

# Exeter City Council<sup>1</sup>

## Tenant Participation Agreement\*

### What is a Tenant Participation Agreement?

This Tenant Participation Agreement is an agreement between tenants, leaseholders and Exeter City Council about the ways we will work together, to enable residents to get involved in improving the quality of their homes and services in their communities. (The term '*residents*' is used in this Agreement to refer to tenants and leaseholders.)

The Agreement describes how residents can be involved in a variety of ways:

- to influence decisions about housing services and policy
- to work with people in their local community to tackle local issues and services

This Agreement is a 'living' document. It will evolve over time as we achieve current aims and objectives and new ones are set. New aims and objectives will be developed through the consultation and involvement structures we have laid down in this document.

This Agreement builds on the one, which was drawn up between Exeter City Council and its residents in 2003. This Agreement is the product of a Review of participation structures undertaken by DOME Consultants in 2005. The 2004/05 stock options appraisal and the Council's decision to retain the housing stock form an important backdrop to the Participation Agreement.

### What we want to achieve

#### **1. Effective tenant consultation, involvement and information**

- with a variety of opportunities for everyone to get involved
- regular consultation about services and 'bricks and mortar' improvements
- all tenants to have opportunities to have a say about policies and priorities
- regular, accessible information from the Council for all residents

#### **2. Improved services and levels of satisfaction**

- higher levels of satisfaction amongst residents and Council staff
- a good quality repairs and maintenance service with all work carried out in timescales agreed with tenants
- opportunities for residents to be involved in monitoring standards of service

#### **3. A supportive and caring community**

- reduced levels of crime
- people encouraged to be good neighbours
- all groups integrated with no-one excluded or left out of our activities

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<sup>1</sup> This document is Exeter City Council's Tenant Compact in accordance with Part 1, Local Government Act 1999

- opportunities for residents who wish to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise

#### **4. A sustainable future for our homes and environment**

- homes improved to meet the Decent Homes Standard
- improved amenities and facilities on estates
- a cleaner, safer and more sustainable environment

#### **Who we want to involve in our Agreement**

We want to involve:

- all tenants, leaseholders and other local residents
- councillors
- council staff in the Housing & Social Inclusion department
- council staff from other relevant departments, for example environmental services and parks
- local housing associations
- local voluntary organisations and agencies working with young people, older people and others who are under represented
- and other service providers including the health services, police and social services

#### **What we will do**

**We will:**

- make sure that good quality information and feedback is given to all residents and staff
- provide a range of opportunities for residents to ‘have their say’ and get involved in decision-making about Council housing policies, priorities, services, improvements to their homes, the local environment, and community activities
- listen to residents and make sure that people feel they have been listened to
- form partnerships with other organisations to support good resident and community involvement
- provide resources to support involvement and identify sources of funding to help us achieve even better opportunities for involvement

#### **Key principles**

This Agreement is based on a set of key principles for resident involvement and participation:

- representation in organised tenant and residents’ groups should take place at as local a level as possible
- all local communities should have the opportunity to be represented at one or more levels
- opportunities for involvement should be clearly communicated to all residents
- the Council will actively promote the need for resident involvement and the opportunities available

- all recognised formal and informal tenant and residents' groups and representatives will be given the support they need to fulfil their role effectively
- residents are recognised by the Council as an equal partner with a key role to play in the development of strategy, policy and service delivery

## **Our Current Position**

### **Positive aspects we can build upon**

1. Our Tenants and Leaseholders Consultation Group (TLCG), Sheltered Housing Consultation Group (SHCG) and Tenants and Residents' Associations (TRAs) are all good at:
  - getting things done
  - giving people information
  - allowing residents to affect policy and services both at local level and City-wide
2. Working parties are effective – e.g on choice based lettings. We have shown that we can carry out improvements to services in response to tenants' priorities. For example we changed the repairs and maintenance contract specification. And we replaced bathroom modernisations with kitchens following consultation with tenants.
3. The Council has a new, fully accessible customer service centre at the Civic Centre in Paris Street, with a range of information and helpful staff. Online information is available on [www.exeter.gov.uk](http://www.exeter.gov.uk)
4. Senior officers are committed to resident involvement and participation and there is good liaison between officers and the community. The Council produces a quarterly newsletter, Tenants' News, and a quarterly sheltered tenants' newsletter, Chatterbox. Individual letters invite residents to local meetings about issues such as programmed works to a particular block, street or estate.
5. Some very committed tenants and leaseholders give up a lot of their time to represent their fellow residents. They are involved in TRAs, TLCG and the SHCG. They work centrally with the Council on panels to select contractors and appoint senior staff, and a range of housing service developments – for example choice based lettings, anti social behaviour and the Business Plan.
6. The Council supports community initiatives such as the Beacon Project, which provides the base for a whole range of services for the local community in Beacon Heath. The tenant participation team also supports The Valley Regeneration Scheme in the Wonford and Priory parts of the city and the emerging Exwick Community Centre.
7. The Council's stock options appraisal consultation in 2004/05 encouraged more residents to get involved in the 'Insight Group'. In response to a

questionnaire at the end of the options appraisal many tenants and leaseholders said they would like to get more involved:

- |   |  |     |
|---|--|-----|
| ➤ | Join a Tenants & Residents Association               | 53  |
| ➤ | Take part in telephone consultation                  | 165 |
| ➤ | Fill in questionnaires and surveys                   | 354 |
| ➤ | Join the Tenants and Leaseholders Consultation Group | 41  |
8. The Council supports TRAs by making available resources such as:
    - set up grants
    - resources for producing newsletters and other information
    - free transport
    - child care costs
  9. Training and skills development, through occasional training days developed by the Devon Group of Tenant Participation Workers, Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and support to study for the Chartered Institute of Housing Tenant Participation Certificate.
  10. Networking with tenants from other social landlords, for example as members of the Devon Tenants Forum.

### **The difficulties we need to tackle**

1. Communicating with **everyone** – there have been gaps in the circulation of information and newsletters, and we need to make sure that all our written information is accessible and interesting. In particular, we aim to use jargon-free language.
2. Increasing the number of TRAs so that residents in all parts of the City have access to a local Association. We currently have three well-established TRAs, representing about 35% of all tenants. The target for 2006 is to increase this to at least five TRAs.
3. Support and commitment from all councillors to resident involvement at local level and centrally needs to be demonstrated
4. Our tenant participation team and senior officers are very committed to developing resident involvement but front line housing officers and sheltered housing wardens need to be more committed and involved. Priority areas of the housing service such as tackling anti social behaviour provide the ideal focus for a joint approach
5. We need to show that the Council takes the feedback from tenants and leaseholders seriously and uses it to improve services in a comprehensive and thorough way. Tenants' criticisms have included 'doing jobs in a piecemeal fashion' and 'not always backing up consultation with action –the Council must put its money where its mouth is'. Customers can give useful feedback on how to spend money more wisely.

6. We need to improve the appeal of consultation meetings and TRAs to tackle general apathy. Some tenants only get involved for a short time over a single issue, and we need to encourage them to stay interested. Topics of meetings need to be relevant and interesting, including for leaseholders. Some people are scared of formal meetings and we need to make meetings informal and fun. We need to appeal to young people, and consider timings and venues of meetings to make them accessible to as many people as possible.

## **Priorities for Action**

**Our priorities for Action in 2006 are set out in an Action Plan attached as Appendix 1. In summary these priorities are:**

- **to increase the number of TRAs from 3 to 5**
- **to review criteria for recognising both formal and informal groups**
- **to establish a city-wide tenant group with elected representative**
- **to establish a customer panel of residents who can be consulted by phone or questionnaire**
- **to establish a focus group of tenants drawn from groups who do not traditionally 'get involved'**
- **to launch the tenants' website**
- **to conduct a tenant satisfaction survey, which, amongst other things, will measure:**
  - overall tenant satisfaction with landlord services
  - tenant satisfaction amongst black and minority ethnic (BME) tenants
  - tenant satisfaction amongst non-BME tenants
  - overall tenant satisfaction with opportunities to participate
  - BME tenant satisfaction with opportunities to participate
  - Non-BME tenant satisfaction with opportunities to participate
- **to establish residents' monitoring of:**
  - housing service standards and performance
  - complaints resolution and action to tackle trends of poor service
  - the capital works programme (Decent Homes)
  - Older Peoples Strategy
- **to establish residents' involvement in Business Planning – development and monitoring**
- **to offer good training and capacity building for residents to support involvement**
- **establish a Resident Auditor Group to test housing services and highlight areas for improvement**
- **to work in partnership with other social landlords and their residents on community issues**
- **to establish a Tenants Conference/Open Day**
- **to deliver training on the benefits of tenant participation to front line housing staff and Operational Managers**

## **Monitoring the Tenant Participation Agreement**

Effective resident involvement is central to the Audit Commission's inspection of housing services. Like all Councils, Exeter City will be monitored to check that it has well-established and effective resident involvement. The Audit Commission has created Key Lines of Enquiry – or KLOEs - which set out the things inspectors will be looking for when judging the housing service. There is a specific KLOE on Resident Involvement.

It is therefore important that the Council and residents monitor their involvement activities themselves. We propose two aspects of monitoring:

- the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultation Group will monitor services, and ensure that there is proper consultation and involvement in service development, delivery and review
- the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultation Group will monitor the overall achievement of the Tenants' Participation Agreement Action Plan (see Appendix 1 below):

Training will be provided for both these groups so that they fully understand the Key Lines of Enquiry and the standards expected.

## Appendix 2 - A summary of the National Core Standards for Compacts

<p><b>Housing Services</b></p>	<p>Housing services and wider community issues are the basis for compacts. There needs to be spectrum of involvement and tenants can chose the level of participation on a range of issues, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Council housing policy and strategy</li> <li>➤ Options for investment and improvement, and taking forward chosen option</li> <li>➤ Capital and regeneration programmes</li> <li>➤ Budgets, finance, rent setting</li> <li>➤ Allocations and lettings, including CBL</li> <li>➤ Anti social behaviour policies and procedures</li> <li>➤ Management of housing services</li> <li>➤ Policies and procedures for repairs, rents, voids</li> <li>➤ Housing benefits and debt advice</li> <li>➤ Leaseholder issues and charges</li> <li>➤ Sheltered housing services</li> <li>➤ Performance management and monitoring, including efficiency and value for money of services</li> <li>➤ Proposals to contract housing services to other providers, including through partnering contracts</li> <li>➤ Neighbourhood and environmental issues</li> <li>➤ Equality and diversity policies</li> <li>➤ Customer care</li> <li>➤ Arrangements for providing information and dealing with complaints</li> </ul>
<p><b>Standards for resources for tenant participation</b></p>	<p>Support should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reasonable financial help e.g. start up grants, annual grant, estate budgets</li> <li>➤ Facilities – access to premises, stationery, photocopying etc.</li> <li>➤ Advice – including independent advice</li> <li>➤ Training, including joint training with officers and councillors</li> <li>➤ Innovative approaches to encourage new tenants to get involved</li> </ul> <p>Council should provide information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Resources including staff time for tenant involvement</li> <li>➤ Which council officers are responsible for delivering specific goals</li> <li>➤ Resources for training and capacity-building</li> <li>➤ Anything else tenants ask for, so long as it is</li> </ul>

	available and its disclosure does not breach confidentiality
<b>Standards for meetings (to apply to meetings between the Council and residents, and to residents meetings such as TRAs)</b>	<p>Meetings should have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Clear objectives and a mandate</li> <li>➤ A clear action plan to deal with matters arising</li> <li>➤ Arrangements for reporting back the outcomes and feedback to those who took part</li> </ul> <p>Meetings should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Publicised effectively and in good time</li> <li>➤ Held at suitable times and in accessible places</li> <li>➤ Properly chaired and conducted in a fair and democratic way</li> </ul> <p>Council should pay for transport, carers' costs, and provide assistance for people who need special help – eg signers, interpreters</p>
<b>Standards for information</b>	<p>These standards apply to the Council and to tenants' groups which have a formal role in decision-making. Information should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Accessible – in plain language and be available in large print, Braille, cassette/CD, translation etc.</li> <li>➤ Clear – avoiding jargon and racist, sexist or other biased language</li> <li>➤ Good quality, timely and tailored to tenants' needs</li> </ul> <p>Tenants should, as appropriate, receive information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Housing strategies, policies and priorities</li> <li>➤ Housing investment options and plans</li> <li>➤ Capital works programmes</li> <li>➤ Any contracting out of services</li> <li>➤ Best value, performance monitoring and review, service standards and targets</li> <li>➤ Housing management and other local services</li> <li>➤ Equality and diversity policies, including racial harassment policy and procedures</li> <li>➤ Compacts themselves, and how to get involved, the support available to help them get involved</li> </ul>
<b>Standards for tenants' groups</b>	Tenants' group must meet reasonable criteria for formal recognition by the council. These criteria should not place too great a burden on tenants' groups.
<b>Tenants' groups involved in decision making</b>	<p>Any tenants and residents group which has a formal role in decision-making must be able to show that it is democratic, accountable, and has all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A written constitution</li> <li>➤ Equal opportunities policy which is complied with</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Regular elections</li> <li>➤ Open financial records (and annual accounts if appropriate)</li> <li>➤ Regular meetings, including an AGM which a minimum number of tenants attend, with minutes</li> <li>➤ A level of active membership, determined by the council and tenants</li> <li>➤ Information to all tenants about the group, encouraging others to get involved</li> <li>➤ Open membership to all</li> <li>➤ Regular newsletters or other written communication with members</li> <li>➤ A means of showing how they have met their objectives, and have the skills to work effectively</li> </ul>
<p><b>Standards for monitoring and measuring performance</b></p>	<p>The Council should consistently monitor and assess how the Compact is performing, with performance standards and targets. The council and tenants should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Assess the results of Compacts against original expectations – if targets are not met, investigate and find remedies</li> <li>➤ Review policies and performance regularly</li> <li>➤ Set clear service standards and targets for tenant consultation and involvement</li> <li>➤ Monitor and evaluate different approaches to tenant participation</li> <li>➤ Monitor tenant representatives and groups to make sure they continue to carry out their roles effectively</li> <li>➤ Monitor equality of opportunity and levels of involvement of all groups including ethnic minorities</li> <li>➤ Assess performance against other housing organisations</li> <li>➤ Check that the council consults with and involve tenants from all parts of the community effectively</li> <li>➤ Performance measures and targets should be set each year for tenants’ satisfaction with participation arrangements, services (including value for money) and their local area</li> </ul>