



Independent Living for Older People in Epping Forest 2023/24 to 2028/29

**A housing strategy for older people in
Epping Forest**

FOREWORD and VISION – from portfolio holder

People living longer is a well-known national trend, and the need for suitable housing plus care and support are therefore also increasing. In Epping Forest life expectancy is 84.1 years, higher than the national average (82.8) (based on 2021 census). The incidence of dementia in the district is also higher than the national average, 2.1% versus 0.71 (source ONS; based on people registered with GPs). The demand for independent living is increasing and the need for more specialist housing is an even more pressing issue.

That is why we need this strategy. Our vision is for everyone aged over 60 in Epping Forest to have a choice of quality, accessible and practical housing, plus the care and support services required to remain independent for as long as possible. This will be delivered through a combination of private sector development, redevelopment of independent living schemes, working with our residents and public sector creativity. These choices must be within the financial reach of all current and future older people in the district so they have the information they need to plan for where they would like to live at different stages of their later lives.

We aim to modernise our housing services for older people and the independent living schemes that we provide. We will also make the best use of assistive technology to help older people remain independent for as long as possible.

Cllr Holly Whitbread Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder

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Responding to a changing population

Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) is the largest social landlord in the district providing homes for 11% of households. The Council's portfolio of 6,465 properties includes general needs houses flats and bungalows, disability adapted properties, independent living accommodation for older and vulnerable people and hostels for homeless households. Housing Associations provide just over 3% of residential premises in the district.

The Council currently manages 12 Independent Living schemes providing a total of 463 homes, mostly one-bed homes, mainly occupied by single people, and three schemes have a high proportion of bedsits. The total number of specialist homes for older people across the district is around 1,300 in 40 schemes. Between the 2011 and 2021 census the population of Epping Forest increased by around 10,300 to around 135,000. The population of people aged over 65 has increased in the same period from 22,550 to 26,269 (around 1.4%), with the biggest increase being in those aged 65 to 74 years.

Review and Intelligence

In 2022 the Council reviewed the performance and sustainability of our sheltered housing, now re-named as Independent Living following a change in the service delivery model. Based on intelligence and population changes, the need in Epping Forest District Council is estimated at around 720 additional units of housing for older people and, 210 units of housing with care (extra care) in the district.

In reviewing service provision and stock, headline findings include:

- People expect their homes to be somewhere they can socialise with family and friends.
- The need to review our current delivery model to allow for a more flexible support service.
- Many of the EFDC schemes are over 50 years old and have lacked investment to modernise them.
- Some schemes currently have low levels of demand.
- All the schemes show positive financial performance, contributing surpluses to the Council.
- The need to explore options for underused facilities such as the second lounges at 3 independent living schemes.
- Review of the planned investment programme.
- Consideration of redeveloping schemes with studio accommodation.

EFDC Key Objectives

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

OUR PRIORITIES

Priority 1: Increasing the supply of affordable housing

Undertaking refurbishments of our independent living schemes to make them more desirable to older people occupying 2/3 bedroom properties, downsizing will free up more of our affordable accommodation for families. It is the quality of homes and service that will encourage tenants to downsize, freeing up much needed family homes.

Priority 2: Ensuring quality, safety, and high standards

In consultation with our residents, upgrade our emergency alarm system and procure a new monitoring provider to ensure we continue to make the best use of assistive technology. In addition, we will adopt a 'stay put' policy as recommended by the Fire and Rescue Service and our Fire Risk Assessor.

Our Independent Living accommodation will be a focus in the Asset Management Strategy (to be finalised early in 2024). This will ensure quality, safety and our high standards continue to be met.

Priority 3: Promoting health, wellbeing, and independence

To ensure our delivery model provides support to those residents that need it, helping them remain independent for as long as possible. To facilitate more social events to help with social isolation and improve general health and well-being. Explore the options for wi-fi in the communal lounges of our independent living schemes and support digital inclusion of our residents.

Priority 4: Facilitating economic growth and regeneration

To undertake an options appraisal for poorly performing stock with a long-term view to redevelop schemes with studio accommodation.

Priority 5: Protecting and enhancing the environment

Continue to promote and hold an annual Flowers in Bloom competition to help improve residents' health and wellbeing and enhance the environment in which they live.

What is independent living?

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

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

We appreciate that older people have different needs, which is why the Council have two kinds of independent living accommodation within the district. An independent living scheme is one block of flats. Grouped dwelling schemes are similar, but the properties are not all together in one block.

One-bedroom flats are the most common type of independent living, although there are still some studio apartments, and one-bedroom bungalows which benefit from their own garden. There are usually some communal facilities, such as a communal lounge, laundry room and a guest room for visiting friends and relatives.

An Independent Living Officer visits residents that need advice and support to remain independent. All the Council's Independent living properties benefit from an emergency alarm system so residents can call for help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Rents are similar to normal council rents but a 'delivery charge' is included for the support provided by the Independent Living Officer and emergency alarm service.

The advantages of living in our independent living schemes include but are not limited to:

- Greater security (door entry system and CCTV)

- The support of a visiting Independent Living Officer
- An emergency alarm system, 24 hours a day
- Community activities, for those that wish to join in
- Communal facilities including guest room and laundry facilities.
- Improved well-being
- A hub for the local community.

Delivering this Strategy

Our Delivery Model

Our work with residents and considering local data/intelligence, has identified the need to change the delivery model to one that responds to the support needs of current and future residents.

During 2022, through consultation, our residents told us they wanted a more flexible service, moving away from daily welfare checks as a number of residents are active and go out most days. They also wanted peace of mind knowing that when they need support it will be available to them. In April 2023 we introduced a new delivery model, one that is flexible and needs led. Some residents continue to receive a welfare check, these are now targeted to those that need and want them, allowing independent living officers to spend more time with residents with significant needs. A consultation exercise will be undertaken with residents in our independent living schemes during 2023/24 to ensure the new delivery service is meeting our resident's needs. We will review the delivery model at least every two years.

At the time of introducing our new delivery model we also moved away from the term "sheltered housing" as it infers people need looking after. Residents living in our schemes are independent and so the term *Independent Living* has been adopted with staff having the title *Independent Living Officer*.

Engaging with residents

The voice of our tenants will be at the centre of how we develop our services and invest in their homes. We will continue the meetings and surveys that have successfully engaged residents in the past. We will review how the Sheltered Forum meetings bring together the views of residents and work towards having a tenant representative from Independent Living on the Council's Tenant & Leaseholder Panel.

Engagement with residents links to our Resident Involvement Strategy, putting the customer at the heart of everything we do, empowering them to hold their landlord to account, improving communication with residents and working with the wider community.

Deliver Model Charge Options

All residents in our Independent Living Schemes pay a charge for the service provided by the Independent Living Officers and the emergency alarm and monitoring service.

The cost is reviewed annually, and we will carry out a deeper dive into what we can and cannot recover via service charges, including what may be covered through Housing Benefits.

Maximise additional accessible accommodation

3 independent living schemes benefit from having 2 communal lounges, Leonard Davis House, North Weald, Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey and Buckhurst Court, Buckhurst Hill.

Consultation with residents at these schemes was undertaken and they fully support the idea of turning these underused facilities into much needed accessible accommodation. Subject to available funding we plan to undertake one conversion a year until all completed.

Working in partnership with other organisations

To maximise opportunities and life chances for older people, we will work with other teams across EFDC and other organisations. Through engagement with the local Health and Wellbeing Board, specifically the socio-economic action group, we hope that we can increase opportunities for older people through joint working. There may also be options to bid for funds to develop activities for our tenants.

Modernising our Independent Living Schemes

We acknowledge that much of our independent living accommodation and communal areas and facilities require investment. We also acknowledge the demand for and appeal of some of our accommodation is not as it once was, hence, this strategy setting a of direction of travel.

We therefore have a programme of work to meet the needs and expectations of residents, including:

- A programme to **refurbish all our independent living schemes** to ensure they remain attractive and desirable, not only to existing tenants but to those looking to downsize and those who are on our housing waiting list. Our aim to is refurbish one or two schemes a year, two are already completed at time of writing this strategy, until all have been completed.
- The Asset Management strategy will prioritise the future investment in Independent Living Schemes. We will look at data such as the ease of letting Independent Living homes and

satisfaction data from tenants to ensure we take a data led approach to stock investment. Our priority is to provide housing to local people, to reduce the number of void properties and ensuring our independent living scheme are sustainable for the future.

- **Deliver and modernise telecare equipment** to meet Digital Switchover - Our independent living schemes currently have an analogue telephone system that is about 18 years old. Plus, technology in emergency alarm systems has moved on. The national analogue network is being switched off in 2025 and we will move our service to digital before that happens. To ensure the alarm systems in our independent living schemes continue to provide a reliable service, and meet the needs of our residents, now and in the future, we will upgrade to a digital system.
- We know that **automatic doors** at the main entrance to an independent living scheme are important to our residents as they aid accessibility for people with disabilities, furthermore, they enhance security and are convenient for people carrying baggage. Automatic door systems also ensure that we comply with the relevant regulations of the Equality Act 2010. Over half of our 12 schemes now benefit from automatic doors and over the life of this strategy we aim to install these at the main entrance of all our independent living schemes.
- People purchase **mobility scooters** for several reasons but in the main they allow people to retain their independence. We provide storage for mobility scooters at some of our schemes. It is also inappropriate for these vehicles to be stored in residents' properties because if they are not looked after or charged properly, they are a significant fire risk. We will develop a programme to ensure that all our independent living schemes have appropriate storage with charging points for these vehicles by 2030. We will investigate opportunities for bicycle storage on our schemes as well.
- As part of future viability assessments, we will also consider whether installation of **charging points for electric vehicles** is appropriate.
- **Digital Inclusion** - We are working with OpenReach to develop options for residents in our Independent Living Schemes to access the internet via broadband services. We will explore the options for communal broadband, undertaking a pilot initially at one scheme and then open out to others schemes if that is successful. We will explore funding support through grants for communal broadband installation and we will look to provide training and possibly some equipment to help residents engage with online services.
- The **Flowers In Bloom** competition was one way to combat the loneliness and isolation that had developed in the Covid lockdowns. This had a detrimental effect on the mental

health and physical health of our residents. As soon as the restrictions started to ease, we looked at ways in which we could get the residents together in a safe environment where they could be at a safe distance from each other but close enough to talk. The Flowers In Bloom competition is fun and exciting and encourages residents to be outside, have some exercise and be socially interactive. We will continue this annual competition as long as residents are interested.

Conclusion

The outline delivery plan is at Appendix 2 to this strategy. It will be developed more fully in 2024 and reported annually to the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel. Progress against the delivery plan and this strategy will be reported to Cabinet in 2028/29 and a revised strategy developed if necessary.

The delivery plan will be used to deliver and assess the impact of this strategy and we will monitor activity against deadlines as well as satisfaction through the annual tenant's survey. Turnover and ease of letting properties and return on investment will also be measured.

GLOSSARY

Affordable housing - Housing that is provided for rent or shared ownership for people who cannot afford to purchase a property on the open market.

Aids and adaptations/assistive technology - Devices and property adjustments for people with restricted mobility or disabilities, to improve their ability to do things around the home.

Corporate Plan - The Council's aspirations for local residents and communities and the principles it will work to.

Digital Inclusion - Being able to use digital devices (such as computers or smart phones and the internet).

The District - The geographic administrative area covered by Epping Forest District Council.

Housing register - A waiting list of people who qualify for social housing in the district.

Older person - For the purpose of independent living, an older person is an applicant aged 60 or over.

Public health - Activities coordinated across different organisations to promote good health, prevent disease, and prolong life.

Social housing - Homes for rent and associated services for people whose personal circumstances make it difficult to meet their housing needs in the open market.

Wellbeing - Being comfortable, healthy, and happy. This may include mental health, satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose and ability to manage stress.

LINKS AND REFERENCES

The strategy pays due regard to the following:

Epping Forest Corporate Plan 2023-2027

Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026

The Social Housing (Regulation) Bill

The emerging Asset Management Strategy

Related strategies and policies

The Strategy is linked to the following strategies and policies:

- Housing Strategy 2023-2027
- Resident Involvement Strategy 2022-2027
- Allocations Scheme 2022-2027
- Customer Complaints Policy
- Health Impact Assessment Guidance
- Safeguarding Policy
- Tenancy Policy 2022-2027

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Over the past five years there has been a number of reports and studies into the provision of care and other services for older people. Age Concern for example are estimating that around 1.6 million people aged 65 or older have unmet needs for care and support.

The Centre for Ageing Better's report *The State of Ageing* ([The State of Ageing 2022](#)) reviewed national data and their conclusions include that "a financially secure and healthy later life is becoming increasingly unlikely for millions of people". There is also a trend for more and more people to be living alone in mid and later life, which has consequences for housing as well as health and care services.

The King's Fund article [What is happening to life expectancy in England?](#) reports that the chances of having a decent old age vary and that the people who are least well-off have the slimmest chance of all. Across England today – depending on where we live and how well-off we are – there are differences of up to ten years in how long we can expect to live and more than 17 years in the time we get in good health without a disabling illness. Almost 1 in 5 homes headed by someone aged 60 or older is in a condition that endangers the health of the people who live there.

In May this year the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) announced a task force that is to report on how housing for older people can be improved. Their work continues and [KEEP THIS UPDATED UNTIL STRATEGY FINALISED]

The *People at the Heart of Care* white paper ([People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform white paper - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)) highlight the importance of housing in helping people to live independently in the community. The Government wants local places to join up housing, health and care services, providing more choice in local communities and creating the local conditions to increase the supply of specialist and supported housing.

APPENDIX 2: ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN SUMMARY – to be developed in detail n 2024

	Project	Task	Measuring success
1.	Conversion of lounges	Convert unused lounges in IL Schemes to additional Independent Living homes, i.e., accessible flats.	New homes created
2.	Encouraging downsizing	Use marketing and the modernising of our IL schemes to encourage tenants to downsize to independent living options.	2 bed and larger homes becoming available
3.	Review the use of IL schemes with studio style accommodation	Use of local intelligence/data in conjunction with the Asset Management Strategy and the stock condition survey to carry out a viability study at these schemes.	Recommendations for the future of schemes with studio accommodation
4.	Refurbish the communal areas of Independent Living Schemes	Complete 1 to 2 refurbishments per annum	1 to 2 schemes completed per annum
5.	To upgrade all emergency alarm (warden call) systems	Procure new alarm call systems services in advance of Digital Switchover	Installation of new systems in advance of Digital Switchover
6.	To relet the alarm receiving centre contract	Undertake a procurement exercise to establish a new five-year contract	A new contractor in place by the end of 2024
7.	To adapt the IL Delivery service to meet the needs of IL residents, now and in the future	Consult with residents and staff and report to Tenant and Leaseholder Panel	Resident satisfaction with involvement and with the delivery model
8.	Consider the charges for the delivery service	Review what we can charge for	Aspire to the service being cost neutral to EFDC

	Project	Task	Measuring success
9.	Digital engagement	Install wi-fi in the communal lounges of our independent living schemes	Successful installations
10.	Digital engagement	Support residents to become digitally engaged	Resident survey
11.	Continue installing mobility scooter storage at our independent living schemes	Identify all locations where a scooter store can go and develop a programme of installation based on funding and feasibility	Successful store installations where funding exists
12.	Review the need for bicycle storage	We will investigate opportunities for bicycle storage on our schemes as well.	Meeting resident requirements
13.	Identify all schemes where automatic main entrance doors can be fitted and develop a programme of installation	A programme of automatic door installation to be created where the Asset Management Strategy and residents identify a need	Successful installation of automatic doors where funding allows
14.	Develop a programme of scheme activities	Deliver the programme in collaboration with residents	Resident survey
15.	Flowers in Bloom every year	To get more residents involved in the scheme and activities to support their mental and physical health	Annual competition to be run across all schemes