generally in flatted accommodation (including maisonettes). In order to discharge its main homeless duty the Council will offer homeless applicants a 2 year Secure (fixed-term) Tenancy to give some temporary stability in order to prepare them to make their own arrangements thereafter. The Council will retain its duty to help [provide housing advice and assistance to] the applicant if at the end of the fixed-term it is established that they have become unintentionally homeless. If the offer is refused, the applicant will have the right to seek a Review of the suitability of the accommodation (applicants are advised to move into the offered accommodation whilst the review is undertaken, as if the Review is not in their favour they will be able to retain the property where they are living).

If not successful, the Council's duty under the Homelessness Act 1996 as amended to provide accommodation will be considered to be discharged.

## **18 Out of Hours Service**

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

## **19. Consultation**

- 19.1 A consultation exercise on this Homelessness Strategy has been undertaken with all partner agencies, and Town and Parish Councils. Following consideration by the Council's Communities Select Committee, the Strategy was approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder in August 2018.

## **20. Action Plans**

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

# Foreword

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Under section 1(3), (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities have a duty to review and publish their Homelessness Strategy on at least a 5 yearly basis. As this area of work regularly changes it was agreed that the Council's Strategy would be reviewed every three years. The Strategy links with the Council's Housing Strategy, Housing Allocations Scheme, and the Corporate Plan. The Strategy sets out achievements since 2015/2016 and incorporates the needs and demands on the service and actions that need to be undertaken over the coming three years. It also sets out the way in which the Council will meet with its new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into force in April 2018.
- 1.2 The homelessness function is provided through the Housing Options Section. A staffing structure chart is shown at Appendix 2.

## 2. Background to the Council's Homelessness Service

- 2.1 The homelessness service is provided by the Housing Options Section. The Council works within the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 and follows the guidance set out in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Code of Practice in Rented Housing and the requirements of the Council's Equality Impact Assessments.
- 2.2 As at May 2018, the Council has 1,361 home seekers on its Housing Register. In addition the Council has 203 home seekers on our Supplementary Waiting List. The Council has housing stock of 6,391 properties.
- 2.3 The last three years have seen 121 new affordable homes provided within the Epping Forest District. At the time of writing (June 2018), there are 9 developments that are on site, which will deliver a total of 107 new affordable homes, and a further 30 sites with planning permission, which will deliver a further 191 new affordable homes. The Council has its own house-building programme, with Phase 1 already completed. At the time of writing, the Council has completed 38 new affordable homes (included in the number above). The Council's has a target of providing 30 new affordable homes each year for the next 10 years. The Council is in the process of completing its new "Local Plan" which will seek to identify a future supply of development sites for the next 10 years. The Plan was agreed in December 2017.

## 3. Tenancy Strategy & Tenancy Policy

- 3.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to publish a Tenancy Strategy which, must set out the matters to which Registered Providers of Housing (including the Council) are to have regard in formulating their policies relating to:
- The kinds of tenancies they grant;
  - The circumstances in which they will grant a tenancy of a particular kind;
  - Where they grant tenancies for a term certain, the lengths of those terms; and
  - The circumstances in which they will grant a further tenancy on the coming to an end of an existing tenancy
- 3.2 The West Essex Housing Forum, which comprises three local authorities in West Essex being Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford District Councils have adopted one Tenancy Strategy that covers the three local authorities' areas in West Essex. The Strategy was adopted by the Cabinet on 22 October 2012.

3.3 In addition, all Registered Providers are required to publish and be responsible for their own individual Tenancy Policy. The Council's Tenancy Policy came into force on 1 September 2013. The Cabinet agreed a Review of the Tenancy Policy on 9 March 2015; the revised Policy took effect from 27 July 2015 and sets out:

- The kinds of tenancies granted
- Circumstances where a tenancy of a particular type will be granted and the length of the term
- Circumstances where a term of less than 5 years will be granted
- Circumstances where another tenancy will be granted on expiry on the same or another property
- How applicants/tenants can appeal against the length of the Secure (fixed-term) Tenancy or the decision not to grant a further tenancy
- Taking account of the needs of vulnerable people
- Provision of Advice and Assistance if another tenancy is not granted at the end of the fixed-term
- Discretionary succession rights

# Homelessness Reduction Act – 2017

## Summary of the New Duties

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### 1. Background

- 1.1 This Section of the Council's Homelessness Strategy sets out in summary the new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into force on 3 April 2018 and radically changed the approach to combatting homelessness. The Council's approach to meeting each aspect of the Act in order to assist residents who are either homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days is set out in each of the relevant sections. A summary of each of the duties are as follows:

### 2. Advisory Services

- 2.1 Any person who considers they are threatened with homelessness will be encouraged to make early contact with the Council and seek Advisory Services.

The Council will provide free homelessness advice and information services to all residents who are in need of such services. This will include advice designed for certain vulnerable groups including care leavers, former armed forces personnel, those leaving custody, victims of domestic abuse, people leaving hospital and those with mental health issues.

- 2.2 Advice will include:

- Prevention of homelessness
- Securing accommodation when homeless
- The rights of applicants and the Council's duties
- Help available to people threatened with or who are homeless
- How to access available help
- Assistance to qualifying applicants to join the Council's Housing Register

### 3. Personalised Housing Plans

- 3.1 Where an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness becoming homeless within 56 days, an assessment will be completed and a Personalised Housing Plan (the Plan) drawn up shared with the applicant. The Plan will include the following:

- The circumstances that caused the applicant to become homeless or threatened with homelessness
- The "reasonable steps" the Council, the applicant and other appropriate agencies will take tailored to the person which are realistic in order to resolve their homelessness
- The housing need of the applicant including what accommodation would be suitable for the applicant and any person/s with whom the applicant resides ("other relevant person/s")
- An assessment of the support needs for the applicant or any other relevant person/s

- 3.2 The Council will notify the applicant of the Plan in writing and agree with them the assessment including the steps to be taken by the applicant to secure suitable accommodation and the steps the Council will take.

- 3.3 The Plan will be kept under review until the Council's duty comes to an end.

### 4. Prevention of Homelessness

- 4.1 The Council will continue with its very successful Homelessness Prevention Service which has proved to be very successful for many years. The service prevents people from becoming homeless in the first place, by assisting people at risk and intervening with a range of solutions. Reasonable steps will be taken to prevent homelessness for any at risk eligible applicant, regardless of priority need which may involve assisting them to stay in their current accommodation, or helping them to find a new place to live.

## **5. The Relief Duty**

- 5.1 Under the relief duty, when the Council is satisfied that an applicant is both homeless and eligible for assistance it will take reasonable steps to help any applicant to secure suitable accommodation for a minimum period of 6 months. This could be by providing a rental or damage deposit guarantee loan and working with private landlords in order to maximise the amount of properties available in the private rented sector.

## **6. Duty to refer**

- 6.1 Under the Homelessness Reduction Act from October 2018, public bodies have a duty to refer to the Council those who are threatened with homelessness. These include hospitals, prisons, job centres etc. The Council will work with public bodies when referrals are received under their duty.

## **7. An Applicants Right to a Review**

- 7.1 Where the Council decides to end certain duties, the applicant will have the right to a review of this decision. Further information on the reviews procedure is set out in the Strategy under the Section Homeless Reviews.

## **8. Government Grants to Support Homelessness Services**

### ***The Government's new Flexible Homelessness Support Grant***

- 8.1 The Council received the Government's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant which replaces the former Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Temporary Accommodation Management fee funding, which was provided to meet the costs of local authorities' management fees paid to Housing Associations to let and manage private sector accommodation for homeless families. The Government wants to "encourage local authorities to spend money on stopping homelessness instead of on costly temporary accommodation." It has therefore abolished paying management fees and provided instead a "lump sum" in order for authorities to tackle homelessness in more flexible and creative ways.
- 8.2 Under the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (which is required to be ring fenced to be used on homelessness services), the Council received £277,000 in 2017/2018 and will be receiving £313,000 in 2018/2019, compared to around £60,000 per annum previously received under the Temporary Accommodation Management funding. The Council's Cabinet has agreed the use of this additional funding which is referred to within the Strategy under each appropriate initiative.

### ***The Government's Homelessness Reduction Act Grant***

- 8.3 Due to the additional burdens being placed on authorities under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the associated Homelessness Code of Guidance, in 2016/2017, the Government provided authorities with financial support to help meet with the consequences of the new duties. As a result, the Council received £134,000. The Council's Cabinet agreed that the funding be used to appoint a full-time Assistant Housing Options Manager (Strategy) on a temporary contract for 3 years funded from the total amount of the grant. The post will be responsible for ensuring that the Council meets all of the new duties.

## Statistical Analysis of Homelessness

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### 1. Incidence of Homelessness

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

Homelessness Information	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of applicants to whom a full duty is owed.	71	56	63
Number of applicants found to be intentionally homeless.	9	14	8
Number of applicants found not to be in priority need.	22	22	26
Number of applicants found to be not homeless.	32	27	24
Number of applicants found to be ineligible for assistance.	1	3	2
<b>Total number of homelessness applications</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>123</b>

- 1.2 As can be seen the number of applicants to whom a full homelessness duty is owed has been at a similar level over the last three years which is a particular achievement bearing in mind that homelessness is a growing problem. This is mainly due to prevention measures achieving alternative housing solutions prior to a homeless application being received by the Council. It should also be noted that the total number of homelessness applications has also reduced in the last three years.

- 1.3 Information on the ethnicity of all Homeless applicants is set out in the table below. The ethnicity of homeless applicants is recorded and included on quarterly Government returns:

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>2015/16 (%)</b>	<b>2016/17 (%)</b>	<b>2017/18 (%)</b>
White British/Irish	69.0	69.6	56.1
Bangladeshi/Pakistani/Indian	0.7	0	3.3
African/Caribbean	2.3	1.7	7.3
Mixed Ethnicity	0	0	0
Other	0.7	3.5	1.6
Not stated	27.3	25.2	31.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

- 1.4 Although Gypsies and Travellers are not identified as a group on Housing Activity Returns they do face particularly problems when homeless due to their cultural aversion to 'bricks and mortar'. A number have purchased land within the District on which they have sited caravans and mobile homes for residential purposes without planning permission. Some have exhausted appeals processes, been evicted, and sought homelessness assistance. There are currently 27 permanent and 8 temporary Gypsy and Traveller sites across the District totalling 140 pitches. Eleven of the sites include 75 pitches in Roydon and Nazeing. One site at Stanford Rivers is in the public sector and is owned Essex County Council. The remainder are on privately owned land. In the Epping Forest District Local Plan Submission Version 2017, the Council is to provide for an additional 38 pitches for gypsies and Travellers and one yard for Travelling Shoe People by 2033.

1.5 The breakdown of the ethnicity of the population of the District is set out in the table below for information (source EFDC Census 2011):

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
White: British/Irish	107,836	86.5
White: Other e.g. European etc.	5,033	4.04
Asian: Bangladeshi/Pakistani/Indian/Chinese/Sri Lankan	5,922	4.76
African/Caribbean	2,404	1.93
Mixed: Multiple Ethnic Groups in one household	2,649	2.12
Other non-British	815	0.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>124,659</b>	<b>100</b>

1.6 In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, the Council will monitor all of the Protected Characteristics of homeless applicants

## **2. Analysis of Priority Need**

2.1 Priority need is determined by statute and prescribes categories of persons for whom local housing authorities must secure accommodation if they are homeless, provided they have not become intentionally homeless.

2.2 Set out in the table below is an analysis of applicants found to be in priority need, unintentionally homeless and owed a full homelessness duty, taken from the Council's Housing Activity returns. These form part of the Government's PI (E) return (statistical information which is completed by all authorities) confirming those households the Council has accepted as being in a priority need and the reasons:

<b>Priority Need Category</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Applicant homeless because of fire, flood, storm or similar disaster.	0	0	0
Applicants with dependent children (including violent breakdown of relationship (partner))	55	40	45

<b>Priority Need Category</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Applicants in priority need because of pregnancy but no other children.	0	0	0
Applicants aged 16/17 years	0	1	2
Applicants formerly in care and aged 18-20 years.	0	0	0
Applicants vulnerable due to old age.	1	1	1
Applicants vulnerable because of physical disability.	6	5	8
Applicants vulnerable because of mental illness or disability.	7	6	4
Applicants vulnerable due to alcohol dependency.	0	0	0
Applicants who were former asylum seekers.	0	0	1
Vulnerable for other special reason.	0	1	0
Applicant vulnerable having been in custody or remand.	0	0	0
Applicants vulnerable for formerly being in care.	0	0	1

<b>Priority Need Category</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Applicants with care and support needs having served in HM Forces.	0	0	0
Applicants (with no children) vulnerable on account of violence including domestic abuse.	2	2	1
<b>Total applicants accepted for a priority need</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>63</b>

2.3 The table above shows that applicants with dependent children (including violent breakdown of relationship (partner) represent the highest number of acceptances in each of the last 3 years. These statistics again highlight the success of the prevention aspect of the service in identifying a housing solution to those households faced with a housing difficulty.

### 3. Reasons for Homelessness

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

<b>Reason for Acceptance</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Parents not willing to accommodate	13	9	6
Other relatives not willing to accommodate.	2	0	7
Non-violent relationship breakdown.	4	2	10
Violent breakdown of relationship (partner)	6	8	3

<b>Reason for Acceptance</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Violent relationship breakdown (involving associated person i.e. relative)	2	1	1
Racially motivated violence.	0	0	0
Other forms of violence.	2	0	1
Racially motivated harassment.	0	0	0
Other forms of harassment.	0	0	0
Mortgage arrears.	1	0	0
Local authority rent arrears.	0	0	0
Housing Association rent arrears.	2	0	1
Private rented rent arrears.	9	6	7
Termination of assured short-hold tenancy.	17	11	8
Reason other than termination of assured short hold tenancy i.e. tied accommodation.	12	16	17
Leaving asylum accommodation.	0	1	1
Leaving prison/remand.	0	0	0
Left hospital.	0	0	0
Left other institution or Care	0	0	0
Leaving armed forces home	0	0	0
Other reason	1	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>63</b>

- 3.2 The figures show that the three most common reasons for acceptances of homelessness were on account of the termination of assured short-hold tenancies leading to the loss of private rented accommodation, parents no longer willing to accommodate their children (although there is a downward trend) and the loss of tied accommodation.

# Advisory Services

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Any person in the District who considers they are threatened with homelessness will be encouraged to make early contact with the Council and seek Advisory Services. The Council will provide free tailored and up-to-date homelessness advice and information services to all residents about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness.
- 1.2 Advice will include:
- Prevention of homelessness
  - Securing accommodation when homeless
  - The rights of applicants and the Council's duties
  - Help available to people threatened with or homeless
  - How to access available help and assistance
  - Assistance to qualifying applicants to join the Council's Housing Register
- 1.3 The Council's Advisory Services will be designed with the following specified vulnerable groups in mind:
- Persons released from prison or youth detention accommodation
  - Care leavers
  - Former members of the regular armed forces
  - Victims of domestic abuse
  - Persons leaving hospital
  - Persons suffering from mental illness or impairment
  - Any other group that the Council identifies as being at particular risk of homelessness in the District
- 1.4 The Council will also meet with its duty to ensure that a Housing Allocations Scheme for determining priorities for allocating social housing is available for inspection and that a summary of that scheme is available, on request, free of charge. Information is provided to all tenants on the express terms of their tenancies, including their statutory rights in respect of assignments, successions and assignments by way of mutual exchange.
- 1.5 Advice and assistance on homelessness and the prevention of homelessness can encompass a wide range of issues, many of which require specialist knowledge. Some cases, for example those involving debt management, are referred to the CAB. The CAB has two dedicated "Debt Advisors" funded by the Council who deal exclusively with debt referrals from the Homelessness Team. Some cases may be referred to other agencies including the Council's Benefit Division. The CAB will also deal with referrals from households that are seeking assistance on account of the impact of Welfare Reforms.
- 1.6 Advice is given on a range of other matters which may assist with an applicant remaining in their current accommodation including:
- Tenants' rights and rights of occupation
  - What to do about harassment and illegal eviction
  - Rights to benefits and assistance with making claims
  - How to protect and retrieve rent deposits
  - Advice on dealing with rent and mortgage arrears
  - Debt management
  - Properties in need of repair, including those which are unfit for habitation providing advice on available grants

- Charitable organisations assisting homeless people (including victims of domestic abuse)
- Securing private rented accommodation
- Applying for social housing
- Access to shared ownership schemes
- Property rights in cases of relationship breakdown or other domestic issues
- Interim and temporary accommodation
- Nominations to other local housing authorities

1.7 Provision will be made to ensure accessibility for those with particular needs including those with mobility difficulties, sight or hearing loss and learning difficulties as well as those for whom English is not their first language.

## **2. Provision of Information**

2.1 A range of advice and information leaflets are made available, some produced by the Communities Directorate, others published by the National Homeless Advice Service and the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Where English is not the first language of the client, assistance can be obtained through approved agencies and documents can be translated in appropriate cases. For the visually impaired, literature can be made available either in large print or by CD or Braille. The Council also provides assistance to adults with care and support needs (and those who may not have access to a computer) to make an on-line housing application to apply to join the Council's Housing Register. Where a profoundly deaf client is a sign user, the Council can arrange "signing" through an approved agency. A loop system for people with hearing difficulties is available at the Civic Offices and at the Area Housing Office (South) at The Broadway, Loughton. Home visits will be made in appropriate instances.

2.2 Under the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings scheme, vacant properties are advertised to applicants on the Council's Housing Register, on a Website and a weekly Property List. Applicants can express an interest on the Website or by telephone or text.

2.3 The Council's tenant's magazine "Housing News" is sent to all tenants twice each year, to all home seekers providing advice on a range of Housing Services.

## **3. Liaison with the Citizens Advice Bureau**

3.1 The CAB has offices in the District in Epping, Waltham Abbey and Loughton. The Council has a Service Level Agreement with the CAB to provide a range of advice and to support those who have difficulties expressing their needs effectively. The Council contributed £114,000 from its General Fund in 2017/18 towards CAB running costs. In addition, further funding of £37,200 is granted by the Council to the CAB in order for them to provide Debt Advisory Services to residents in the District which include applicants threatened with homelessness and debt management advice to the Council's tenants. One of the two Debt Advisors they employ offers a drop in service one half day each week and a further half day each week for appointments at the Council's Housing Office at the Limes Centre, Chigwell.

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

3.3 Where a client is pursuing a review of a homelessness decision made by the Council they are advised in writing to seek assistance from the CAB or Shelter. Often, where applicants seek advice from one of the CAB's, they in turn seek specialist advice from their dedicated solicitor.

## Duty to Refer

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- 1.1 From October 2018, certain public authorities in England are required to notify the Council of any service users they consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness (i.e. it is likely they will become homeless within 56 days). Prior to making a referral to the Council the public authority will have the consent of the person to the referral and for their contact details to be supplied to us so that contact can be arranged and allow the person to identify the authority in England where they would like the notification to be made.
- 1.2 The public authorities in England included in the duty are as follows:
  - Prisons
  - Youth offender institutions
  - Secure training centres
  - Secure colleges
  - Youth offending teams
  - Probation services
  - Jobcentre Plus
  - Social service authorities
  - Emergency Departments
  - Urgent treatment centres
  - Hospitals in their function to provide inpatient care
  - The Regular Forces
- 1.3 At the time of writing the Strategy, the Council is entering into joint working arrangements with agencies in order to set up local procedures for referrals to be made in order to better identify persons at risk of homelessness at an early stage.
- 1.4 A single point of contact will be set up for referrals which will be publicised on the Council's Website and shared with those public authorities included in the duty. The referring authority will be required to complete a standard referral form ensuring that all relevant information is captured.
- 1.5 The Council will always respond to any referral received although this in itself will not constitute an application for assistance, although the referral may trigger an application if it is found that the applicant might be homeless or threatened with homelessness. The response will be tailored to the specific needs of the person referred and include joint working particularly with the referring authority to ensure that shared efforts result in positive outcomes for the applicant. The person will be contacted using the contact details provided in the referral.
- 1.6 Information will be provided generally on accessing advice and assistance including our opening hours, address, phone number, email and 24-hour contact details.

## Personalised Housing Plans

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- 1.1 Where an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness becoming homeless within 56 days, an assessment will be completed to determine the duties owed to a person applying for assistance. This process will begin generally by way of a face-to-face initial interview. Should this not be possible the Council will undertake an assessment on the telephone, internet or with a partner agency. If, following all relevant enquiries, the Council is satisfied that the person is not homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days they will be given a Section 184 notification of the decision reached.
- 1.2 A Personalised Housing Plan (the Plan) will be drawn up in writing to provide a framework for the Council and the applicant to work together in a positive and collaborative way to identify appropriate actions to prevent or relieve the applicant's homelessness. The Plan will be shared with the applicant and include the following:
  - The circumstances that caused the applicant to become homeless or threatened with homelessness
  - The "reasonable steps" the Council, the applicant and other appropriate agencies will take to help the applicant retain or secure accommodation tailored to the person which are realistic in order to resolve their homelessness
  - The housing need of the applicant including what accommodation would be suitable for the applicant and any person/s with whom the applicant resides ("other relevant person/s")
  - An assessment of the support needs for the applicant or any other relevant person/s living with them to have and sustain suitable accommodation
- 1.3 The Council will notify the applicant of the Plan in writing and agree with them the assessment including the steps to be taken by the applicant to secure suitable accommodation and the steps the Council will take.
- 1.4 The Plan will be kept under review throughout the prevention and relief stages until the Council's duty comes to an end.
- 1.5 If the Council is unable to reach an agreement with the applicant about the reasonable steps to be included in their Plan, a record of why agreement has not been reached will be made in the Plan indicating what steps the Council considers is reasonable for the applicant and the Council to take. These will include recommended steps, which the applicant can choose to take if they wish including taking a broader range of advice and support perhaps to seek employment etc. The prevention or relief duty will not be ended if the applicant fails to take recommended steps. However, if the applicant fails to take mandatory steps being the steps limited to those the Council considers are required in order to prevent or relieve the homelessness then the Council will seek to end its duty under the grounds of deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate.

## 2. Review of the Personalised Action Plan

- 2.1 Applicants have the right to request a review of the reasonable steps that the Council has included within their Plan at the prevention and relief stages. Further information on the reviews procedure is set out later in the Strategy under the Section Homelessness Reviews.

# Homelessness Prevention

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Homelessness Team is an integral part of the Housing Options Service. The team is led by the Assistant Housing Options Manager (Homelessness), assisted by 2 PT Senior Homelessness Officers.
- 1.2 The Council will give proper consideration of all applications for assistance and will accept a homeless application from those may be threatened with homelessness or if it is likely they will become homeless with 56 days and make enquiries to see whether a duty is owed under Part 7 of the 1996 Act. Homeless applications will be assessed in parallel with a full and detailed assessment each applicant's case which will include ensuring that the Council's Prevention and Relief Duties are met.
- 1.3 When the Council is satisfied that an applicant is both threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance it will, taking into account the needs and circumstances of the applicant, take reasonable steps which will be set out in the Personalised Housing Plan to help the applicant to either remain in their own home or to seek alternative accommodation. If the applicant does not have a local connection the Council will continue with the prevention duty.
- 1.4 If an applicant's needs may put them at risk of further homelessness, the Council will work with relevant support and specialist services with the aim of increased sustainability.

## 2. Ending the Prevention Duty

- 2.1 The Council will end its prevention duties in the following circumstances:
  - Where the applicant has suitable accommodation available for occupation for at least 6 months and the Council has complied with the Prevention Duty
  - Where the applicant who was owed the prevention duty has become homeless
  - Where the applicant has refused an offer of suitable accommodation and that accommodation would have been available to them for the prescribed period
  - Where the applicant has become intentionally homeless from any accommodation made available to them as a result of the reasonable steps taken by the Council during the prevention duty
  - Where the applicant is no longer eligible for assistance
  - Where the applicant has withdrawn their application
  - Where the applicant has deliberately and unreasonably refused to co-operate

## 3. Statistics

- 3.1 The Council's Prevention work has proved highly effective which has not only seen a huge reduction in the level of acceptances, it has also led to a high number of people being able to remain in their current homes.
- 3.2 The number of cases assisted through Homelessness Prevention now exceeds the number of homelessness cases to whom a statutory duty is owed.
- 3.3 People who consider they are at risk of homelessness are encouraged to make early contact with the Council.

3.4 Homelessness Prevention Officers now 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.

3.5 The table below shows the number of cases that presented to the Homelessness Prevention Service in the last three years and the reason, with the numbers of cases prevented set out in the final row:

<b>Prevention Action</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Mediation	1	1	4
Reconciliation	4	2	1
Financial payments from homelessness prevention fund	1	1	0
Debt advice	2	3	0
Resolving housing benefit problem	9	7	1
Resolving rent arrears in social housing or private sector	9	4	5
Sanctuary scheme for victims of domestic violence	4	0	2
Crisis intervention	3	4	1
Negotiation to help someone remain in the private rented sector	6	14	11
Providing other assistance to enable someone to remain in private rented sector	58	19	14

<b>Prevention Action</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Mortgage arrears	0	5	1
Other homelessness prevention measure (where work has commenced but there has been no further contact and resolution is unknown)	279	237	209
Housed in hostel or HMO	2	5	2
Housed in private rented sector with landlord incentive scheme	71	48	62
Housed in private rented sector without landlord incentive scheme	57	53	55
Accommodation arranged with friends or relatives	24	37	16
Supported accommodation	34	12	17
Social housing Priority Transfer	6	4	0
Social housing: Housing Register offer	37	31	24
Social housing: Housing Association direct offer.	13	2	1
Low cost home ownership scheme	1	0	1
Other homelessness relieved	4	14	20
<b>Total cases prevented</b>	<b>625 (90%)</b>	<b>503 (90%)</b>	<b>447 (88%)</b>
<b>Total number of cases</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>510</b>

3.6 During the period set out in the above table, the Prevention Service dealt with 1,765 cases of which around 89% have been prevented. The figures do not take into account the many other enquiries made by the general public. This has been a considerable achievement. These results have had a direct impact on the homelessness acceptance rate, which has significantly reduced during the same period.

#### **4. Preventing Homelessness Initiatives**

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

#### **5. The Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS)**

5.1 One of the difficulties that homeless and other housing applicants have in accessing the private rented sector (especially those in receipt of housing benefit), is to provide 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.

5.2 The Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS) is a scheme for helping homeless people to access private rented accommodation. It was set up in 1995 by a specially-created voluntary organisation as a registered charity, with financial support from the National Lottery Charities Board and the District Council, the respective contributions being £20,000 and £5,000. In early 2005, EFHAS learnt that their bid to the Big Lottery Fund for additional capital funding of £20,000 had been successful, which increased their funds to around £40,000 at that time. Furthermore, the Council's Cabinet agreed that £26,500 of additional CLG funding be used to assist the scheme in both 2011/2012 & 2012/13.

5.3 EFHAS is able to help homeless people 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. Furthermore, the Council has an Underwriting Agreement with EFHAS whereby it underwrites up to £60,000 of damage deposit guarantees in order to ensure that the guarantees did 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.

5.4 Between 1995 and April 2018, EFHAS helped over 356 homeless families move into the private-rented sector in this way, who would otherwise probably have been unable to do so. Many of these families would have had to seek accommodation from the Council direct. Currently there are 59 guarantees in place totalling £47,782.

5.5 All referrals to EFHAS are made by the Council through the Housing Options Section. 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.

5.6 Assistance can also be given to applicants who do not have sufficient furniture through the Furniture Re-use Project based in Epping.

## **6. The Rental Loan Scheme**

- 6.1 The Rental Loan Scheme was set up in 2008/2009 and was initially funded by both Government grants of around £37,000 (received by the Council in recognition of its good performance on preventing homelessness), and further funding from the Council's General Fund of around £20,000. The scheme complements the EFHAS scheme and provides applicants with a rental loan to meet the costs of the first month's rent in advance when securing accommodation in the private sector. Applicants are required to repay the loan on an interest free basis over 36 months, thereby re-cycling the budget to enable others to benefit from the scheme in the future.
- 6.2 In February 2017, the Cabinet agreed that under the Council's "Invest to Save" initiative £90,000 be used to fund additional rental loans in order to prevent homelessness further avoiding applicants having to be placed in costly B&B and other types of accommodation. Furthermore, following the receipt of the Government's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, in October 2017 the Cabinet agreed that an additional £80,000 in 2017/2018 and £80,000 in 2018/2019 be used for this purpose funded from the Grant.
- 6.3 At the time of writing, there are funds to provide around a further 63 rental loans. Families who are assisted with rental loans have their new accommodation inspected by the Private Sector Housing Team to ensure they are suitable and free from any significant hazards.

## **7. Housing Association Leasing Direct (HALD)**

- 7.1 The Council set up a Housing Association Leasing Direct (HALD) scheme with Genesis Housing Association in July 2010. The Council has assisted 24 households who would have otherwise been homeless in accessing accommodation under the scheme through nominations made by the Homelessness Prevention Team. Those referred must be eligible for full housing benefit in order to qualify for assistance, with the household being able to remain in the property for 2 years under an assured short-hold tenancy.
- 7.2 The Council pays Genesis Housing Association management fees of around £60,000 per annum to provide the units of accommodation representing a cost of £60 per week per unit. The amount paid is set in accordance with the DWP's Housing Benefit Subsidy rules and was previously met by the Department of Work and Pensions. As this funding has been replaced by the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant in June 2017, the Council's Cabinet agreed that the funding be continued funded from the new Grant.
- 7.3 In October 2017, the Council's Cabinet agreed a budget in order to provide landlord incentive payments in partnership with Genesis Housing Association of £2,000 per property paid on the basis that the property is available to the Council's homeless applicant for a minimum of 2 years. The budget is funded from the Government's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and is sufficient to provide 4 landlord incentive payments in both 2017/2018 and 2018/2019.

## **8. Private Lease Agreements Converting Empty Properties (PLACE)**

- 8.1 The PLACE scheme has been set up by a consortium of 7 Councils including EFDC following a successful bid for Government 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 will be made available to families nominated by the Homelessness Prevention Team. The Council has assisted 4 households in this way that would otherwise have been homeless.

## **9. Parental Exclusions**

- 9.1 Young people can sometimes have volatile relationships with their parents and can be at risk of exclusion from their home. "Relate", who are a charity providing relationship support to people of all ages and backgrounds through its network of counsellors, receive referrals and seek a resolution to family difficulties and have an 80% success rate. In some cases, an exit plan is drawn up for the young person to move on to independent accommodation at the appropriate time. The Homelessness Team work with Essex County Council's Homelessness Response Team who also mediates between young people and families and provides other general support.

## **10. Young Parent Scheme**

- 10.1 Railway Meadow in Ongar is a supported housing scheme built in partnership with Brentwood and Uttlesford Councils for young parents, which provides support to help young people overcome challenges during their pregnancy and the first year of their child's life. The scheme consists of 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 8 of the flats.
- 10.2 Until 2016/2017, the annual support costs for the Scheme were met by Essex County Council's Housing Related Support (HRS) budget. However, as a result of HRS funding reductions the funding for the Scheme was withdrawn. In June 2017, the Cabinet agreed that the Council meets its own HRS costs at the Scheme with a budget of £29,000 in both 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 funded from the Government's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant.

## **11. Epping Forest District "Sanctuary" Scheme.**

- 11.1 The Council's "Sanctuary" Scheme assists victims of domestic violence or Hate Crime on a tenure neutral basis. The scheme provides a safe room within the victim's home. A typical sanctuary room would include a fire door with mortice locks, smoke detectors, fire blanket and two fire extinguishers. The victim would be supplied with a mobile phone to summon emergency assistance. The Council's works Safer Communities Team works in partnership with, Essex Police Hate Crime Unit, Essex Fire and Rescue and Safer Places (formerly known as Harlow Women's Aid) on the provision of the schemes. All referrals are made through the Homelessness Team. Since its introduction, five Sanctuary rooms have been installed and have prevented homelessness. Since the scheme became operational in 2006, 17 Sanctuary schemes have been installed across the Epping Forest District.

## **12 Single Accommodation for Epping Forest (SAFE) Project.**

- 12.1 SAFE is managed by NACRO Community Enterprises, a registered housing association and charity, which offers supported accommodation to single people. The scheme works in partnership with Social Care's Divisional Based Intervention Team (DBIT) under the Essex Young People's Partnership (EYPP), the Essex Probation Service, the Youth Offending Team and the Peabody Trust Support Scheme based in Waltham Abbey. The project is used in resolving the housing difficulties of single people across the District who otherwise would become homeless. SAFE was set up in 1993 with funding from the former Housing Corporation, the Council and the Probation Service. The Council provided SAFE land free of charge for the first of the developments and they now provide 37 Units of

accommodation. This is in a mix of accommodation which is either shared or self-contained.

- 12.2 Properties in the scheme are furnished and managed by SAFE, which lets them under a licence or an assured short-hold tenancy. Most residents are at the scheme for around one year. The scheme is managed by a Project Manager and supported by a team of Project Workers. Around 75% of all referrals are made by the Council with the balance being made from other key agencies. The main client group is 16-18 year olds, although people up to the age of 25 years are accepted. Those referred are assessed by the Project Manager with a report on each case being referred to the SAFE Panel (comprising representatives from key agencies) for consideration. Those not accepted onto the scheme can appeal against the decision. On average there are 20 admissions annually to the scheme.
- 12.3 The Council can provide move-on accommodation by providing SAFE residents with a direct offer of accommodation under the terms of the Housing Allocations Scheme. However, other move on options can be considered by SAFE Staff.

### **13. Family Mosaic Peabody Trust – Trailblazer Scheme**

- 13.1 Following a successful bid for Government funding under the Trailblazer Scheme by Essex County Council in 2016, the Council's Homelessness Prevention work has been further enhanced by an additional Case-Worker who provides intensive support to those threatened with homelessness. The worker has the capacity for a case-load of around 27 cases each year.

### **14. Rough Sleeping**

- 14.1 The Council's Cabinet agreed in October 2017 that a total budget of £10,500 is made available to fund an external company to provide specialist services to rough sleepers in the District. At the time of writing, the Council is entering into an agreement with CHESS (Churches Homeless Emergency Support Scheme) which will provide an outreach service to visit rough sleepers to offer advice and assistance.

### **15. Preventing Repossession Fund**

#### *Background*

- 15.1 The Council received a grant of £47,500 from the Communities and Local Government (CLG) at the end of June 2009, which enabled the Council to extend small loans to families at risk of homelessness through repossession or evictions. In March 2012, a further grant of £30,000 was received as part of a preventing re-possession national allocation. The Government issued guidance on the use of the grant which provided financial assistance enabling applicants to remain in their own homes.
- 15.2 Under the Government's guidance, financial assistance through small interest free loans ranging from £1,000 to £3,000 per household capped to a maximum of £5,000 were available interest free is made available. Final decisions on how the money is deployed rested with the Council and was based on individual local need and circumstances. In addition to homeowners, the funding was used to assist residents in all forms of tenure that are struggling with their rental payments and face eviction.
- 15.3 Loans were agreed by senior officers repayable by the applicant over a period of 1-5 years depending upon the size of the loan and the circumstances of the applicant. This allowed the money to be re-cycled to help other households in the future. Only those households who, following investigations, were found to be genuinely unable to pay their rent or mortgage, due to "income shock" caused by loss of earnings where there is no history of previous arrears, were able to benefit.

- 15.4 Loans were only agreed, when the recipient was prepared to act on debt advice to make repayments more affordable following the intervention of an advisor. They were provided where lenders cannot apply forbearance measures due to the level of arrears, but will freeze possession action as a result of the loan, on the basis that all parties are prepared to compromise on the debt owed and should be made to recover the position, (rather than fully clear arrears) where all other options have failed. Loans were not be made where there were other ways to resolve the problem. For example, if the arrears are caused by housing benefit delays, assistance should be given in dealing with the matter. Loans were only made where it would enable a household to remain in place where no other option would lead to this outcome.
- 15.5 Between June 2009 and October 2016 the Council provided 18 small loans. However, due to lack of funding the Scheme was discontinued.

*Re introduction of the Preventing Re-possession Fund*

- 15.6 In October 2017, the Council's Cabinet agreed the re-introduction of the Preventing Repossession Fund with a budget being made available of £40,000 in 2017/2018 and £65,000 in 2018/2019 funded from the Government's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant. It was recognised that the most common reason for acceptances of homelessness is due to the termination of Assured Short-hold Tenancies leading to the loss of private rented accommodation which could be avoided if the Fund was re-introduced under the same conditions as previously.

**16. Discretionary Housing Payment**

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

**17. Review of Decision to End the Prevention Duty**

- 17.1 Where the Council decides to end the Prevention Duty, the applicant will have the right to a review of this decision. Further information on the reviews procedure is set out later in the Strategy under the Section Homelessness Reviews.

# The Relief Duty

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- 1.1 When the Council is satisfied that an applicant is both homeless, eligible for assistance and meets with the local connection requirements interim accommodation will be provided. Where local connection requirements are not met, at this stage a referral will be made to another authority in England.
- 1.2 During the period of the Relief Duty, the Council may complete its enquiries into the duties that may be owed to the applicant. If it is found that the full housing duty is not owed, the Council will continue to provide assistance during the Relief Duty stage.
- 1.3 The Council will not issue any decision on its main housing duty during the Relief Duty stage.

## 2. Ending the Relief Duty

- 2.1 The Council will end its relief duties in the following circumstances:
  - Where the applicant has suitable accommodation available for occupation for at least 6 months and the Council has complied with the Relief Duty
  - Where the applicant who was owed the Relief Duty and has become homeless
  - Where the applicant has refused an offer of suitable accommodation and that accommodation would have been available to them for the prescribed period
  - Where the applicant has become intentionally homeless for any accommodation made available to them as a result of the reasonable steps taken by the Council during the Relief Duty
  - Where the applicant is no longer eligible for assistance
  - Where the applicant has withdrawn their application
  - Where the applicant has deliberately and unreasonably refused to co-operate

## 3. Review of Decision to end the Relief Duty

- 3.1 Where the Council decides to end the Relief Duty, the applicant will have the right to a review of this decision. Further information on the reviews procedure is set out later in the Strategy under the Section Homeless Reviews.

## Deliberate and Unreasonable Refusal to Co-operate

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- 1.1 Both the Prevention and relief Duties can be brought to an end if an applicant deliberately and unreasonably refuses to take any of the steps they agreed to take, or that the Council set out for them to take, or where an agreement could not be reached in their Personalised Housing Plan.
  - 1.2 Before issuing a Notice and bringing either duty to an end, the Council will be satisfied that it is reasonable to do so when taking into account all of the circumstances. When satisfied a warning letter will be issued to the applicant making it clear to the applicant the reasons why it is intending to issue the Notice setting out the consequences and giving a reasonable period prior to the Notice being served. The reasonable period will depend upon the circumstances of the case and will give the applicant sufficient time to rectify the non-co-operation and prevent the Notice being served.
  - 1.3 If the non-co-operation is not rectified, then the Council will issue a Section 193 (B) Notice, signed by an appropriate person who is someone of at least an equivalent seniority to the officer who made the original decision who has not been involved in the original decision to serve the Notice. The appropriate person will give particular consideration as to whether the original decision to issue the Notice had due regard to the circumstances and the needs of the applicant and whether these were properly identified. The Notice will explain clearly why it has been served.
  - 1.4 If the Prevention Duty is ended for these purposes, it will not affect the Council's assessment of the applicant and what duties are owed should the applicant seek help having become homeless.
  - 1.5 If the Relief Duty is ended for these purposes, then the main housing duty will not apply to applicants who are eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and have a priority need. However, in these cases, the Council will secure that accommodation is available for occupation by the applicant by making a final offer of accommodation.
- 2. Review of Decision to end the Relief Duty**
- 2.1 Where the Council decides to end the Relief Duty, the applicant will have the right to a review of this decision. Further information on the reviews procedure is set out later in the Strategy under the Section Homelessness Reviews.

## Support schemes, welfare and mediation services

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 A number of support schemes are in place in the District to support people who have been homeless or may be at risk of being homeless and are as follows:

### 2. Safer Places Floating Support Scheme (Stay Safe)

- 2.1 This is known as the 'Stay Safe' scheme and was launched in January 2003, and can assist up to 14 households at any one time.
- 2.2 The aim of Stay Safe is to assist women experiencing (or at risk of) domestic abuse to remain safely in their own homes. It can also be used to support women moving on from a refuge. There is access to a 24 hour emergency help line with contact being made by a Support Worker at least once each week. Risk assessments are undertaken and, if it is safe, meetings take place in clients' homes. Otherwise, local drop-in centres are used. On average, the Support Worker will spend around 3 hours per week on each case. Plans are made, setting out the action required to provide the practical support, information, advice and guidance needed in each case. These are kept under review with risk assessments updated.
- 2.3 Although referrals to Stay Safe may be made by other agencies, many are made through the Council's Homelessness Team. A number of referrals are also made from the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).
- 2.4 Applicants can visit the drop-in centres and have access to a solicitor, if required. They can also attend various support sessions.
- 2.5 Stay Safe has a full-time Support Worker in the District who reports to an Area Co-ordinator based in Harlow and is also responsible for managing three Support Workers at similar schemes in East Hertfordshire, Broxbourne and Harlow.

### 3. Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

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

### 4. The Peabody Trust Support Scheme

- 4.1 The Peabody Trust Support Scheme (Formally Family Mosaic) provides floating support to vulnerable people irrespective of tenure across the Epping Forest District.
- 4.2 The service also provides a high level of support to homeless applicants placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 4.3 The Support Worker provides agreed levels of support with the client. This will include acting as a key link with other agencies and preparing the client to acquire the skills needed to sustain a permanent tenancy.

- 4.4 Support Workers also provide a service to people whom the Council does not owe a duty under homelessness legislation. All referrals to the scheme for those living in bed and breakfast accommodation are through the Homelessness Team.
- 4.5 The Assistant Housing Options Manager (Homelessness) meets on a monthly basis with the Peabody Trust Managers to discuss contact and service delivery matters.

## **5 Epping Re-Use Furniture Project**

- 5.1 The Epping Re-Use Furniture Project, offers good quality second hand furniture and household items at significantly reduced prices, and in some instances free of charge when referred by specific agencies. The Housing Options Section makes referrals in appropriate cases.

## **6. Epping Foodbank**

- 6.1 The Council works in partnership with The Trussell Trust who provides the Foodbank Service. The service provides essential food supplies to those households experiencing exceptional financial hardship. The numbers accessing the service has increased by 87%. The Council issues Foodbank vouchers to households who suffer hardship, in the last 12 months 14 vouchers have been issued by the Council. In additional emergency packs have been provided to certain households at the Council's Homeless Persons' Hostel Norway House, North Weald.

## **7. Essex National Probation Service**

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

## **8. North Essex Mental Health Partnership**

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

## **9. Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel Arrangements**

- 9.1 The Council is a member of the Multi-agency Public Protection Panel Arrangements (MAPPA). The Panel is co-ordinated by Essex Police and manages high risk offenders. The Housing Options Manager and the Assistant Housing Options Manager (Homelessness) attends when cases are being considered involving homeless applicants who are seeking assistance from the Council.

## **10. Out of Hours Service**

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

# The Role of Essex County Council's Social Care

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## 1. Children's Social Care

- 1.1 The majority of children's services are now provided on a 'quadrant basis' (Essex is split into four geographical areas with each area being a quadrant) and children in the Epping Forest District receive services from the 'West Essex Quadrant'. Many staff providing services for children in the Epping Forest District (under the West Essex Quadrant) is located at Goodman House in Harlow.

## 2. Leaving and After Care Team

- 2.2 The Leaving & After Care Team is quadrant-based and located at Goodman House, Harlow. The team takes casework responsibility for children up to the age of 15 years and six months. The team provide support whilst the young people are in care, for example: assessing need, creating "Pathway plans" and assisting in the transition process of young people moving on from care. The team also provides aftercare support according to the specific provisions of the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children Leaving Care Act 2000.
- 2.3 The Council's Homelessness Team are notified by the Leaving and After Care Team prior to a young person leaving care in order that their housing needs can be assessed. In general, the Council arranges for NACRO (a housing association providing specialist housing and support for young people) to accommodate young people leaving care in the SAFE Scheme to give them extra preparation for independent living. The Council then re-houses the young person when they move on from NACRO into Council accommodation with Floating Support.

## 3. Homeless Response Team

- 3.1 The Homeless Response Team is a small, centrally based team (located at County Hall, Chelmsford) which seeks to engage with 16 & 17 year olds on the verge of parental eviction and mediates with families to avoid homelessness and the necessity of providing accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
- 3.2 The team works in partnership with the Council's Homelessness Prevention Team and carries out joint assessments either through planned sessions or in response to urgent requests (whenever this is possible).

## 4. Assessment & Intervention Team

- 4.1 The Assessment and Intervention Team is also quadrant-based and located in Goodman House, Harlow. The Team respond to the immediate needs of children and families referred to Children's Social Care where an assessment of that need is required and especially in relation to "Safeguarding" (Child Protection) and "Children in Need". Referrals to this service are through the central Initial Response Team, with reference to Essex County Council threshold criteria. The Council will, in accordance with the Essex-wide Intentionally Homeless Families Protocol, alert Children's Social Care where families with dependent children are found to be intentionally homeless and are being required to leave their accommodation.

## 5. Family Support & Protection

- 5.1 The Family Support and Protection Team is Quadrant-based and located at Goodman House, Harlow responding in the longer term for those children subject to Child Protection Plans, and Child in Need plans, with reference to Essex County Council threshold criteria.

## **6. Family Solutions**

- 6.1 Family Solutions was set up in October 2013 and works in partnership with the Council in providing intensive support to households in need across the District. Some of the households are active cases being dealt with by the Council's Homelessness Team. Since introduced, Family Solutions have assisted over 100 households.

## **7. Learning Disability and Physical Impairment Team**

- 7.1 The Learning Disability and Physical Impairment Team are quadrant-based and located at Goodman House, Harlow. New referrals are initially received by a central Essex Team (Social Care Direct) and then forwarded to the Team for further assistance. The Learning Disability and Physical Impairment Team refer people requiring housing and support to schemes called Barnes Court, and Tolpuddle House in Ongar which are owned and managed by East Thames Housing Association.

## **8. Community Assessment Team for Older People**

- 8.1 The Community Assessment Team for Older People are quadrant-based and located at Goodman House. The Team assist people aged over 65. Initial referrals are received first by a central Essex Team (Social Care Direct) and then passed where necessary to the Team.

## **9. Safeguarding Adults**

- 9.1 The Council has a Corporate Safeguarding Group. Key staff have received training on Safeguarding adults with care and support needs. The Council has a Safeguarding Strategy and a reporting form and has an e-learning package available to all staff.

## Services for people involved with drug and alcohol abuse

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1. The Housing Options Section deals mainly with referrals from the Community Drug and Alcohol Services known as “Choices”. The service works with clients of all ages with their funding coming predominantly through the Essex Drug and Alcohol Partnership (EDAP) whose commissioning function is managed by the Essex Drug and Alcohol Action Team based at Essex County Council’s offices in Chelmsford.
2. Some referrals are dealt with by the Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Services (ADAS). ADAS clients are assessed and complex alcohol cases are then referred to the Community Drug and Alcohol Team (CDAT) with Choices dealing with drug only cases. Client with Alcohol problems far outnumber those with drug problems.
3. Choices offer outreach services in Loughton and Waltham Abbey. Clients are referred through a number of sources including hospitals, ADAS, GPs, family members and self-referrals. The service is an all age recovery management service with links and referral routes to more structured treatment interventions where required. Family support is offered which helps young people remain in their own homes, but where necessary they are referred to emergency night shelters across the County.
4. The aim of Choices is to support clients and families to build recovery and to support them to re-integrate into society and to become free of drugs dependence. The intention is to also develop Alcohol prevention in a similar way in the future.
5. Homelessness is a common problem with drug and alcohol clients. In order to deal with the problem, the Council has entered into a local protocol with treatment providers to ensure effective working arrangements.

# Homelessness Reviews

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## 1. Right to Request a Review

- 1.1 Applicants have the right to request the Council to review its decision on homelessness cases in the following circumstances:
- Their eligibility for assistance
  - What duty (if any) is owed to them in relation to the duties owed to persons found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness
  - The steps the applicant is to take in their Personalised Housing Plan at the prevention duty
  - To give notice to bring the prevention duty to an end
  - The steps an applicant is to take in their Personalised Housing Plan at the relief duty
  - To give notice to bring the relief duty to an end
  - Giving notice in cases of deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate
  - To notify their case to another authority
  - The suitability of accommodation offered
- 1.2 The request for a review must be made within 21 days beginning on the day which they were notified of the decision. If the applicant requests a review outside of the deadline, the Council may offer additional time depending upon the circumstances. The applicant will be notified that they, or someone acting on their behalf, are required within two weeks of requesting the review to provide grounds and reasons for challenging the Council's decision as well as any new relevant information obtained since the decision. If the request is made in accordance with Section 202 of the Act the Council must review the relevant decision. Reviews will be carried out (or signed-off), by an officer of the Council (or by someone acting as an agent of the Council) who has not been involved in the original decision and is senior in rank or grade to the officer who took the original decision.
- 1.3 An applicant is not required to provide grounds or reasons for challenging the Council's decision in their request for a review but are invited to do so. The Council will notify the applicant that they, or someone acting on their behalf, may make written representations in connection with the request for a review within two weeks from the day on which the applicant requested the review. This period can be extended by mutual agreement.
- 1.4 In cases where the Council considers that there is a deficiency or irregularity in the original decision, or the manner in which it was made, but they are minded nonetheless to make a decision that is against the applicant's interests the applicant will be notified that the decision maker is so minded and that further written or oral representations can be made.
- 1.5 Applicants will be made aware in writing or by other means of the period by which the review must be completed. Such periods will be in accordance with the Code of Guidance.
- 1.6 Applicants will be advised of agencies that can assist them in the review process including the CAB and Shelter.
- 1.7 The Council also refers Section 202 Reviews to an external company to undertake reviews depending upon the workload of officers. These arrangements are in accordance with the Local Authorities (Contracting out of Allocation of Housing and Homelessness Functions) Order 1996.

- 1.8 Applicants will be notified in writing of the decision on review. If a homeless applicant is dissatisfied with a decision made at a statutory Section 202 Review, provided their application is made within 21 days of the statutory review decision, they have the right to pursue a further review on a point of law through the County Court. This is explained to applicants in decision letters.
- 1.9 Where a homeless applicant is in priority need and not intentionally homeless but has no local connection with the District, they may be referred to another local authority where they do have a connection.

# Accommodating Homeless Households

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act introduced the duty to “help to secure” accommodation for all applicants who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness or homeless. Helping to secure does not mean that the Council has a duty to directly find and secure accommodation, but involves the Council working with applicants to agree (where possible) reasonable steps that the applicant and the Council can take to identify and secure suitable accommodation.
- 1.2 The Council uses a variety of interim and temporary accommodation including its Norway House hostel, and a small block of self-contained flats at Hemnall House, Epping where tenants receive out-reach support from hostel staff. Homeless applicants are very rarely placed in the Council’s own housing stock. For management reasons, certain single homeless applicants are provided with Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- 1.3 The table below shows the distribution of households between the different types of temporary accommodation for the past 3 years.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Norway House Hostel</b>	<b>Hemnall House</b>	<b>Council Stock</b>	<b>Brook Haven And Women’s Refuge</b>	<b>Bed &amp; Breakfast</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	31	9	27	4	17	<b>88</b>
<b>2016/17</b>	45	9	24	5	31	<b>114</b>
<b>2015/16</b>	43	9	24	5	21	<b>102</b>

## 2. Homeless Persons’ Hostel Norway House, North Weald

### *Background*

- 2.1 The Council’s hostel, Norway House, North Weald (a Grade II listed building) underwent a major refurbishment and improvement scheme in 2004/05.
- 2.2 The hostel has a number of facilities including an enclosed garden which provides a play area for children under 5 and a play area for older children equipped by a group of volunteers, funded mainly through grants from Essex County Council Community Partnership and Essex Youth Development and Child-Care Partnership. In 2014, the Hostel had Wi Fi access installed which enables all residents to access the Internet. The Council works with the Norway House Stakeholder Partnership which comprises representatives from local schools, Churches and Health Service staff. The group aims to generally improve the quality of life for residents.
- 2.3 Norway House has ample parking facilities and a large secure store for residents’ furniture, should they be unable to accommodate all their possessions in their rooms. Homeless households in other accommodation can also benefit from the storage.

- 2.4 There are 32 rooms on the ground and first floors which are let individually or as suites, as necessary. Four attic rooms have been refurbished, with their own private facilities. Two additional rooms are reserved for night and week-end emergencies, with beds made-up ready for use. Residents have use of communal kitchens, common rooms and laundry facilities. Over the last three years, the majority of rooms have been provided with their own bathroom facilities with the remainder being converted within the next year. A previously unused area outside of the communal kitchen has recently been converted into a meeting room.
- 2.5 The former Caretaker's accommodation has been converted to provide three separate rooms for 16-17 year olds in order to meet reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for this younger age group. Residents provide their own furniture, but where necessary basic items of equipment such as beds can be supplied from hostel stores.
- 2.6 In 1992, in response to an increase in homelessness at that time, five chalets providing accommodation for 10 families were built in the grounds to the rear of the main hostel, and continue to provide a valuable contribution to the assistance Norway House can provide.
- 2.7 The hostel has a door-entry system for the main building and closed circuit television cameras cover external doors, parking areas and some communal areas internally. These systems are controlled from the Manager's office.
- 2.8 Office opening hours are 9 am to 5 pm weekdays. A service is also provided on Saturday mornings for between 2 and 4 hours. In addition, some cover is offered on Bank Holidays. The Manager and Deputy Managers are on call on a 24 hour, 365 day rota basis to deal with emergencies.
- 2.9 On admission to the hostel, residents are given a 'welcome' pack, which includes information about local schools, health services etc. They are helped to apply for housing benefit, if necessary, and a Supporting People Tenant Support Plan is maintained.
- 2.10 Residents have a licence agreement which sets out the conditions by which they live at the hostel.

#### *Modular Temporary Accommodation for Single Vulnerable Homeless People*

- 2.12 In March 2017, the Council's Cabinet agreed that a pilot Scheme be undertaken at Norway House to provide three modular units of temporary accommodation for six vulnerable homeless people. A number of local authorities are now exploring the use of the units which are the same size as shipping containers. They are of robust metal construction, can be painted in a range of colours and can be stacked with staircase access. They have additional storage facilities and some car parking and are an alternative to expensive and less desirable B&B accommodation. The units are expected to be installed towards the end of 2018.

#### *Staffing Arrangements*

- 2.12 The Hostel has 5 staff supervised by the Assistant Housing Options Manager (Homelessness). The Hostel team includes the Manager, 2.5 FTE Deputy Managers, a Caretaker and a part-time Cleaner. Hostel Management staff have a small office near to the entrance of the main building with a service reception area for residents' enquiries.
- 2.13 As the Hostel is now full most of the time it has resulted in an increased workload for staff who also now visit and monitor other types of temporary accommodation. Furthermore, the installation of the modular units referred to above has presented a need for additional staffing. In April 2017, the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed the appointment of one part-time (18 hours) additional Deputy Hostel Manager on a temporary contract for 2 years (included in the staffing numbers referred to in Paragraph 2.12 above), funded from the Government's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant in recognition of the additional workload.

### **3. Hemnall House, Epping**

- 3.1 Hemnall House comprises 10 units of accommodation on two floors, mainly small studio flats with shared facilities, although there are some larger self-contained units.
- 3.2 The flats are occupied on a non-secure tenancy with the accommodation being carpeted and the kitchens equipped with refrigerators and cookers. Residents have use of a communal laundry room.
- 3.3 Staff offer support to tenants on an out-reach basis and visit the scheme each week. The flats are let to families with no more than 2 children (because of the limited size of the flats) who are able to live more independently than those at the hostel.
- 3.4 Some residents may be referred to the Peabody Trust Support Scheme where additional support is needed.

### **4. Bed and Breakfast Accommodation**

- 4.1 Following a competitive tendering exercise, the Council has appointed a number of hotels both within and outside of the District to provide bed and breakfast accommodation. All hotels used have been inspected to ensure that they provide adequate living conditions and meet all health and safety requirements. Fire Safety Risk Assessments are monitored on a six-monthly basis.
- 4.2 The Council has on average 20 single people living in bed and breakfast accommodation at any one time who are generally housed there as a last resort for management reasons. The vast majority of occupants receive housing benefit.

### **5. Zinc Arts Accommodation**

- 5.1 Zinc Arts is a local charity based in Ongar and offers a range of accredited courses to those who struggle with mainstream education. At the site there is a residential block comprising 25 units which were originally designed for the use of students attending Zinc Arts' programmes. However, as there was limited interest from students many of the rooms remained empty. As a result, Zinc Arts now let the units to people who require support as a "health and wellbeing" Project with a Duty Manager on site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Zinc Arts approached the Council with the proposal that the units are made available for either single or parent and child homelessness applicants.
- 5.2 In April 2017, the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed that the Council enters into an Agreement with Zinc Arts to place homeless applicants at the accommodation on an ad.hoc. Licence basis. In 2018/2019 up to 9 homeless applicants will be placed there which will assist in reducing the number of applicants placed in expensive and less desirable B&B accommodation.

### **6. Non-secure Council Accommodation**

- 6.1 In certain circumstances, where in the opinion of the Housing Options Manager it is considered appropriate, arrangements will be made for an applicant to be housed temporarily in the Council's own housing stock until a permanent offer is made. At the time of writing around 15 properties have been made available in this way.

### **7. Women's Refuges**

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

- 7.2 It comprises 3 x 1 bedroom and 2 x 2 bedroom self-contained flats with their own kitchens and bathrooms. A Health Visitor attends regularly and the Scheme Manager ensures that all the tenants have access to a G.P. Legal advice is provided by a visiting solicitor. The Scheme Manager helps with training residents and assisting with issues such as returning to work with good links with local schools and nurseries being established.
- 7.3 Residents have assured short-hold Tenancies that can be renewed if they are not ready to move on. In order to be accepted on the scheme, residents must have been accepted for either the interim or full homelessness duty by the Council.
- 7.4 Safer Places is an independent domestic abuse charity dedicated to supporting adults and children affected by domestic abuse. They have refuges in Harlow, Broxbourne and Southend providing supported accommodation for up to 273 women. They also offer an outreach and floating support service in five Hertfordshire and Essex areas including the Epping Forest District. The outreach service is for women who either cannot or will not go into a refuge. The Homelessness Prevention Team would refer households fleeing domestic violence for a refuge space. In addition, referrals are also made to Women's Aid a national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children. They support a network of a range of domestic and sexual violence services across the UK.

## **8. High Risk Victims of Domestic Abuse - Transfers**

- 8.1 Where an existing social housing tenant of another Essex authority (who is a high risk victim of domestic abuse) is referred and it is confirmed by Essex County Council, that the victim needs to be moved specifically to the Epping Forest District, an appropriate offer of a tenancy will be made on a reciprocal basis. Any offer will be subject to Essex Police strongly recommending that the person must live only within the District and their priority has been assessed as being greater than all other existing cases where a duty has been accepted by the Council under the homeless legislation. Such accommodation offered will be either a flat or maisonette.

## **9. Applicants Accepted as Homeless under Part 7 of the Homelessness Act as amended**

- 9.1 Applicants accepted by Epping Forest District Council as homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended, will be made one offer of suitable accommodation after receiving their S.184 decision letter, in generally flatted accommodation (including maisonettes). Homeless applicants will be made an offer accordingly, subject to the availability of accommodation. In order to discharge its main homeless duty the Council will offer homeless applicants a 2 year Secure (fixed-term) Tenancy to give some temporary stability in order to prepare them to make their own arrangements thereafter. The Council will retain its duty to help [provide housing advice and assistance to] the applicant if at the end of the fixed-term establishes that they have become unintentionally homeless. If the offer is refused, the applicant will have the right to seek a Review of the suitability of the accommodation. If not successful, the Council's duty under the Homelessness Act 1996 as amended to provide accommodation will be considered to be discharged.
- 9.2 Around twenty percent of all offers of Council accommodation are made to homelessness applicants.

## Consultation

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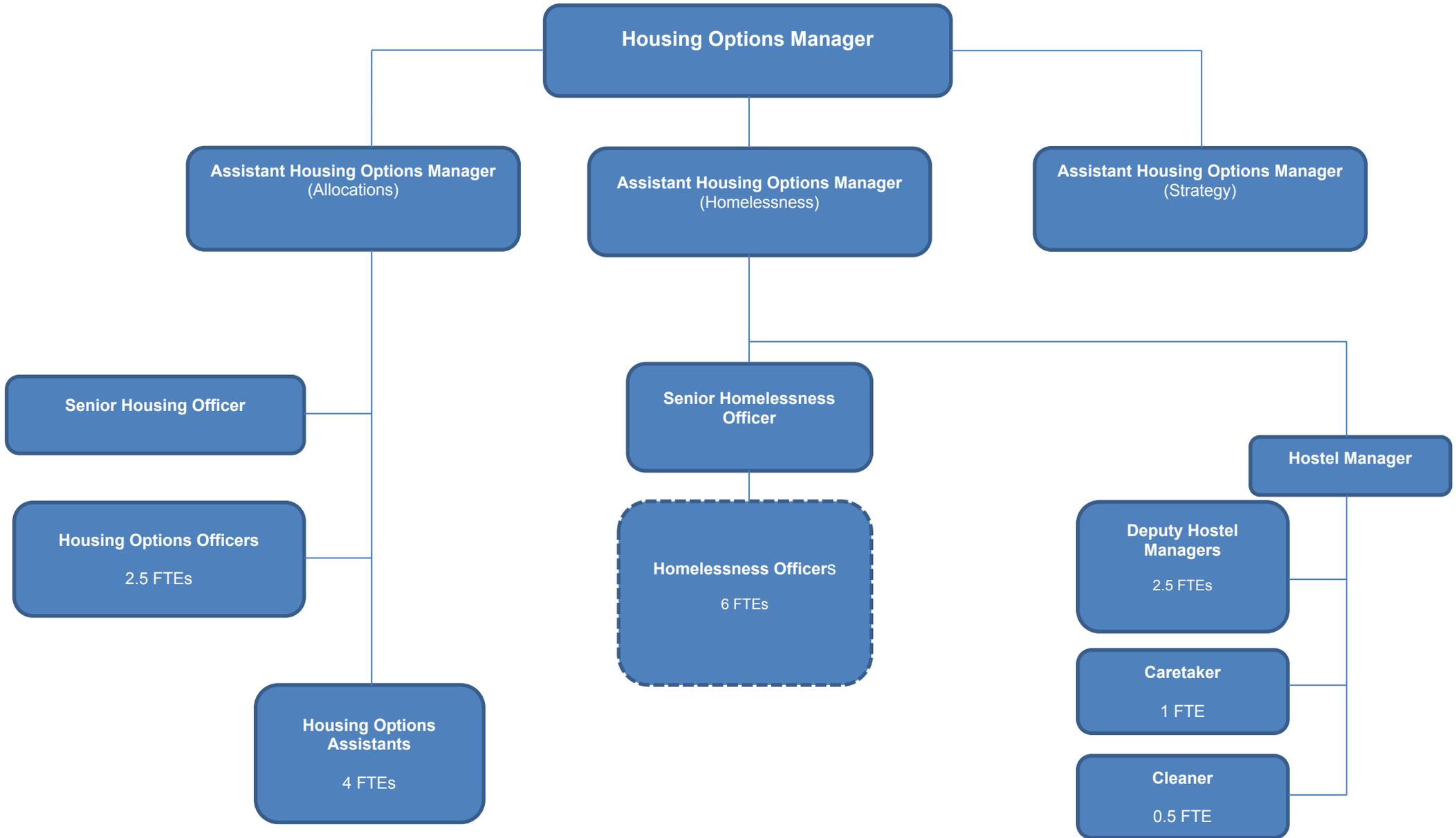
1. A consultation exercise on the Strategy has been undertaken with all partner agencies, the communities Select Committee Member Panel and Town and Parish Councils. The Strategy was approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder in August 2018.
2. The Council undertakes periodic consultations with its customers including customer interview exit surveys. The homelessness service forms part of the three yearly tenant's satisfaction survey with all Housing Services.

Action	Priority	Target Date	Milestones & Monitoring Arrangements	Responsibility
Appointment of the new Post of Assistant Housing Options Manager (Strategy) funded from Government Grant	High	July 2018	Recruitment Induction Assistance with meeting the new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act	Housing Options Manager
Continue to keep the number of households in temporary accommodation to a minimum and within the Council's Key Performance Indicator target of 65 households	High	On-going		Housing Options Manager
Continue to keep the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for the single homeless to a minimum	High	On-going	Bed and Breakfast accommodation will only be used for the single homeless where there are severe management difficulties  Consider the use of other suitable types accommodation	Asst Housing Options Manager (Homelessness)
Continue to ensure 40% affordable housing on large development sites	High	On-going	This will be achieved through local plan	Assistant Director (Property and Development)
Continuously Review the financial and underwriting support given to the Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme	High	On-going	This is essential in tackling homelessness	Housing Options Manager
Expand the "Sanctuary" Scheme for victims of domestic abuse and hate crime	Medium	On-going	5 active schemes currently in place	Housing Options Manager

<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Milestones &amp; Monitoring Arrangements</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Review the budget for the Rental Loan Scheme and the Preventing re-possession Fund	Medium	On-going	This is essential in tackling homelessness`	Housing Options Manager
Finalise the arrangements for "CHESS" to provide advice, support and assistance to rough sleepers in the District	High	July 2018	Meetings with CHESS Complete Service Level Agreement Monitor performance	Housing Options Manager
Implement the revised Housing Allocations Scheme changes relating to homelessness	High	July 2018	2 year fixed term tenancies for homeless applicants New tenancy declaration Information on sign-up Visiting tenants after 18 months Reduce residency requirement for those in appropriate support schemes	Housing Options Manager
Liaise with appropriate external agencies and set up procedures under the Duty to Refer	High	October 2018	Meetings with agencies Training of staff Referral forms	Housing Options Manager
Submit a report to the Cabinet for consideration to be given for the use of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant for 2019/2020	High	October 2018		Assistant Director (Housing Operations)
Complete the installation of the Modular Units ("pods") in the grounds at the Council's homeless persons' hostel Norway House , north Weald	High	December 2018	Planning Consent Risk Assessment  Procedures for housing single homeless applicants in the units	Assistant Director (Property and Development)  Housing Options Manager

<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Milestones &amp; Monitoring Arrangements</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Work with Genesis Housing Association in order to provide landlord incentives thereby expanding the private sector leasing scheme	High	December 2018	Meeting with Genesis Housing Association Promoting the Scheme	Housing Options Manager
Expand the use of the Zinc Arts accommodation initiative to 9 units in 2018/2019	High	December 2018	Identifying suitable single or parent and child applicants to be accommodated there  Exploring the possibility of expanding the scheme further	Housing Options Manager

# HOUSING OPTIONS SECTION





# **Epping Forest District Council**

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