



# **Exeter City Council**

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**

**OPTION APPRAISAL**

**COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

**JUNE 2004**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Communication Strategy identifies the ways in which Exeter City Council will communicate about the decision making process of option appraisal. All local authorities that own housing stock have to carry out an option appraisal before July 2005. The options appraisal process must be agreed and 'signed' off by Government Office South West (GOSW) before submission to full council.

The Community Housing Task Force (CHTF), an advisory agency of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, is supporting and acting as a critical friend to the council throughout this process.

The option appraisal process needs clear communication and consultation as the future of its stock and housing services is one of the biggest decisions a Council has to make. The GOSW will want to see that process outcomes have been appropriate.

The following principles will be adopted in all communications:

- Truth and honesty
- Simplicity
- Openness and ease of understanding
- Inclusiveness
- Listening and responding
- Accountability
- Impartiality
- Consistency
- Accuracy

The objectives for communication are:

- To enable everyone affected - tenants, leaseholders, elected members, staff and all other stakeholders - to understand the reason for, and participate fully in, the option appraisal process.
- To raise awareness of the issues and challenges faced by the Council, together with potential solutions.
- To ensure open and accessible channels of communication between stakeholders and decision makers which in turn shape and inform the Council's views.
- To encourage, listen and respond to the views of all stakeholders.
- To increase opportunities for tenants and residents to contribute to service development and decision making through this process and not just to consider the investment issues related to option appraisal
- To ensure independent advice for tenants through this process.

Communication will take place with key stakeholders, and stakeholders may increase as the appraisal process progresses. Methods of communication will include:

- Written
- Electronic
- Verbal
- Internal communication

Access to information and confidentiality are considered to ensure sensitive information is shared appropriately and personal information is not shared publicly.

The relationship with the media needs to be clear and responsibility is designated to ensure clear communication in a timely fashion, including ensuring information is available to the media following significant decisions being made by Scrutiny Committees and Full Council.

The views of stakeholders, particularly tenants and leaseholders, staff and elected members, need to be gathered and fed into the decision making process and will be carried out in the following ways and through the following groups:

**For tenants:**

Tenants' & Leaseholders Consultation Group  
Options Appraisal sub group  
Sheltered Housing Forum  
Tenants' Insight Group  
Meetings with the Independent Tenants Advisor (ITA) at sheltered housing schemes  
Exhibitions and roadshows  
Freephone helpline **0800 919994**  
STATUS survey and Your Priorities Survey

Websites:

[www.exeter.gov.uk](http://www.exeter.gov.uk)

[www.domeconsultants.co.uk](http://www.domeconsultants.co.uk) Independent Tenants' Advisor

**For staff:**

Team briefings and information sessions  
Consultation with Unions

**For elected members:**

Reports and presentations to members  
Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee meetings  
The Executive  
Decision made by Full Council

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background to the communication strategy

Exeter City Council recognises the importance of open and effective communication, both internally and externally, to:

- ensure full public accountability
- achieve strategic objectives
- deliver effective, high quality services

This document identifies how the Council will communicate about the very important decision making process of the housing option appraisal.

An option appraisal is the way the Council, working with tenants and other people affected by that decision, will make a decision on the future of its housing service and housing stock.

The Government has said that every Council should carry out a rigorous and objective option appraisal by July 2005, and that tenants should be at the heart of the process. Guidance<sup>1</sup> has been issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on how councils should carry out their appraisal and the criteria that should be met for it to be approved and ‘signed off’ by Government Office for the South West (GOSW).

The option appraisal process will cover the evaluation of the needs of the housing service and housing stock including housing need and demand, set against the resources available for management and maintenance through the Housing Revenue Account. The appraisal process will look at all options available to the Council to ensure the best service for its tenants for the future.

Options will be considered against the Council's strategic and key operational objectives and priorities and issues identified by tenants through the Tenant Insight Group. These options, or a mix of options, will be tested to see which best deliver the objectives and priorities and which are most likely to succeed. Tenants will have an opportunity to shape the decision on which form or type of landlord or management structure is most appropriate to deliver the preferred option for Exeter.

We welcome the support and advice of the Community Housing Task Force, and the Independent Tenants’ Advisor (ITA) TACT @DOME, part of Dome Consultants.

We recognise the role of the Government Office South West in ensuring that the Council option process complies with the Government’s aspirations and criteria for rigour and objectivity.

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<sup>1</sup> Delivering Decent Homes – Option Appraisal Guidance for local authorities ODPM June 2003

## **1.2 The importance of effective communication**

Without effective communication the option appraisal process cannot work properly. The future of its housing services and housing stock is one of the biggest decisions a Council can make and a number of groups and individuals (stakeholders) have to be fully involved in the process. Poor communication undermines the appraisal and consultation process and could ultimately lead to a decision being made outside the Council's timescale or based on inaccurate or poor information.

Government Office will want to see that the option appraisal process has been appropriate, rigorous and objective before signing off the report which details the process and outcomes of the appraisal. Effective communication and accurate information are the keys to ensuring the decisions made on option appraisal and the consultation process that underpins it are the right decisions for Exeter Council and all its stakeholders, including tenants and staff.

## 2. PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

### 2.1 Principles of communication

The following principles will be adopted in all our communications:

- ***Truth and honesty*** – providing a true picture of the situation and only withholding information for valid reasons of confidentiality; being proud of our achievements, but admitting to limitations; not raising unrealistic expectations; respecting confidentiality and data protection.
- ***Simplicity*** – use of jargon-free language and glossaries.
- ***Openness and ease of understanding*** – providing information for all those that are affected by any decision we may make; ensuring processes are in place to give everyone the information they need to contribute to decision-making.
- ***Inclusiveness*** – giving careful consideration to who we are communicating with; ensuring that we use tools and mechanisms appropriate to our audience, e.g. commitment to minimum font sizes, ensuring we make contact with ‘hard to reach’ groups, etc.
- ***Listening and responding*** – to all views and questions; recognising that all have a right to express valid views.
- ***Accountability*** – giving clear messages about who is responsible for making decisions and explaining how decisions will be reached.
- ***Impartiality*** – providing sufficient information to tenants, leaseholders, elected members, staff and all other stakeholders to allow balanced decision-making.
- ***Consistency*** – to ensure that reports, publications and all other documents and letters are clearly identified as option appraisal material
- ***Accuracy*** – ensuring information is accurate and up to date.

### 2.2 Objectives for communication

Our objectives for communication are:

- To enable everyone affected - tenants, leaseholders, elected members, staff and all other stakeholders - to understand the reason for, and participate fully in, the option appraisal process.
- To raise awareness of the issues and challenges faced by the Council, together with potential solutions.

- To ensure open and accessible channels of communication between stakeholders and decision makers which in turn shape and inform the Council's views.
- To encourage, listen and respond to the views of all stakeholders.
- To increase opportunities for tenants and residents to contribute to service development and decision making through this process and not just to consider the investment issues related to option appraisal
- To ensure independent advice for tenants through this process.

### **3. METHODS OF COMMUNICATION**

#### **3.1 Key stakeholders**

Communication will take place with a number of key stakeholders – groups, agencies and individuals. The key stakeholders identified to date are:

- Tenants and their advocates
- Leaseholders
- Tenants' Insight Group which will formally represent tenants' views on option appraisal
- Tenants' & Leaseholders Consultation Group
- Options Appraisal sub group
- All constituted Tenant and Resident Associations
- Sheltered Housing Forum
- Community groups
- Owner occupiers and others in the wider community
- Elected members
- Staff
- Recognised Unions
- Local Strategic Partnership Executive (LSP) and associated social task groups
- Partner Housing Associations
- Government Office South West (GOSW)
- Community Housing Task Force (CHTF)

Stakeholders may increase as the option appraisal progresses and to reflect this, the Options Appraisal sub group and the Options Appraisal Board will consider this strategy regularly and ensure necessary changes to the document and to key stakeholders are undertaken.

#### **3.2 Methods of communication**

##### **3.2.1 Formal and informal communication**

As part of the option appraisal process Exeter City Council and all relevant stakeholders will communicate formally and informally throughout the process. There is a need to clarify when communication is informal and when it is formal.

##### **3.2.1.1 Formal communication:**

Formal communication will be undertaken in writing (supported by minuted discussion where necessary) and in particular circumstances – this is because formal communication relates to specific parts of the option appraisal process where recommendations for decisions relating to the future of the housing stock are made, or information on which that decision-making is based is made available.

Formal communication is that which takes place in the following circumstances:

- a) Recommendations or information to stakeholders approved by the Options Appraisal sub group, Options Appraisal Board, Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee, Executive or Full Council
- b) Recommendations and reports by the Options Appraisal sub group to Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee
- c) Recommendations and reports by the Options Appraisal sub group to the Options Appraisal Board
- d) Recommendations to and from the Tenants' Insight Group to the Options Appraisal sub group, Options Appraisal Board or Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee
- e) Information relating to unions and staff on the impact (or potential impact) of decisions or options on employment and services
- f) Any communications between the established groups and GOSW or the CHTF

Formal communication will always be in writing or recorded formally in minutes of meetings (which may include electronic formats) to ensure an audit trail for the decision making process.

### **3.2.1.1 Informal communication:**

All other communication is informal, although it should still be accurate, appropriate and in line with the principles of this strategy.

Informal communication can be in any format and will include information shared between staff, consultants and members of relevant groups involved in the option appraisal process.

### **3.2.2 Written communication**

Exeter City Council will maximise the effectiveness of written communication and will:

- Ensure that all written communication is useful and meaningful
- Use respectful language which is not sexist, homophobic, heterosexist or racist and will avoid patronising statements
- Use plain English, avoiding jargon or providing glossaries where necessary
- Seek to simplify complex subjects, e.g. legislation, policy, application processes wherever possible whilst retaining the substance of the issue
- Ensure that information is concise and relevant
- Ensure that information is consistent
- Develop a range of information to meet needs and answer questions people may have
- Ensure that information provided is timely to allow people an opportunity to contribute to decision making
- Provide documents to the CHTF and GOSW for comment

- Respond to diversity within Exeter by ensuring that documents are available in a range of formats and can be provided (at least in summary) in other languages if requested
- Ensure (and publicise) the Council's recycling principles are followed with regard to hard copies of information produced once the decision making process is complete.
- Ensure tenants, leaseholders, elected members, staff and all other stakeholders are given sufficient time to consider written information to allow them to contribute fully to the decision making process.

***Written information will include:***

- Newsletters for tenants and staff
- Pocket guide to option appraisal (bullet points on the main options and their impact)
- Desk guide to option appraisal (more detailed guide to the main options and their implications)
- Frequently asked questions list (FAQ)
- Glossary of main terms used in option appraisal
- Briefings for key pieces of work to ensure everyone knows what needs to be done, when it has to be done by and who should take the lead
- Project plan for key actions to be undertaken
- Outcomes of the STATUS and Your Priorities surveys

### **3.2.3 Electronic communication**

By making the best of opportunities to use e-communication the Council will:

- Use its Website and Intranet and the ITA website to deliver useful, accurate and up to date information about the option appraisal process
- Treat external e-mail correspondence as we would postal correspondence, e.g. keeping a log and applying the same response time targets
- Recognise that not everyone is comfortable using e-communication and that not everyone has access to this form of communication

***Electronic communication will include:***

- Special page on Council Website [www.exeter.gov.uk](http://www.exeter.gov.uk)
- Information on Council Intranet
- Publicity for TACT website [www.domeconsultants.co.uk](http://www.domeconsultants.co.uk)

### **3.2.4 Verbal communication**

In developing forms of communication that are easily recordable to ensure views are identified and information processes can be tracked, Exeter City Council will not lose sight of the importance of face to face contact and conversation. We will:

- Ensure staff have consistent, accurate information on which to answer questions from stakeholders
- Publicise the ITA and meetings of the Insight Group
- Ensure tenants are aware of officers who can be contacted to discuss questions and ideas relating to option appraisal and service delivery
- Run exhibitions and roadshows to offer face to face contact
- publicise the ITA freephone helpline
- Establish a database which will record questions and ideas which are given verbally as well as in writing by stakeholders
- Remember that people may worry about the impact of the appraisal process and keep reminding people that they can talk concerns and ideas through at different events and with officers, other stakeholders and the ITA.
- Consider arranging site visits to other authorities to see the impact of stock transfer, the effect of a 'no' vote to transfer, the establishment of an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and staying as you are.
- ***Verbal communication will include:***
  - Team briefings for staff
  - Tenant Insight Group meetings
  - Helpline provided by the ITA (TACT freephone number – **0800 919994**)
  - Meetings with Unions
  - Exhibitions and roadshows and possibly a conference (where written information will also be available)
  - Presentations and seminars for tenants (including the Tenants' & Leaseholders Consultation Group, the Sheltered Housing Forum, recognised and unrecognised groups), staff and elected members
  - ITA – led meetings at all sheltered housing schemes
  - Publicity for the exhibitions and roadshows amongst vulnerable tenants – publicity through social task groups via Local Strategic Partnership and community groups
  - 'Talking papers' – using existing services for people with a visual impairment to explain about, and seek views on, options
  - Interpretation if requested for those whose first language is not English

### **3.2.5 Internal communication**

Effective communication within the Council will deliver consistent messages and create an environment where all options can be debated and considered. To achieve this the Council will:

- Ensure staff are fully informed of and understand the option appraisal, its process, principles and objectives
- Encourage trade union representation on the Options Appraisal board to discuss the implications of the appraisal process and its outcomes

- Fully inform staff of all important developments impacting on the option appraisal and actively seek their opinions, through the preferences expressed by staff in recent consultation for the corporate communication strategy – team briefings, email, Executive Summary and the Internet
- Increase knowledge and understanding of the issues, problems and solutions available to the Council
- Communicate effectively with all elected members
- Ensure that elected members and staff have easy access to the information they require to inform decision-making.
- Provide open channels for elected members and staff to communicate their views, express their ideas and offer suggestions
- Ensure that elected members have regular, timely and relevant information from officers in order to fulfil their democratic role
- Ensure that the local knowledge, experience and relevant professional expertise are channelled into the option appraisal to enhance its effectiveness
- Maintain clear communication channels between elected members and officers to ensuring consistency in messages to other stakeholders.
- Ensure that staff and other partners dealing with tenants and customers are briefed with accurate and timely information so that they can answer enquiries on the option appraisal in a consistent and accurate way.

In response to the need to work to a timetable allowing a decision to be made on the likely future options(s) at the Full Council meeting on 14 December 2004 it is important that staff and elected members play their part in responding to the issues of option appraisal by:

- Making every effort to keep informed of the process and issues around Options Appraisal
- Informing their Managers (staff) or the relevant Director or Chief Executive (elected members) if there appears to be a problem in accessing the information they require
- Being prepared to voice ideas, suggestions and viewpoints to Managers (staff) or Senior Officers (elected members) in the knowledge that their comments will be welcomed
- Making use of briefings, written material and guidance on the Option Appraisal, so that when tenants and constituents ask for information they are able to offer, or signpost people to, accurate and balanced information

### **3.2.6 Access to information and confidentiality**

The majority of information gathered during the option appraisal process will be made publicly available. The information on which decisions are to be made will be available to all stakeholders.

Some information will be treated as confidential. Information classed as confidential or with restricted availability will be determined by the Options Appraisal Board on the recommendations of the Options Appraisal sub group. This will include information such as the detail of discussions between recognised Unions, Human Resources and staff. A list of information that exists but is not available for public consideration will be developed as Appendix 4 to this strategy, so that everyone can be aware of what will not be shared and why.

Contact details for individuals will be recorded as part of the information collected for the database where possible, but will not be divulged in reports or other publicly available information.

#### **4. Media Relations**

The role of the press and other media is an important one in alerting people to the option appraisal and to provide information as well as reflecting the discussions taking place. The Council is keen to ensure information reported by the press is as accurate as possible and to create effective links with the media to facilitate this. The Council will apply good practice and implement local protocols to help the Council achieve effective and positive information about its decisions, policies and services for local people in the press by:

- Ensuring that the Media Relations Officer deals with reactive media enquiries speedily, consistently and accurately through liaison with the Head of Housing & Social Inclusion.
- Providing information that is targeted and designed to provide accurate information to local people about the Council's decisions
- Ensuring that local people know who is making the decisions on behalf of the Council, by direct reference to the Options Appraisal sub group, Options Appraisal Board, Scrutiny Committees and the decision to be made by Full Council
- Monitoring information presented in the local press and specialist press (e.g. housing press) and other media in relation to option appraisal to facilitate appropriate and timely responses and making the information available to the Options Appraisal sub group and Options Appraisal Board members
- Adhering to sensible protocols which mean that:
  - i) Pro-active information releases or briefings are drafted by the Media Relations Officer in consultation with the Head of Housing & Social Inclusion, Strategic Director or Lead Councillor for Housing & Social Inclusion
  - ii) Press releases or statements to the media follow established Council guidelines, both in terms of content and style
  - iii) The media will be invited to put their enquiries through Media Relations – the named contact will be Steve Upsher, Media Relations Officer (tel 01392 265103 or email to: [stephen.upsher@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.upsher@exeter.gov.uk))
  - iv) Media enquiries received at any other point or level in the Council or by consultants on the option appraisal are referred immediately to Media Relations
  - v) Council staff at any level and consultants do not write letters intended for publication to the press (or through other media sources) that comment on any aspect of the option appraisal or in response to any article in the press

- vi) A press or other media release is always developed and issued to the press within one working day of any significant decision or report at an open meeting of Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee and Full Council

## **5. Turning communication into consultation**

No matter how good the communication is concerning option appraisal, if the views of stakeholders are not sought, evaluated and utilised in the decision making process then the option appraisal will not succeed.

A large part of the option appraisal process is one of information giving. Exeter City Council is keen to remember that information is given so that stakeholders can genuinely understand the reason for option appraisal and be involved in the decisions that need to be made as part of the process. Information giving is not an end in itself. The Council is committed to feeding back to stakeholders throughout and at the end of the process, explaining how views have been used in making the final decision.

The views of stakeholders, and particularly of tenants, staff and elected members need to be ascertained and fed into the decision making process at relevant points. This will be done in a number of ways, using initiatives already identified as part of the wider communication strategy.

### **5.1 Tenants and leaseholders**

This section should be read in conjunction with the Tenant Empowerment Strategy, which looks in detail at how tenants and residents should be supported and prepared for the role they play in deciding on options as part of the appraisal process. There are a number of tenants groups who will all have a role to play in the option appraisal.

#### **Tenants' Insight Group**

The Insight Group will be set up and serviced by TACT and will consist of members of the Tenants & Leaseholders Consultation Group, Sheltered Housing Forum, Leaseholders Forum and Options Appraisal sub group alongside individual tenants and residents who have an interest in the option appraisal process and outcome. Individuals do not have to be members of any tenant or resident association to join the Insight Group. Membership of the Insight Group will be open to all throughout the options appraisal process. The Group will work closely with TACT to identify issues of importance for the appraisal and will make formal recommendations to the Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee via a report to the Options Appraisal Board relating to the options available to the Council.

Insight Group members have the chance to go on site visits to other authorities to identify different issues relating to the range of options and will receive a significant amount of information to enable them to fully consider the options available, the impact on tenants, and to come to an informed decision on which option(s) to recommend. It is possible a conference will also be organised in Exeter for tenants.

Information about the group and how to join in can be obtained in the following ways:

- Going along to road shows, exhibitions, sheltered scheme meetings, inviting the ITA to community/tenants' groups
- Attending Insight Group sessions
- TACT freephone – **0800 919994**
- TACT Website – [www.domeconsultants.co.uk](http://www.domeconsultants.co.uk)
- Newsletters and talking papers
- Writing to the ITA – TACT@DOME, Suite 6/7 First Floor, Shire Hall, Newport NP20 5HB
- Contacting the Council's Tenant Participation Unit, members of the Tenants & Leaseholders Consultation Group and Sheltered Housing Forum, Options Appraisal sub group or any Tenants Association

### **Tenants' & Leaseholders Consultation Group**

This group comprises representatives from Tenants & Residents Associations and any tenant who has expressed an interest in becoming involved in housing management issues. The current mailing list is 70 tenants and leaseholders with up to 20 attending any one meeting. This group is open to all tenants and leaseholders.

The group discuss issues raised by them or by the council and also monitors the performance of council contractors. The group act as a sounding board and as a pressure group, influencing council policy. The group also elects representatives onto council working groups that discuss policy, for example Choice Based Lettings.

### **Sheltered Housing Forum**

The tenants of the Council's 21 sheltered schemes are represented at the Sheltered Housing Forum, which meets quarterly. This is an active and well-supported group, which works with Council officers to tackle issues of particular interest and importance to the residents of sheltered schemes.

### **Leaseholders Forum**

A leaseholders forum has been established and meets quarterly. Leaseholders main concerns centre around the issue of service charges and a presentation on Options Appraisal raised concerns about increases in service charges. Clearly, leaseholders need to be kept fully informed about the process and outcomes

### **Meetings with TACT at Sheltered Housing schemes**

As part of their tender for the TACT role TACT Consultants identified the importance of involving older and vulnerable people in the consultation process. As part of the exhibitions and roadshows TACT will visit each sheltered housing scheme to discuss options with tenants and to invite tenants to form part of the Insight Group and therefore have more formal involvement in the decision making process.

## **Roadshows and other events**

A TACT vehicle roadshow will take place in June 2004 with the purpose of providing information to tenants and recruiting the Insight group.

Exhibition sessions will run through the day and evening and will allow tenants to consult with Officers and the TACT on the option appraisal process and ways they can be involved. Information on options will also be available, as well as the chance to discuss those options with staff.

The Council will consider running additional events, depending on the response to the exhibitions and roadshow and their usefulness in aiding the information giving and consultation process.

Questions and issues identified at the exhibitions and roadshows will be gathered and entered on to a database of all queries and issues identified through the appraisal process. Reports will be produced detailing the information held on the database to inform and guide formal recommendations to Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee, the Executive and therefore to Full Council.

## **Site visits and conferences**

If appropriate, site visits will be organised jointly for members of the Insight Group and elected members from the Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee and will include visits to an authority where a 'yes' vote was given to transfer, an authority where a 'no' vote was returned on transfer, a 'stay as you are' council and an authority where an ALMO has been established.

A conference may be organised in Exeter for tenants to explore issues further.

## **TACT Helpline 0800 919994**

TACT will provide a helpline which any tenant (or anyone else) can ring to ask about option appraisal and issues of concern or ideas. Queries will be logged and fed back to the database so reports can be compiled on the main issues for Exeter.

## **TACT Website [www.domeconsultants.co.uk](http://www.domeconsultants.co.uk)**

A website has been established by TACT which provides information on option appraisal and a message board on which people can log comments and queries.

## **Independent Tenants' Adviser**

[TACT@DOME](mailto:TACT@DOME) Consultants are the Independent Tenants' Adviser. They are paid from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) (tenants' rents) but are independent so they can advise tenants and residents with no conflict of interest. TACT's role is to offer independent advice, to support tenants and residents in understanding the implications of option appraisal and to enable tenants and residents to make formal recommendations regarding the option(s) they wish to be taken forward.

## **5.2 Staff**

The role of staff is important in two main ways in option appraisal. Firstly they have a key role in providing information and reassurance to tenants and other stakeholders about the process and outcomes of option appraisal, and secondly they are involved as changes in services may result in changes in structures and staff roles. As well as informing staff so they in turn can advise and support tenants, Exeter City Council understands the need for staff to feel comfortable with the information available on option appraisal and the implications of different options on them. Staff need to be consulted and involved through a range of methods which ensures their views can be fed through as part of the decision making process.

### **Team briefings**

Front line housing staff will be given regular briefings on the options appraisal process. In addition one member of the housing staff acts in a dual role as union representative and front line staff member. The corporate communication strategy includes Team Briefings for all staff and options appraisal will feature on all briefings throughout the process.

The Council's Intranet will be used to share information with staff and in-house newsletters will also be used.

### **Information sessions**

Initial briefings will be provided for staff before the roadshows take place. This session will provide verbal information to staff along with written information in the form of frequently asked questions and glossaries. These ways of providing information to staff will not only enable staff to support tenants and residents, but will be part of the consultation process by informing staff who can then ask questions and consult with their Union as well as talking to Managers about the options and offering their views.

Queries from staff will be fed into the database along with questions and issues from staff will be reported separately to those from tenants and residents and other stakeholders so the difference between issues for tenants and staff or elected members and staff will be clearly shown

### **Consultation with Unions**

Because option appraisal may have implications for staff roles, the Options Appraisal Board comprises a union representative.

The Council is committed to establishing a process, which supports, informs and consults staff and sees close working with the Unions as a crucial part of this process.

### **5.3 Elected members**

Elected members will make the decision on which option(s) the Council will take forward through the Full Council meeting in \*December 2004. Clearly, the views of elected members and their need for information on option appraisal generally and on the implications for Exeter before the decision is made are crucial.

Additionally, elected members, like staff, will be asked for advice and information by other stakeholders and will need to be able to provide information or signpost people to wherever that information is best provided.

### **Scrutiny Committees**

Formal recommendations will be forwarded from the Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee to Full Council. The Executive Committee will consider and make recommendations to Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee in relation to the corporate impact of options prior to the recommendations to Full Council.

Members will be encouraged to consider and identify issues through briefings and information provided, but the formal consultation role for members will come through the Scrutiny role and the decision of Full Council.

### **5.4 Other key stakeholders**

Information sent to tenants will be circulated to all stakeholders to ensure understanding about the option appraisal process and the reason the process has to be undertaken. The Council is keen to ensure that the views of wider stakeholders are heard and considered, and that stakeholders are able to signpost others to sources of information.

Views will be welcomed and recorded in a separate field of the database and will be reported alongside other database information at regular intervals.

### **5.5 The Options Appraisal sub group, Options Appraisal Board, Scrutiny Committee and Full Council**

The Options Appraisal sub group will manage the process from a tenant's perspective. This group will work closely with the ITA and monitor the effectiveness of their role and will validate invoices.

The group is made up of representatives from the T&LCG, sheltered forum, Tenants Associations and others with an interest in options appraisal.

The Options Appraisal Board is chaired by the Head of Housing & Social Inclusion who oversees the option appraisal process on behalf of the Council. Senior Council Officers will be able to give their views as part of the consultation process for staff.

The Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee's role is to consider all evidence on option appraisal before making a formal recommendation to Full Council on which

option or options to take forward. The evidence considered will include feedback and recommendations from tenants in the form of a report from the Tenants' Insight Group, and feedback from staff and the Unions on the impact of options. A formal report will be made by the Options Appraisal Board to the C&E Scrutiny Committee detailing the financial implications of options on the Housing Revenue Account and the housing service as well as the way in which options will deliver strategic and operational objectives and proprieties for the Council and stakeholders.

Full Council will make a decision on which option(s) to pursue at a meeting on 14 December 2004. However, this timetable needs to remain flexible to ensure a comprehensive and meaningful options appraisal process is carried out and to the satisfaction of the Government Office South West.

Formal consultation with elected members will be through the decision making process. Other consultation and the chance for elected members to ask questions and consider the options available will be through seminars and responses to information provided.