



Epping Forest District Council Annual Report to Tenants 2022

Epping Forest
District Council
www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk

This Annual Report to Tenants provides information about how Epping Forest District Council Housing Services performed from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 and our plans for 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Welcome to our annual report to tenants for April 2021 - March 2022

2021/22 has been another challenging year as everyone continued to adjust to the impact of the pandemic and the rapidly rising cost of living.

Understandably the fuel and food shortages and price hikes affected many residents and we have continued to do what we can to support those most affected.

Despite the hurdles, we worked with the community to make some real improvements to our estates and services.

We also started to prepare for significant changes to the way Social Housing Landlords (like the Council and Housing Associations) will be held to account by tenants, the Housing Ombudsman and the Government's regulator of social housing.

This report would normally have been produced in the Autumn of 2022 however our resources at the time did not allow this to happen. An updated Annual Report for 2022/23 will be produced in the next month and published.

Our stock

As of 31 March 2022, our stock included:

- 6,465 Council homes
- 1,084 leasehold properties
- 1 hostel (54 rooms)
- 2 houses in multiple occupation (7 rooms)
- 2,102 garages

Collectively we have:

- provided 19 new affordable homes for people on our housing register as part of our Council house building programme
- increased our housing stock by purchasing 10 properties from the open market
- managed a housing register of 1,314 applicants
- rehoused 439 households including 82 mutual exchanges



Activities over last year and plans for the year ahead

Our forward planning combines the direction of travel set out in the EFDC corporate plan and housing related statutory and regulatory changes with listening and responding flexibly to the needs and wishes of residents.

Restructure and Changes to Building Regulations

The regulatory and statutory requirements for compliance across a range of subjects will come to bear in the next two years and we are preparing to meet those requirements.

What we have achieved in 2021-22

Our Property Surveyors, Neighbourhood Officers and Estate and Land Officers all now work together on the same geographical areas, or patches, as a small team. The Surveyors will be spending more time out and about surveying properties and talking to tenants.

What is planned for 2022-23

Preparing for the asset management strategy to be produced in 2023-24.

Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF)

The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) supports the UK government's plans to reach net zero by 2050, by cutting carbon emissions, combatting fuel poverty, and creating green jobs. The first tranche of funding was made available from August 2021.

What we have achieved in 2021-22

We have teamed up with E.On energy to prepare a bid for funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. E.On have assisted us in preparing the bid but will also assist all through the delivery process, should they be successful, with resident and contractor engagement. We have stressed that where possible local contractors should meet the requirements of PAS2035. (PAS 2035 is a specification for 'whole-house' retrofit with regards to energy efficiency.) Successful bids will be notified around February 2023. There are 130 properties in total, all of which do not have a gas supply to them, so this should provide some financial relief to some residents' fuels bills. We will use this as an opportunity to build our decarbonisation strategy moving forward.

What is planned for 2022-23

A formal contract for the retrofit programme put in place and preparations for roll out of works in 2023/24.

Working with Qualis

What we have achieved in 2021- 22

Qualis are generally meeting the agreed performance and our working relationship is continuing to evolve. We are hoping to include Qualis in the decarbonisation strategy of the Council moving forward and have begun discussions about what they need to do to be able to work retrofitting our properties in the future.

What is planned for 2022-23

We will increase our joint working with Qualis to ensure that our good performance on gas compliance continues.



Income Recovery

What we have achieved in 2021-22

We have reduced the arrears of rent owed to the Council by 16.1%, down by £97.56k on a total debt of £606k owed by former and current tenants. We are continually updating the information and support that we provide to tenants and leaseholders who are struggling to pay their rent or leasehold service charges, to take account of the cost-of-living crisis.

What is planned for 2022-23

We are launching a campaign to encourage tenants and leaseholders who are finding it difficult to manage their rent and/or service charges to seek help. Our key messages are to contact us as soon as possible, and to use the services at our Community Hub. We are introducing ways of making communication easier, by improving the letters we send and promoting a wider range of digital services such as email, text, and the Council website. We plan to review the way customers can pay rent by making use of direct debits and providing the option of paying rent weekly, fortnightly, 4-weekly, or monthly. By offering a variety of ways for tenants to pay rent, we hope to meet the individual needs of each person. We are also working with residents to help them to achieve the two weeks in advance payment required by their tenancy agreement; allowing advance payments to be spread over the course of this financial year (rather than one lump sum).

Older People's Services

What we have achieved in 2021-22

We undertook a refurbishment of Frank Bretton House which focused on the internal decoration of the scheme and included wallpaper and paint, flooring, window dressings, new front doors for residents, furniture, artwork and signage, in addition 2 new planters were installed in the communal garden to allow residents to plant flowers. The work was done to a high standard with residents being very positive about the modern feel of the scheme. The refurbishments will be rolled out across our independent living schemes. Activities such as gardening for everyone have been supported and enabled with the installation of raised flower beds and a Flowers in Bloom competition. We reviewed and updated our Welcome to Sheltered Housing booklet and devised an action plan to improve our customer service.

What is planned for 2022-23

We will continue our sheltered housing refurbishments and start planning the upgrade of the emergency alarm systems. We will hold another Flowers in Bloom competition and install raised flower beds at Frank Bretton House and Hyde Mead House. A cream tea will be at all schemes to celebrate the platinum Jubilee. Resident consultation will be held on a new needs' led support model which all being well will be implement April 23.

Housing Needs

What we have achieved in 2021-22

Over the course of 2021/22 we met new requirements from the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, including recruiting to a Domestic Abuse Support Specialist role. We completed consultation on a new Housing Allocations Scheme and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and improved the online customer portal (Home Option) for those seeking housing.

We also began assessing our services against the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation. This is an independent accreditation for housing providers responding to domestic abuse. The accreditation is a three-year process and considers policy, processes, and approach. We will monitor the benefits of this work and resources needed, to consider moving forward with the accreditation process.



We facilitated 90 lets into the privately rented sector and let 439 (including mutual exchanges) Council properties and 43 Housing Association properties. We have also supported 12 Ukrainian refugees through private sector property inspections, housing in our own stock and assisting into private rented accommodation. We also won 3 years' worth of funding, as part of a joint bid, to help people sleeping rough in our district.

Changing Futures is a job coaching project addressing the gaps between health, homelessness, and housing. The project is funded by £75k over three years. We are working closely with Open Road and their job coach is embedded with our homelessness teams providing support on CV's, interviews and job searching. The employment work is done in concert with their housing plans and health needs.

The Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding initiative is also supporting rough sleepers with access to outreach mental health support via an NHS employed specialist nurse.

What is planned for 2022-23

We aim to be making the best use we can of the private rented sector as a key prevention tool for the relief of homelessness. We will have a deeper investigation into under occupation – we want to make best use of council stock and ensure all opportunities to release family sized accommodation for those that need it are realised. We will increase the number of private sector property inspections that support refugees into local housing.

As part of the RSI consortium, we will commence the next three-year funding initiative for delivery of services to reduce the numbers of rough sleepers. We will use a combination of prevention and the funding to support people off the streets. E.g., to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) owned by EFDC and managed by our partners who deliver life skills and other services.

Development

What we have achieved in 2021-22

We have made huge progress in our Council house building programme, completing 19 units in 21/22 of our phase 4.2 with the rest expected later on in the year.

We have been working hard with our design team to develop further schemes to deliver more much needed affordable housing units and will be looking to take these designs further in the next financial year.

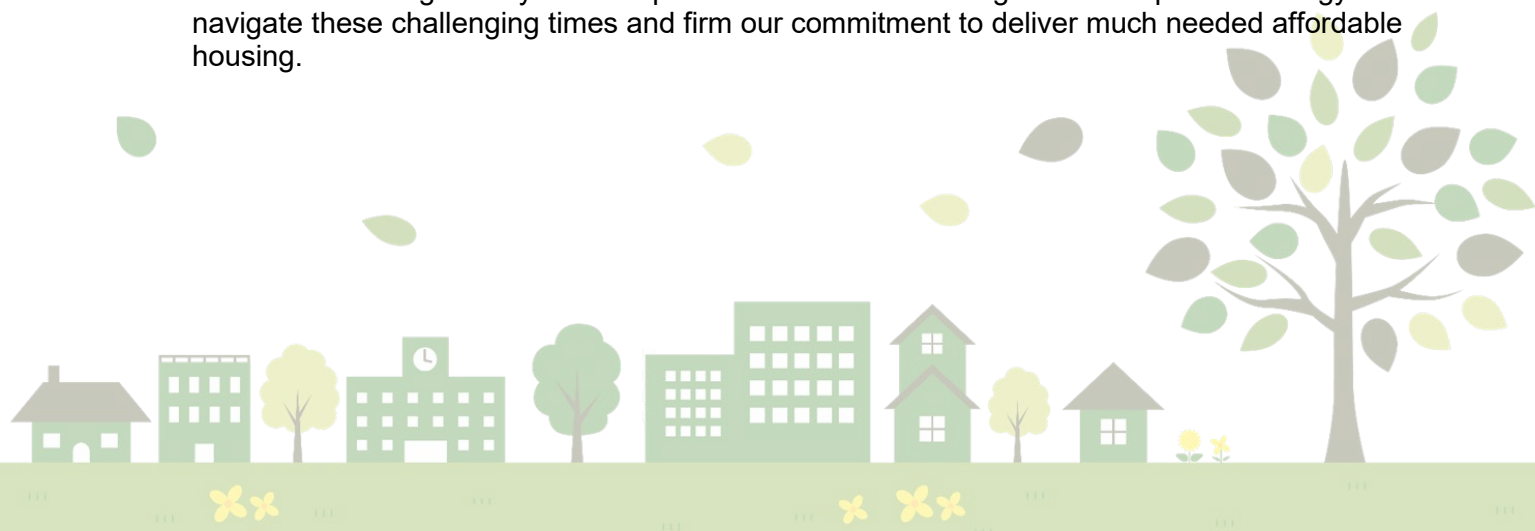
We have faced several challenges this year, with build costs increasing at a huge rate, material, and labour shortages and more recently, the overall economic turmoil. We remain committed to our house building programme and will do all that we can to mitigate the risks caused by the challenges currently being faced.

What is planned for 2022-23

We expect to deliver on a further 19 units between April and June from our phase 4.2 programme. Within our programme we have a further two schemes that will be delivered in 22/23 providing 15 units for affordable rent at our Pentlow Way and Woollard Street sites. Additionally, we are expecting a further 18 units to be delivered by one of our strategic housing partners B3 Living in 22/23, providing us with 14 affordable rent units and 4 shared ownership units.

We will be submitting planning applications as part of our future council house building programme, which will include homes built with high standards of energy efficiency.

We will be working closely with our portfolio holder in reviewing our development strategy as we navigate these challenging times and firm our commitment to deliver much needed affordable housing.



Safer Neighbourhoods and Communities

What we have achieved in 2021-22

We do our best to make sure that your neighbourhoods, as well as your homes, are a safe and enjoyable place to live. In 2021 we introduced our new Anti-Social Behaviour app (called ASB App) for complainants of anti-social behaviour, allowing them to report on active cases from their mobile phones. This is still in the early stages, and we are excited for the future development of the app.

We take anti-social behaviour extremely seriously and in partnership with the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team, we have dealt with 456 cases of low-level and high-level ASB.

This action includes:

- Issuing 21 Community Protection Warnings, 6 Community Protection Notices, 127 formal warnings and 17 tenancy action notices to individuals whose behaviour has had an adverse impact on a community they live in or visit.
- We also tackled more serious ASB offences, which have resulted in 6 properties being closed and 12 tenants being evicted, or their tenancy being surrendered.
- We spent £35,480 on dealing with fly tipping and littering. This figure does not include the cost of dealing with rubbish left on the floor next to refuse bins and is money that could otherwise have spent on other services.

What is planned for 2022-23

The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour function and team will move to the Safer Communities team to work alongside our other investigative and enforcement officers. The domestic abuse strategy will be reviewed to ensure it matches the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) standards. We will begin to deliver a range of estate projects at Ninefields, Waltham Abbey through a two-year Home Office Safer Streets Fund.

Cleaner and Greener Neighbourhoods

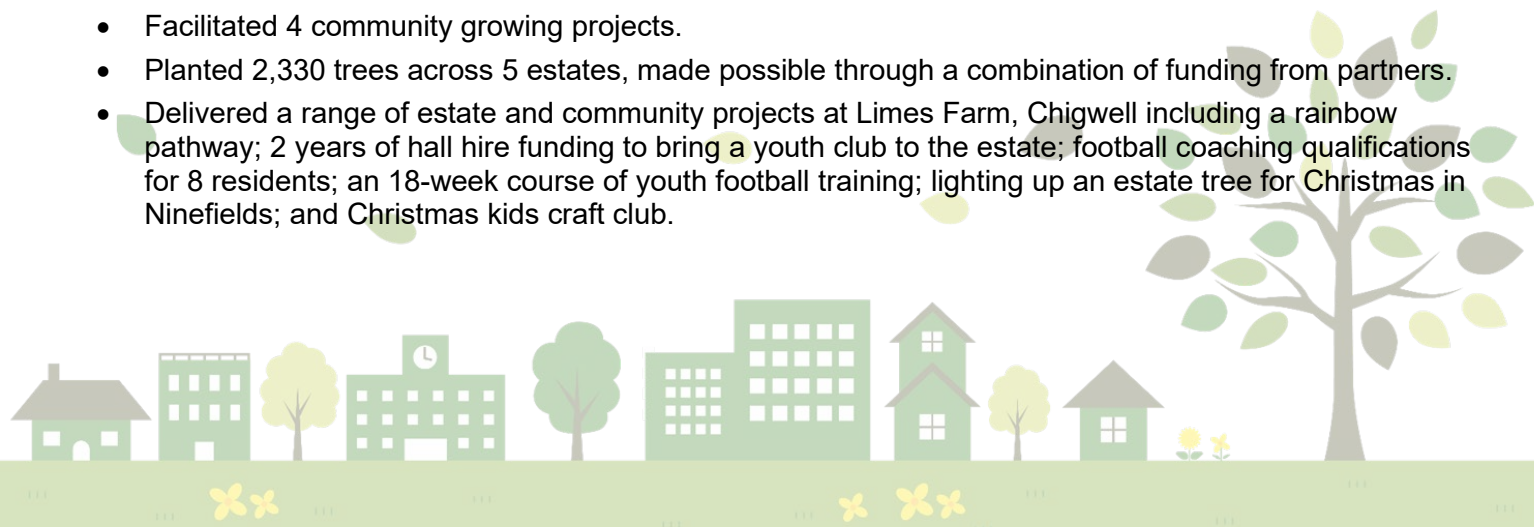
What we have achieved in 2021-22

We have committed a total of £1.482m over the last 2 years to maintain our estates and neighbourhoods, with programmes ranging from working with the Mow & Grow project, to help our elderly and disabled residents to maintain their gardens to seeking enforcement action to address ASB.

On estates where residents have opted into a Cleaning and Caretaking Service, our cleaners and caretakers work hard to keep your neighbourhoods clean and tidy. During 2021/22 we have moved to an all-electric fleet; removed 74 separate pieces of graffiti throughout the district. As part of an initiative to make our team multi skilled operatives, 3 cleaners have now been trained as part of a City and Guilds Diploma to spray and weed our estates. The team have also been involved in 23 low level hoarding cases, helping those most vulnerable in our community maintain their tenancies and clean their homes to a liveable standard.

On our estates we also:

- Provided 15 safe and secure bin stores to tidy up your estates, reduce fly tipping and reduce the risk of arson.
- Installed / refurbished 19 jockey rails to combat unauthorised parking on housing green spaces.
- Facilitated 4 community growing projects.
- Planted 2,330 trees across 5 estates, made possible through a combination of funding from partners.
- Delivered a range of estate and community projects at Limes Farm, Chigwell including a rainbow pathway; 2 years of hall hire funding to bring a youth club to the estate; football coaching qualifications for 8 residents; an 18-week course of youth football training; lighting up an estate tree for Christmas in Ninefields; and Christmas kids craft club.



What is planned for 2022-23

We will begin a public consultation with residents concerning our third proposed estate regeneration scheme at the Broadway in Loughton. We will also introduce new rules and charges for skip companies wishing to position skips on the Council's housing land. This will encourage skips to be positioned more responsibly, for shorter periods of time and will generate additional funds.

Our cleaning service will be seeking a waste disposal licence or other agreement to dispose of waste material from hoarding cases and fly tipping.

Involving and empowering our residents

We are committed to engaging with our tenants, leaseholders, and other residents, involving residents in shaping our services and ensuring that we are providing the level of service that residents expect. We continue to directly engage with tenants and leaseholders through our Tenant and Leaseholder Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum, Tenants' and Residents' Associations, Resident Involvement Co-Create Group, Focus Groups and Block Champions. We also have five fully constituted residents' groups.

What we have achieved in 2021-22

We started developing a new Property and Housing Resident Involvement Partnership Strategy, setting out our approach to resident engagement and how resident involvement services will be delivered. To ensure that residents are truly placed at the heart of the strategy, we set up a Resident Involvement Co-Creation Group to co-produce the Strategy. Our new Facebook page increased in followers and helped keep residents up to date with local and national issues. During the year we ran several consultations on a range of national and local issues, co-producing with residents our response to the Social Housing Regulator on proposed Tenant Satisfaction Measures. We also delivered our first training course for involved residents.

What is planned for 2022-23

We will seek approval for and start to deliver the new Housing Resident Involvement Strategy. We aim to complete a tenant and leaseholder census to enable us to check and correct the information we have stored about our residents and understand how they wish to be contacted. The census will help us to provide the right services targeted to the people that need them and identify who may need extra advice and support. We will also carry out the annual tenant and lessee survey addressing the new requirements from the Regulator of Social Housing.

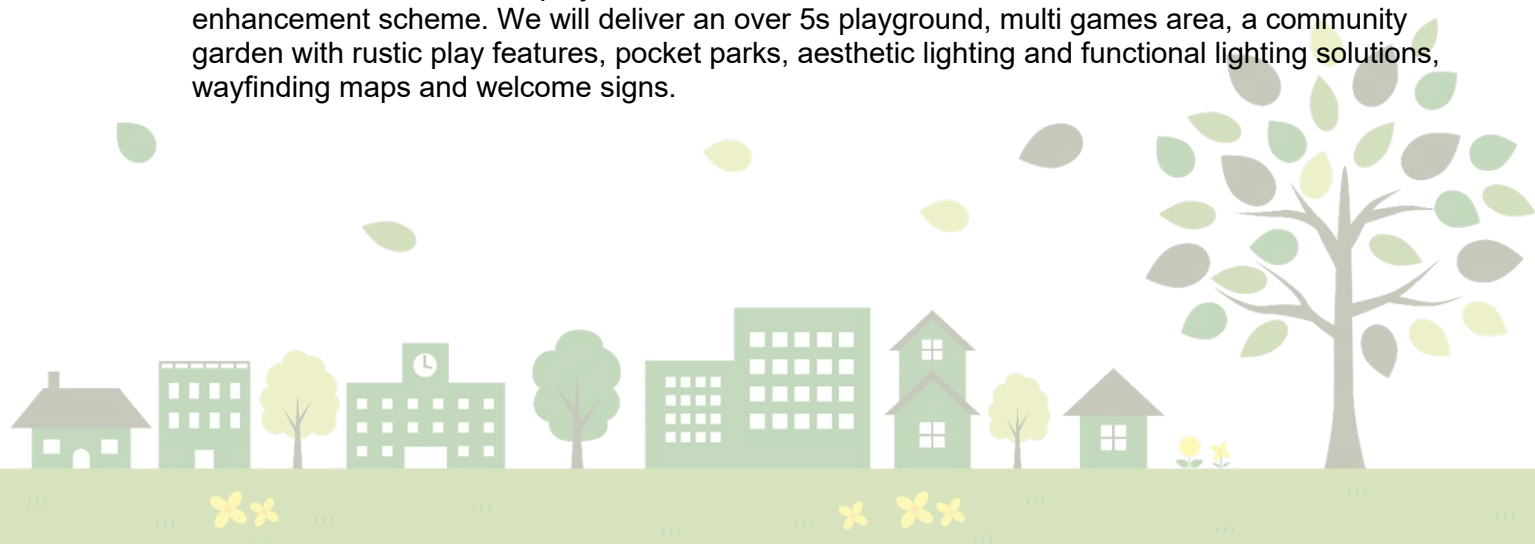
More than Bricks and Mortar

What we have achieved in 2021-22

In 2021/22, we launched a new four-year project, the More than Bricks and Mortar Estate Improvement Scheme. Under the scheme, residents are encouraged to suggest improvements aimed at enhancing the look, feel and lived experience of our Council and mixed tenure housing estates. The scheme was ring fenced in year one to estates where there were recognised Residents Associations. Some fantastic feedback was received at public consultation and several projects were approved for delivery by the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel. These projects will be delivered in 2022/23.

What is planned for 2022-23

We will continue to deliver projects under the More than Bricks and Mortar Scheme estate enhancement scheme. We will deliver an over 5s playground, multi games area, a community garden with rustic play features, pocket parks, aesthetic lighting and functional lighting solutions, wayfinding maps and welcome signs.



Complaints

We always want to provide you with the best possible service; however, we appreciate that sometimes things can go wrong. If there is a problem, we want you to tell us so that we can investigate, put things right and learn from it.

Complaints in 2021/22

We updated our complaints policy in October 2022 and the full version is on the Council's website at [Comments, compliments and complaints - Epping Forest District Council \(eppingforestdc.gov.uk\)](https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/Comments%2Ccomplimentsandcomplaints).

Housing assets & maintenance, management, and homelessness & allocations complaints

Complaints by Subject

Subject	Number in 2021/22
Repairs	14
Planned works	3
Failure to provide a service	29
Poor communication	16
Poor conduct (staff or contractor)	33
Unhappy with policy decision	6
Totals	101

Main Cause of Complaints

Main cause	Number in 2021/22
Dissatisfaction with repair or delayed repair	11
Customer understanding or expectation	60
Failure to provide a service	15
Poor communication	3
Poor conduct (staff or contractor)	10
Open	2
Totals	101

In terms of complaints being upheld or not, we upheld or partially upheld 39 of the 101 complaints received in 2021/22

9 cases went to a stage 2 investigation and 3 were partly or wholly upheld. 21 cases were referred to the Housing Ombudsman (these may have been considered by EFDC in the previous year) who found fault in 3 of the cases.



Our Performance

Our performance is closely monitored by staff, managers, and elected councillors. Some of our performance indicators are also monitored by our tenant and leaseholders' panel. The table below shows the tenant selected measures and our performance over the last two fiscal years.

Indicator	EFDC Target	Performance 2020-21	Performance 2021-22	Performance against target 2021-22
Amount of rent collected as a proportion of rent owed	100%	100.88%*	100.5%*	Exceeded target
Number of households occupying temporary accommodation at the end of the year	100	110	110	Target not achieved
Average number of calendar days it took to re-let a council property	30 days	58 days	49 days	Target not achieved
Average overall number of working days it took to complete a responsive repair	7 days	7 days	15 days	Target not achieved
Tenant satisfaction with the general standard of the repairs service	98%	90%	94%	Target not achieved
Average number of working days it took to complete major void works with a value of more than £1,500	22 days	23 days	20 days	Exceeded target
Percentage of properties that did not meet the Decent Home Standard at the end of the year	0%	0%	2%	Target not achieved
Number of annual gas safety certificates lapsed over 12 months	0	0	0	Achieved target

*This figure is over 100% as it includes recovery of rent arrears owed from previous years



What we spent on repairs and maintenance

Capital expenditure is the money we spend on planned maintenance. The chart below shows how much we spent last year and plan to spend this year.

Works	Expenditure 2021-2022	Planned Expenditure 2022-2023
Gas and electric heating	£808,140	£1,260,000
Electric rewiring and upgrades	£893,300	£1,200,000
Windows, doors & front entrance doors	£1,791,800	£1,404,000
Tiled and flat roofing	£268,700	£1,049,000
Water tank replacements	£0	£204,000
Kitchen replacements	£554,100	£750,000
Bathroom replacements	£330,600	£625,000
Door entry security systems	£202,400	£400,000
Disabled adaptations	£572,400	£650,000

In the last year we also spent £2 million on other capital projects including estate environmental works, structural work, and asbestos removal.

Energy Efficiency Works	Number completed in 2021-2022	Actual Expenditure 2021-22
Cavity Wall Insulation	17	29,708
Loft Insulation	8	2,400
Total	25	32,108

Adaptations

We can adapt Council properties to make them more accessible for tenants with disabilities. Here is a breakdown of disabled adaption works we undertook in 2021-2022.

Adaptation	Number completed in 2021-2022	Total cost
Graded floor showers	51	£295,265
Over bath showers	8	£27,217
Bathrooms	0	0
Dropped kerbs/hard standings	12	£82,445
Ramps	4	£15,139
Stair lifts	11	£57,786
Property extensions (wet room & bedroom)	2	£70,000
Clos-o-mat toilets	2	£9,543
Total	91	£572,393

For further information, or to receive this report in an accessible format please contact the Housing Strategy Team by email at Housingstrategy@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

