

Epping Forest District Council Annual Report to Tenants 2024

This Annual Report to Tenants provides information about how Epping Forest District Council Housing Services performed from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and our plans for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Welcome to our annual report to tenants

2023/24 was a busy year for social housing across the country with the introduction of Tenancy Satisfaction Measures and a range of consultations from Government and related agencies.

These consultations are now developing to a new framework for the assessment of social housing providers. Alongside this are new requirements for responding to damp and mould and a move towards introducing professional housing qualifications in the social housing sector.

Amongst this collection of changes, Epping Forest Housing and Property Services have continued to provide good housing and good services to our tenants and lessees.

The first report of Tenant Satisfaction Measures show that 75% of our tenants are satisfied with our overall services, compared to 66% across all local authority social housing providers. This is a good score but we aspire to being better and will continue to test satisfaction levels at least annually. See [Housing key reports](#) for more outcomes from the 2023/24 Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

In 2024/25 we will continue our stock condition survey to help target the work or of our repairs and maintenance services. We will also manage a development programme that will add more affordable housing to the available supply in the District.

We will also implement more elements of our housing management computer system to help offer seamless services to tenants and homeowners.

How do we compare with others?

| Housemark Year End | Other Local Authorities | EFDC |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------|
| Overall Satisfaction | 66% | 75% |
| Complaint Handling | 34% | 36% |
| Responsive Repairs | 70% | 69% |
| Time taken to complete repair | 66% | 66% |
| Communal Areas | 66% | 64% |
| Approach to ASB | 57% | 70% |

Our stock

As of 31 March 2024, our stock included:

- 6,379 Council homes
- 1,093 leasehold properties
- 1 hostel (54 rooms)
- 2 houses in multiple occupation (7 rooms)
- 2,071 garages

1. Improving our services

We further developed our neighbourhood approach and developed distinct teams to deal with tenancy matters and estates matters. We introduced a foundation of key policies, some meeting building safety and health and safety requirements and others setting out our priorities and practices for how we work our customer and manage your homes.

What we achieved in 2023-24

2023-24 was a year when we saw new legislation come into effect and we carried out our first Tenancy Satisfaction Measures survey and began a self-assessment against the Consumer Standards. We started the stock condition survey that is fundamental to the future management of and investment in our homes. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30 year Business Plan was reviewed.

The levels of satisfaction with Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC) housing services demonstrated areas in which satisfaction is both good and, requires some improvement. Headlines include:

- Three out of four tenants are satisfied with the overall service provided by EFDC (75%); across all local authority providers the average was 66%.
- Around three out of four tenants are satisfied that they are provided with a home that is well maintained (73%) with the national average for social landlords being 69%.
- Eight out of ten tenants are satisfied that EFDC provides them with a home that is safe (81%) and overall the tenants of social landlords nationally scored 76%.
- Three out of five tenants with communal areas are satisfied that these communal areas are kept clean and well maintained (61%) which is below the national median score of 66%.
- Three out of four tenants that had a repair carried out in the last 12 months are satisfied with the overall repairs service during this period (74%) and the national local authority figure is 70%.
- Fewer tenants are satisfied with the time taken to complete their most recent repair after they reported it (67%) which is in line with the national council figure of 66%.
- More than three out of four tenants believe that EFDC treat them with fairness and respect (78%) compared to a national figure of 76%.

NOTE: National averages for local authority are taken from Housemark's end of year report which includes data from 103 local authorities.

What is planned for 2024-25

We are preparing for inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing. The inspection, when carried out, will assess the Council's housing services against the Consumer Standards, see below:

- Safety and Quality Standard
- Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Tenancy Standard

That inspection will assess the Council's housing services as one of the following:

C1 Delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards

C2 Some weaknesses delivering the consumer standards; improvement is needed.

C3 Serious failings delivering the consumer standards; significant improvement is needed

C4 Very serious failings in delivering the consumer standards; fundamental changes are needed.

At the same time, we will be considering how our structure and links with the rest of the Council can best serve our tenants and lessees.

2. Keeping your home safe

All of our customers deserve to be safe in their own home and we have continued to improve our approach to health and safety with six key policies approved and continued very high performance in maintaining safety.

What we achieved in 2023-24

Six key policies were finalised which ensure the safe management of Asbestos Safety, Electrical Safety, Fire Safety, Gas Safety, Lift Safety, Water Hygiene. Our performance is high and continually monitored. We also set out our energy efficiency retrofit programme to take us to 2030 and beyond.

| Safety areas | Our compliance at 31/03/24 |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Electrical certificates | 100% |
| Fire Risk Assessments | 100% |
| Gas certificates | 99.97% |
| CO Detector installs | 99.72% |
| Water Safety Checks | 100% |

What is planned for 2024-25

We will complete the survey on the condition of the homes we provide, enabling us to plan the maintenance of the homes we provide more effectively. In tandem with this stock condition survey, we will assess the overall performance of the homes we provide. We will analyse our data to find out which properties are places where people want to live and want to stay, and which are not. This will enable us to plan the long-term future of our assets.

We will complete the Housing Asset Management Strategy, which will cover the next five years. Over 500 residents responded to a survey on their priorities for their homes and neighbourhoods, which will be used to develop the strategy. Our progress on delivering the strategy will be reviewed every 12 months.

3. Energy Efficiency Retrofit programmes

The first of these started in 2023/24 as part of a series of projects between now and 2050 to make our homes ready for the Government's net zero target. These are partly funded by national programmes supporting landlords to achieve net zero.

What we have achieved in 2023-24

Our project to bring 132 homes to a minimum energy efficiency performance of EPC band C started on site in January 2024. This is due to complete by April 2025. The project is part funded by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). These homes are some of our least energy efficient and will benefit from improved insulation, heating systems and photovoltaic panels as appropriate.

What is planned for 2024-25

We are committed to bring all the homes we provide to a minimum energy efficiency performance of EPC band C by the end of 2030. There are about 2,300 homes below this standard. We are in the process of bidding for grant funding selecting contractors to deliver the improvements.

4. Repairing and maintaining your home

Qualis provide the Council's repairs service to our tenants. This covers day to day repairs, planned maintenance and emergency repairs plus gas heating and hot water services. Qualis are wholly owned by EFDC and manage many aspects of our work.

What we have achieved in 2023-24

Last year Qualis carried out over 18,000 responsive repairs. 93% of tenants said they were satisfied with the repair carried out by Qualis and 80% of repairs were completed within agreed timescales.

Qualis also refurbished 337 void properties, ensuring they were ready for letting to new tenants.

Our planned kitchen and bathroom replacement programme is provided by Qualis. During 2023/24 they replaced 188 kitchens and 219 bathrooms.

In addition, Qualis deliver electrical and gas safety checks to our homes, as well as aids and adaptations, cyclical works and grounds maintenance.

What is planned for 2024-25

The programme of planned works will continue. Qualis will deliver the kitchen, bathroom and heating replacement programme. Other contractors will deliver other workstreams including re-roofing, window replacements and specialist works. We plan to spend over £11.0m on replacing components during 2024/25. A further £1.0m is budgeted for making adaptations to improve the independence of disabled tenants.

Qualis will continue to work closely with New City College to provide Apprenticeship and Work Placement opportunities, which include both trade and office-based positions.

5. Income Recovery

We rely on income from rents and service charges to keep tenants' homes in good repair and to provide the housing services that support our customers. The rent also covers the cost of the staff and their resources that support our residents to manage and sustain their tenancies.

What we have achieved in 2023-24

At 31st March 2024 we had collected 99.96% of the rent due for 2023-24, and reduced the arrears owed from £524,000 to £519,000.

What is planned for 2024-25

We will maintain our support for customers to pay their rent and service charges and encourage them to contact us if they are facing financial difficulties. 2024-25 will be a challenging year since it has 53 weeks and universal credit will continue to pay a 52-week amount – tenants will need to plan for that additional week to ensure that they do not fall into arrears. Those in receipt of housing benefit will receive the additional week's payment. With the universal credit migration, a lot of customers will now be responsible for paying their rent to us directly.

6. Services for Older People

What we have achieved in 2023-24

A strategy for Independent Living for Older People was finalised and approved by Cabinet. We continued to review the service we offer and have adapted our support model to reflect tenant's wishes to see Independent Living Officers more frequently.

The upgrade to the new emergency call alarm system started and includes improvements on the previous system. Such as the removal of pull cords, replacing these with a pendant which can be worn around the neck or on a wrist strap to allow tenants to raise an alarm call from anywhere within the independent living scheme. At the same time, we started the procurement process for the emergency alarm call monitoring service.

We are refurbishing all our independent living schemes and Hyde Mead House in Nazeing is our second scheme to be completed.



What is planned for 2024-25

We will continue to review the support service we offer. We have started a programme to convert communal lounges that are not used into more homes, initially creating five new properties, we intend that these will become available in 2025. The upgrade to a new emergency alarm call system will complete and Appello will take over the monitoring of our emergency alarm call monitoring requirements. We will complete another refurbishment at Jubilee Court, Waltham Abbey. We will also hold another Flowers in Bloom competition and carry out further consultation on our support service.

7. Meeting Housing Needs

Since the inception of the new allocations scheme in September 2022, we are continuously evaluating its influence. The ever-growing demand for affordable housing across the district has placed significant pressure on our limited supply, with the need consistently surpassing availability. To address this challenge, we are working collaboratively across the Housing Directorate, aligning our efforts to achieve the common goal of providing affordable homes to as many individuals and families as possible. By fostering teamwork and shared objectives, we hope to make meaningful progress in expanding access to affordable housing for all that need it.

What we have achieved in 2023-24

We have now been working under the new allocations criteria for over a year and have better insight into the impact it has had. Some of the improvements have included:

- A total of 129 homeless households were offered permanent accommodations via the housing register.
- 18 households successfully downsized to smaller properties across the district, enabling larger families on the housing register to move to homes more suitable for their household size.
- Supported our partner B3 Living to deliver 14 new build affordable rent units which were allocated to applicants via the housing register.

The Rough Sleeper Initiative contracts in place are currently funded until March 2025. Due to the change in Government, we cannot confirm what will happen in the longer run, however we have had confirmation from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government that an announcement will be made within the next budget review in November 2024. It is likely that there will be a years continuation funding taking services to March 2026.

Despite challenges within the private rented sector and the volume of people seeking alternative accommodation, our team managed to support a total of 56 people into alternative accommodation in the private sector in the last year.

What is planned for 2024-25

As we develop a better understanding of the impact the new scheme has had, we plan to conduct an annual review of allocations and lettings to enable officers and Members to adjust the allocations scheme if necessary.

It is an increasingly challenging time for the homelessness service given the national housing crisis and subsequent demand on our service. Between June 2023 and June 2024, we have seen a total of 1456 customers with a housing need.

Given the national context with local government budget constraints, the council was faced to make some extremely difficult decisions, and subsequently was not able to fulfil some of our ambitions from the previous report.

Within our programme we will deliver another 15 units for affordable in phase 4.3 of the development programme (Council House Building Programme) for affordable rent at our Pentlow Way and Woollard Street.

Our partnership with CHP will deliver 16 Affordable rent units, due for completion in Summer 2024 as well as Sovereign Network Homes who will deliver 8 affordable rent units, all allocated to applicants via our housing register.

We continue to support refugees through the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) project, we expect to be able to deliver some larger properties for extended families as well some smaller units, as detailed in YB's story below.

YB's Story

In 2023, we were approached by a Ukrainian refugee, YB, seeking guidance after her Homes for Ukraine host could no longer provide accommodation. YB was placed in temporary housing through EFDC while we conducted our standard assessments. Through the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) project, we were able to identify a property within our housing stock, which was fully refurbished with the support of the project to prepare it as a permanent home for YB. In partnership with the Essex Integration Service, we continue to provide support, helping YB integrate into our community and become a valued resident of the Epping Forest District.

The homelessness team are really pleased we have been able to secure another years funding for our fantastic Domestic Abuse Support Specialist. This will enable our officer to carry on supporting the needs of those who are experiencing domestic abuse until June 2026. If you are experiencing domestic abuse, please contact us on 01992 564 190, or by emailing homelessness@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

8. New homes

What we have achieved in 2023-24

We held the opening events for Fitch House and Brokenshire Court with local councillors, the family of those the blocks are named after, and the MP for Epping Forest Dame Eleanor Laing. These form 15 units of phase 4.3 of our Council House Building Programme.

We continue to support refugees through the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) project.

We are committed to delivering on our Council House Building Programme and will continue to work alongside our strategic partners to deliver more affordable housing to try and alleviate some of the pressure on housing need within the district.

Our partner Qualis are building 28 affordable units for us at Roundhills. We continue to work with this partner and are in discussions regarding two further projects.

What is planned for 2024-25

In the next year we hope to start on site with our project on Chequers Road for 8 flats. This will be published for tender using the public platform Contracts Finder. This site has been designed to Passivhaus standard and contractors will be invited to bid both based on achieving Building Regulations, and to a Passivhaus specification. Following this, a strategic decision will be made regarding the direction of our specification moving forward based on cost and value. This will help drive our Development Strategy moving forward.

With the pressure from the new government to build more homes our pipeline has been scrutinised. Our smaller sites are being reconsidered, and grant funding streams are being reviewed in conjunction. We are particularly interested in sites that provide 10+ units.

We plan to work closer with planning colleagues at early stages to deliver the homes the district needs, where we need them.

9. Safer Neighbourhoods and Community Resilience

The Council has experienced teams of investigators across the range of environmental and anti-social behaviour (ASB) reports. One team, the Community Safety Investigators, concentrates on dealing with ASB and the other focusses on with noise and environmental crime, these are the Environmental Enforcement Officers. Collectively they are the Community Resilience Team.

We promote these services through action days, working with the Police and other agencies, and we need our residents to work with us to report and combat nuisance and crime.

What we have achieved in 2023-24

In 2023-24 we received 715 housing related reports of ASB. These included a range of issues such as noise complaints, graffiti, drug related concerns and dumped cars. We will investigate and, if appropriate, take action on all reports received. Examples of actions include:

Closure Orders

Under the Anti-social behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 the local authority has the power to apply for a Closure Order at a property if serious nuisance and/or disorder has occurred or is likely to occur at the property. A case must be put forward to the Magistrate court for them to approve and make the order.

We have applied for several successful Closure Orders in the last year for cases that are having serious implications to the local community.

Closure Orders enable us to safeguard the local community as well as the resident living at the property.

Examples of why we have applied for a Closure Order at properties this year are; tenants being cuckooed and their property taken over, comings and goings from a property associated to criminal activity, drug dealing and sex work.

Cannabis

Did you know that we can investigate cannabis odour?

If you are affected by cannabis odour from your neighbour you can report it to us on:

<https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/crime-and-safety/report-anti-social-behaviour/>

This will be allocated to a Community Safety Investigator who will be in contact with you regarding the process. We can issue Community Protection Warnings and Notices for cannabis odour and if the odour continues then we can take the case to prosecution.

Community Protection Warnings and Notice are the most used enforcement when dealing with anti-social behaviour.

In September 2023 officers from Essex Police with Epping Forest District Council's community resilience officers launched Operation Dial to carry out extra patrols to combat anti-social behaviour (ASB) around Debden Broadway.

This initiative is part of a larger £1.1 million investment by the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to tackle ASB in 11 hotspot areas across the county. The funding for this operation is provided by the central government as part of their Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy, with a focus on delivering high visibility patrols, public engagement, targeted youth outreach, and early intervention.

What is planned for 2024-25

Safer streets will launch in July 2024, running until July 2025, we will be working at Oakwood Hill estate, Loughton. The project will focus on key community safety areas; CCTV, lighting, diversionary activities, healthy relationships, community safety and area enhancement.

We will be out in the community for ASB awareness week which this year falls in November 2024.

10. Looking after your Home and your Neighbourhoods

What we have achieved in 2023-24

Gardening services and grounds maintenance have now been taken over by Qualis. This service helps households in our tenanted properties who cannot cope with the upkeep of their gardens.

Tenants can be considered for the scheme if:

- There is no one physically able under the age of 70, living at the property
- Their rent account is in credit
- Tenants in receipt of certain benefits relating to disability.

Gardens are maintained on a four to six weekly basis following an assessment by the coordinator. It is currently over-subscribed; however, we will be working with Qualis to manage the list of gardens that need attention with a view to create more capacity.

What is planned for 2024-25

A key part of our relationship with our tenants is meeting each household and establishing what they may need from us. These visits are an opportunity to report repairs, deal with any welfare concerns, make referrals to supporting agencies, and look at whether the property meets the needs of the household and discuss options if not. Officers can immediately feedback to teams within the Council whilst at these visits.

The visits also give us the chance to review whether the property is being looked after and that the customer is meeting their obligations under the tenancy agreement.

At the same time, we will carry out inspections of each block, street and estate where we have properties. We will be identifying any health and safety concerns, looking at the quality of cleaning and grounds maintenance, and reporting any general repair needs.

11. Involving and empowering our residents

We are engaging with residents through a Tenant and Leaseholder Panel, annual surveys, the Youth Council and consultations on specific projects we are developing.

What we have achieved in 2023-24

The Tenants and Leaseholders Panel considered a number of strategies prior to consideration by the Communities Scrutiny Committee, including a number of strategies supporting safety in our homes. Qualis reported to the Panel and engaged in discussions about their performance.

The first regulatory Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey was completed and the results will be reported in 2024-25. The Resident Involvement Strategy was formally agreed and a delivery plan developed. The plan to roll out a programme of estate, street and block representatives was not completed and this will be rolled into the next year.

What is planned for 2024-25

The Tenants and Leaseholders Panel and other resident involvement groups need to be re-started following the recruitment of a new Resident Involvement Officer. Focus groups and task and finish groups are to be set up to look at specific issues regarding EFDC's policies and procedures.

In our Independent Living Schemes we will continue with the programme of Chatterbox meetings.

A comment from the Chair of our Tenant and Leaseholder Panel (T&LP)

With the shift in the regulatory approach, and a new focus on local authorities as landlords, the role of tenants and other residents in holding us to account and support the Council to develop policies and process is now even more important.

T&LP wants to encourage more tenants to take part in panel meetings, scrutiny reporting, focus groups etc. The T&LP will be looking for a diverse range of tenants from across the district to take part, so if anyone would be interested in taking part in helping EFDC interact with tenants and to get their views and opinions to help in making the district a better place to live, then to get in touch via ResidentInvolvement@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

12. Estate Management and Improvement

What we have achieved in 2023-24

The new Tenancy and Estates Teams formed in 2023 replacing the Neighbourhoods and Estate and Land Teams. Between July 2023 and May 2024, there were several changes to the teams and at times it was difficult and the staff have been incredibly resilient in their learning new roles. As part of the development of the teams, Officers, in consultation with their managers, have selected the aspect of tenancy and estates for which they are best suited. This has been a success, and the staff are more fulfilled and content in their roles and able to deliver to a better standard.

The structure changes to the teams has led to slower delivery of some key work, there is now a new focus and positivity with Officers collaborating across the two teams and offering support and experience between them. This has enabled the teams to become more streamlined and working towards new goals and objectives for the new financial year.

The Estates team have continued on the delivery of new and improved bin stores taken from the Homes Fit for Human Habitation Act Fund. Lower Queens Road, Bourne House, Love Lane and Kelvedon House are blocks which have benefitted from the erection of the new bin stores which are compliant with the Fire Safety policy and are also much more aesthetically pleasing.

The Tenancy team are undertaking tenancy audits, identifying issues that previously would have been overlooked. The tenancy audits are used to support tenants in need and the Officers are able to signpost our tenants for any further assistance needed.

We continued improving Ninefields Estate by installing uniformed privacy panels and paving slabs in the gardens of many of the blocks. Our residents raised concerns about the conditions of the gardens and this is one way that we can make the gardens more desirable, by ensuring some privacy and residents' own space in the gardens. Churchill and Davis Court benefitted from storage sheds being installed in the communal gardens.

What is planned for 2024-25

The major works project at Limes Farm and Copperfield was completed in June 2024. The project included roof repairs, replacement doors and windows, external repairs and redecorations, a new outdoor gym and landscaping.

We expect to start the major repairs project at The Broadway in Winter 2024. The scheme will replace the life expired roof, windows, doors and asphalt walkways to give the two blocks on either side of the Broadway a new lease of life. We will work closely with the residential and commercial leaseholders in relation to their contributions in accordance with their respective leases. We expect the work to be completed in 12 months.

From October 2024 the Estates Team will focus on implementing a zero tolerance policy to items being left in the internal communal areas. This supports our continued effort to reduce fire risks around our homes. Fire risk assessments provide our Officers with reports on how we can improve on the fire safety in our blocks; we are given recommendations which we must ensure are met so that our blocks are as fire safe as possible. We have been working towards a zero-tolerance approach for some years now and we welcome the support from tenants to maintain a safe environment.

Safer Streets funding has been secured for Oakwood Hill Estate and various activity and changes to the estate will become apparent to the residents. We will start with weed spraying throughout the estate, remarking of parking bays and installing storage for buggies and bikes on the estate. There is an issue with bikes and buggies being stored in the communal stairwell within the blocks and we will provide safe alternatives, supporting the implementation of the sterile zone. We will also reintroduce the weekly community hub in the community hall, offering lots of services for our residents, including Tenancy and Estates team Officers, working alongside the Officers from the Income Recovery Team. Qualis, Peabody, Rehousing and Homelessness Teams will also attend.

13. Home Ownership

The home ownership service provides support and help to our lessees. They also support tenants who wish to explore or progress their Right to Buy and manage the Council's obligations in the sales process. The home ownership service is responsible for the service charge calculations within the HRA, for all tenures.

What we have achieved in 2023-24

In 2023/2024 we received 32 new Right to Buy Applications of which 9 sales were completed.

We provided full details and a breakdown of forthcoming Estimated costs to all Leaseholders one month prior to the financial year commencing and the Actual expenditure for the previous year were advised to all our Leaseholders within the statutory time frames.

We continue to effectively manage service charge accounts for 1095 Leaseholders for both Ongoing Services and programmes of Major Works.

The Home Ownership Strategy was finalised and approved by Cabinet.

We updated our Leaseholder Handbook on the Council's website and continue to sign post to this handbook for guidance. We advise all new Leaseholders of the Handbook and provide them information on the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel and invite them to become involved.

We introduced Council Loans to improve payment options for our Leaseholders across the district who are involved in packages of Major Works.

We provided 52 property customised Pre-Sale Information Packs to Solicitors within 10 working days of request in respect of Leasehold sales on the open market, supporting a smooth customer journey and transition of owners.

What is planned for 2024-25

We will continue to effectively manage the full service ensuring all statutory time limits are achieved whilst embracing any opportunities for continued improvements.

We will acknowledge and support the Leaseholders who are involved with the package of Major Works and enhancements at The Broadway properties, keeping them fully informed at all times and assisting them in understanding the processes and responsibilities that affect them under their lease.

We will look for any further improvements which will benefit our Leaseholders in respect of Council Loans for packages of Major Works.

14. Shared Ownership

In future there will also be a need for some services for owners who have taken a share of their property. Discussions are underway about where the shared ownership service fits best within EFDC services.

What we have achieved in 2023-24

In partnership with housing associations, we created 19 new homes for Epping Forest and started a programme of shared ownership homes.

What is planned for 2024-25

We will continue to work with partners to create new homes to help address housing need in the District. Our partnership with Network Homes will deliver 14 Shared Ownership units 2023/24 with more planned for 2024/25 and 2025/26.



15. Cleaner and Greener Neighbourhoods

What we achieved in 2023-24

The Caretaking and Cleaning team have continued to support with low level hoarding cases throughout the year. The number of referrals for help with hoarding has reduced with 5 low level and 4 high risk cases being completed.

Graffiti cleaning cases were more complex this year, the team have dealt with several cases which included in depth cleaning and repainting. New equipment was purchased to help the team ensure that graffiti can be removed efficiently. 12 graffiti cleans were carried out; mainly tags or anti-social comments and drawings removed from around the district.

Following the success of days of action in 2023 the cleaning team, along with colleagues from tenancy and estates team took part in joint days of action in Waltham Abbey and other locations. These include teams from across the Council plus the Police and the House services teams. Residents also get involved and whilst the cleaning team are cleaning and clearing communal grounds – including those managed by other agencies – the tenancy team are door knocking to talk to residents. More of these days of action are being planned for the future.

This work was also linked to ASB awareness week in Buckhurst Hill in July 2023 which again saw combined agencies and more can be read about this at <https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/asb-awareness-week-2023>

To maintain our communal areas, our cleaning team carried bin store cleaning and tidying across 20 different sites and deep cleaning in communal areas in 7 different blocks. These are ad hoc cleans done throughout the district as and when required.

What is planned for 2024-25

In 2024/25 the Cleaning and Caretaking team will be taking over the weeding service currently provided by Qualis. The team will be receiving new equipment to enable them to provide this service. We will be looking into environmentally friendly and animal safe products such as white vinegar to use as an alternative to chemicals when weed spraying. Days of action will take place in Waltham Abbey and Limes Farm.

We will continue to support the Community Safety team by taking part in upcoming events such as ASB awareness week in 2024/25. We are also assessing the costs that could be recharged for cleaning in those parts of communal areas that are not currently part of the cleaning arrangements.

A hoarding forum is being established in West Essex, we will be active in the forum and look forward to hearing best practice.



Complaints

Our aim, as outlined in our Complaints Policy, is to provide you with the best possible service, however we appreciate that sometimes things can go wrong. If there is a problem, we need you to tell us so that we can investigate, put things right and learn from it. This will help us to continuously improve our service to you.

Complaints in 2023/24

In line with the Ombudsman's Joint Complaint Handling Code that was introduced April 2024, we have reviewed our Complaints Policy to reflect regulatory changes that have been introduced and to ensure our process is compliant. We continue to review the reasons why our residents are dissatisfied and use this information to identify opportunities for service improvements.

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

Complaints by Subject

| Subject | Number in 2023/24 |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Repairs | 150 |
| Planned Works | 19 |
| Failure to Provide Service | 24 |
| Lack of action | 34 |
| Poor Communication | 24 |
| Poor Conduct (Staff or Contractor) | 39 |
| Totals | 319 |

| Main cause | Number in 2023/24 |
|---|-------------------|
| Dissatisfaction with repair or delayed repair | 132 |
| Meeting customer expectations | 88 |
| Customer Misunderstanding | 7 |
| Failure to provide a service | 6 |
| Poor communication | 37 |
| Poor conduct (staff or contractor) | 15 |
| Open/Other (e.g., withdrawn) | 34 |
| TOTAL | 319 |

Main cause of complaints

In terms of complaints being upheld or not, we upheld or partially upheld 127 (40%) of the 319 complaints received in 2023/24 at stage 1.

28 cases went to a stage 2 investigation and 7 (25%) were partly or wholly upheld. 13 cases were referred to the Housing Ombudsman and 6 to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (these may have been considered by EFDC in the previous year). Of the cases referred to the Housing Ombudsman, 5 are still being considered, 7 were not investigated and in 1 case the Ombudsman found fault.

Our Performance

Our performance is closely monitored by staff, managers, and elected councillors. The table below shows selected measures and our performance over the last two financial years.

| Indicator | EFDC Target | Performance 2022-23 | Performance 2023-24 | Performance against target 2023/24 |
|--|-------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Amount of rent collected as a proportion of rent owed in the year (using LAHS figures) | 100% | 98% | 99.96% | Achieved |
| Number of evictions for rent arrears | N/A | 4 | 4 | N/A |
| Number of households occupying temporary accommodation at the end of the year | 100 | 115 | 118 | Missed target |
| Average number of calendar days it took to re-let a council property | 30 days | 52 days | 53 days | Missed target |
| Tenant satisfaction with the general standard of the repairs service | 90% | 93% | 78% | Missed target |
| Average number of working days it took to complete major void works with a value of more than £1,500 | 22 days | 26 | 19 days | Exceeded target |
| Percentage of properties that did not meet the Decent Home Standard at the end of the year | 0% | 3.5% | 5.9% | Missed target |
| Number of annual gas safety certificates outstanding at 31/03/2024 | 0 | 8 | 9 | Missed target |



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 2023-2024 | Planned Expenditure 2024-2025 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Gas, electric and air source heating | £1,323,564 | £2,150,000 |
| Electric rewiring and upgrades | £203,341 | £183,429 |
| Windows, doors & front entrance doors | £2,700,008 | £2,774,179 |
| Tiled and flat roofing | £519,213 | £938,412 |
| Water tank replacements | 0 | £42,854 |
| Kitchen replacements | £1,963,306 | £2,409,000 |
| Bathroom replacements | £1,714,522 | £1,242,463 |
| Door entry security systems | £125,335 | £336,292 |

In the last year we also spent £1,027,000 on other capital projects including estate environmental works, structural work, and asbestos removal.

| Energy Efficiency Works | Number completed in 2023-2024 | Total cost |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Cavity Wall Insulation | 5 | £8,983 |
| Loft Insulation | 6 | £11,084 |
| Air Source Heating | 2 | £29,433 |
| Total | 13 | £49,500 |

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 2023-2024.

| Adaptation | Number completed in 2023-2024 | Total cost |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Graded floor showers | 48 | £369,821 |
| Over bath showers | 7 | £22,036 |
| Bathrooms | 4 | £22,610 |
| Dropped kerbs/hard standings | 17 | £190,460 |
| Ramps | 15 | £82,737 |
| Stair lifts | 11 | £60,247 |
| Through floor lifts | 1 | £16,671 |
| Kitchen adaptations | 3 | £16,578 |
| Property extensions (wet room & bedroom) | 3 | £159,155 |
| Clos-o-mat toilets | 0 | 0 |
| Other adaptations | 15 | £53,718 |
| Total | 124 | £994,033 |

For further information, or to receive this report in another format, such as large print, please contact the Housing Strategy Team by email at Housingstrategy@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

