



Exeter City Council

HOUSING UNIT

**RESIDENT
INVOLVEMENT
STRATEGY
2007-2010**

September 2007

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING UNIT

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 2007-2010

INTRODUCTION

Exeter City Council is committed to involving residents in improving the quality of its housing services and widening the role residents' play in deciding how those services should develop. This commitment is based on a belief that residents who are involved and are satisfied that they are able to influence service delivery will help us create places where people want to live.

This document sets out our approach to involving residents in Exeter City Council's housing management service over the next three years (2007-10). Included is a framework for monitoring and reviewing the strategy.

The strategy should be read in conjunction with the Tenants' Agreement (Compact) that was agreed with our residents in January 2006. This document can be found on our resident website www.exetertenants.org.uk.

DEFINITION

Because the strategy is designed specifically for the Council's Housing Unit, and in particular the housing management service, the term *resident* in this case means all tenants and leaseholders living within the Council's properties.

VISION

Exeter City Council's vision for its housing service is:

“Working with our partners, we aim to provide excellent customer services; decent, affordable homes within sustainable neighbourhoods; and a range of housing solutions for the benefit of our customers and the wider community”.

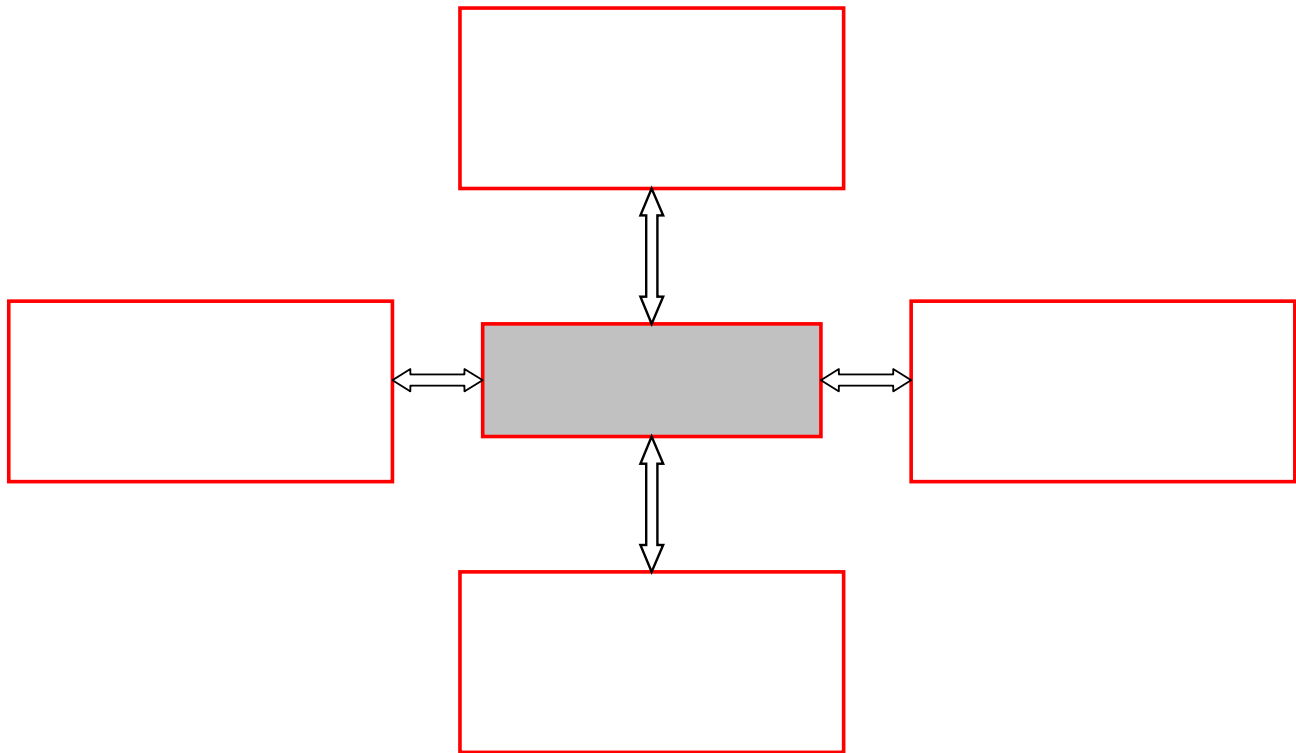
This strategy aims to support this vision by:

- Having resident involvement at the heart of service improvement
- Widening the role residents play in developing services
- Increasing resident satisfaction with their ability to influence the services they receive
- Helping us to develop strong and cohesive communities.
- Developing ways to tackle social exclusion on our estates

Aims of the Resident Involvement strategy:

- To increase the level of satisfaction among residents in their 'opportunities for participation in management and decision making' (BVPi 075a)
- To ensure our residents have a wide range of options to become involved in delivery of services within their communities which suit their circumstances
- To ensure Exeter City Council's Housing Management Team is accountable to residents through its formal governance and consultation structures
- Ensures we are pro-active in engaging with hard-to-reach groups
- Ensures our services continue to respond to our customers' needs
- Ensures that our residents have input into the Exeter City Council Housing Strategy and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
- Meets the specific local needs of residents of Exeter City Council

The broad aims of the strategy set resident involvement as a key driver for improving services:



PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

This strategy outlines the framework Exeter City Council will adopt to ensure our residents are regularly informed, consulted and offered opportunities to participate in the management of the housing service.

For many years the Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to resident involvement and this strategy builds on past achievements and develops new approaches to engage with our residents and deliver positive benefits for our neighbourhoods.

The implementation of this strategy is viewed as an opportunity to ensure a strong and developing relationship with our residents that is inclusive, flexible and involves communication with a wider cross section of residents.

The development of a comprehensive strategy can:

- Help improve housing management services across our neighbourhoods;
- Enhance the relationship between housing staff, councillors and residents;
- Lead to greater resident satisfaction;
- Give residents more choice and greater influence over the management of their homes and the environment in which they live.
- Help councillors and residents represent their neighbourhoods more efficiently by opening up additional channels of communication.

The Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry No. 5 *Resident Involvement* have informed this strategy.

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STANDARDS

We will keep our residents informed by

- Sending every tenant and leaseholder a copy of 'Insight' at least four times a year, along with newsletters about local projects as and when appropriate;
- Publish the sheltered housing newsletter 'Chatterbox' four times a year;
- Publishing an Annual Report to Tenants every July highlighting our performance and achievements in the previous financial year;
- Using both the Exeter City Council and the Tenants' websites to let residents know what is going on, as well as publicising activities in a wide range of formats;
- Inviting residents to an Annual Conference every September to discuss current issues and help us plan for the future;
- Making sure housing staff can provide residents with up-to-date information in an easy to understand and concise way;
- Providing a comprehensive range of literature about our housing services to enable residents to access the services in a way that suits them;

We will involve everyone by providing

- A translation service and information on tape, in Braille, in large print or in another language to people who ask for it:

- A range of methods for residents to be involved in the management of the housing service that suits their needs and matches their level of commitment;
- Equality and diversity training for all resident representatives

We will enable residents to monitor, test and give feedback on the service by:

- Creating a Performance Review Committee that meets every quarter to monitor performance and action plans
- Conducting a STATUS survey every two years
- Establishing a number of focus groups that meet every six months to help 'test' the quality of current services
- Establish and support a Resident Auditor Team to inspect the housing service against nationally published standards and industry best practice.

We will help residents stay involved

- By providing help and support with things like childcare costs, travelling expenses, training and stationary.

EXISTING TENANT PARTICIPATION STRUCTURE

Exeter City Council has a housing stock of over 5000 rented homes and 900 leaseholders (as at 1 April 2007). The stock comprises a wide range of property types and styles that were developed throughout the last century.

The housing stock is located within the city boundaries and can be found on a mixture of larger traditional housing estates and smaller 'in-fill' developments. There are 22 sheltered housing schemes totalling some 552 homes. 17 of these schemes have a communal room.

The Tenant and Leaseholder Consultation Group (T&LCG)

As part of the Best Value review in 1997 the existing Tenants & Residents Associations and Area Forums comprising interested, self-selecting residents were drawn together to form a Tenants & Leaseholders Consultation Group. Since this time, the T&LCG has been the main consultative body for all city wide housing management and policy issues. The T&LCG receives a wide range of reports and presentations from officers across the housing service. In 2006 the T&LCG also started receiving the new quarterly Performance Digest giving details of the housing unit's performance across all its functions.

The T&LCG meets quarterly with attendance ranging between 10 to 20 tenants and leaseholders from a mailing list of 75.

Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TRA's)

Local issues and policies are discussed with estate-based Tenants & Residents Associations. The Council encourages the creation of such groups by offering help and support to residents and 'start-up' grants to those TRA's that agree a formal constitution.

Despite on-going promotional work both at a city wide and neighbourhood level there are currently only two active Tenants' and Residents' Association's. These are both well established within their local communities and can highlight a number of improvements in the their neighbourhoods as a result of their activities. Both campaign on behalf of their communities and both organise social events for local residents.

Sheltered Housing Forum (SHF)

There is an active Sheltered Housing Forum (SHF) representing all 552 sheltered housing tenants. Each sheltered site elects up to two representatives (plus a reserve) to the SHF. The SHF also nominates two representatives to sit on the Tenants & Leaseholders Consultation Group.

The SHF plays an active role in older persons initiatives such as defining service standards for the Supporting People regime and developing an Older Persons Strategy. The SHF also meets quarterly and between 15-20 tenants regularly attend.

Resident Involvement Register

The Council holds the names and addresses of some 400 residents who have expressed an interest in the past to be involved in some way in the management of the housing service. This can be through attending meetings and focus groups, receiving questionnaires on specific issues or being involved with telephone surveys.

The list was established during the housing stock options appraisal process undertaken in 2004/05. Part of the process involved sending every tenant and leaseholder a questionnaire regarding the future of their homes. A section of the questionnaire asked each resident about their future willingness to be involved in the management of the housing service and was broken down into four categories:

- Answer questionnaires
- Join the T&LCG
- Be involved in telephone surveys
- Join a local T&RA

This register is frequently used to gauge tenant opinion and satisfaction, for example a recent Reactive Repairs focus group included members drawn from this register.

Insight (formerly Tenants' News)

Insight is a quarterly newsletter sent to all tenants and leaseholders. It contains a range of articles about new or existing services together with more light-hearted issues such as recipes, cross words and competitions.

Chatterbox

The Chatterbox is an ad hoc newsletter produced specifically for residents of the Council's sheltered housing schemes. As with 'Insight' it aims to provide a mixture of news and information to this target audience.

A NEW RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRUCTURE FOR THE FUTURE

The Council believes that the existing resident involvement structures no longer provide a dynamic range of opportunities for residents to become involved in the housing service. Attendance at meetings has decreased in recent years and the pool of residents who volunteer to become involved in the various working parties and service review groups has become smaller.

To help the Council better understand residents views on its Tenant Participation Policies the 2006 STATUS survey was used to help collect data from across the tenant population.

The STATUS survey was undertaken in the autumn of 2006 by the National Housing Federation's 'Feedback' service. A reflective sample of the Council's tenants received the standard tenant satisfaction questionnaire. There was an overall response rate of 51%. The survey also showed that:

- 72% of tenants were happy with the opportunities for participation in management and decision-making
- 85% of tenants said the Council kept them well informed
- 75% of tenants believe the Council takes account of their views

The survey contained additional questions to help the Council find out what forms of consultation tenants would be the most happiest to participate in: The results showed:

- 51% were happy to complete surveys/questionnaires
- 11% said they would attend open days, community events or conferences
- 9% said they would join a Tenants' and Residents' Association
- 8% said they would attend resident forums and,
- 7% said they would be happy to attend a focus group

A total of 39% of tenants said they were not interested in being involved at all.

Using these results the Council hopes to build a resident involvement strategy for the future that offers more tenants the chance to have their say in the management of their homes, but recognises that the majority of tenants only wish to have a casual involvement and are not prepared to give up large amounts of their time to attend a variety of meetings.

The strategy will also build on examples of best practice from across the country that can demonstrate higher levels of success in this area.

As a result this strategy will include both formal and informal structures for resident involvement that will help shape the future success of the housing service.

Formal Structures

Tenant and Leaseholder Committee (TALC)

The existing T&LCG is a consultative body with arguably little influence. Whilst a small group of residents have regularly attended these meetings and have played an active role in its business, the group has no real empowerment and offers little challenge to managers and staff. Membership of the group does not include residents from every area of the city and unfortunately has no representation from younger members of the community.

In recognition of this officers and residents have worked together throughout 2006 to develop a new formal structure that will be representative of the whole city. It is hoped this new structure will, in time, give greater empowerment to resident representatives and provide greater challenge for officers and members.

The new structure will create a **Tenant and Leaseholder Committee (TALC)**. The committee will be made up of 17 tenant representatives elected from 6 clearly defined areas across the city.

A Steering Group of residents developed a new constitution and election process, which was subsequently ratified by the T&LCG. (A copy of the TALC constitution is attached as Appendix 1).

To ensure involvement from as wide a range of residents as possible, each constituted Tenant & Residents Association can elect one representative (plus a reserve) to sit on the TALC.

The Sheltered Housing Forum will elect two representatives (plus two reserves) to sit on the TALC.

All residents who are interested in serving on this committee will have to be nominated and where necessary an election will take place within that defined area. All tenants within that area will have the chance to vote in a postal ballot.

Once established the committee will agree its Terms of Reference and a Code of Conduct for its members. (A copy of these Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct are attached as Appendix 2).

The committee will elect a Chair who will seek to represent all tenants and leaseholders. The committee will be supported by the Council's Tenant Participation Manager and a Tenant Liaison Officer who will ensure meeting agenda's and minutes are circulated and that individual members have access to information as required. The committee will be given full training to help them undertake this important role and to ensure standards of working are consistent. The committee will also have a specific budget to enable them to buy in specialist training or attend conferences.

Performance Review Committee

The Tenants' and Leaseholders' Committee has agreed to establish a sub group called the Performance Review Committee (PRC) to ensure the Housing Unit's performance is open to regular scrutiny and challenge. The PRC is made up of:

- seven tenants and leaseholders nominated by the TALC
- the Council's Portfolio Holder for Housing & Social Inclusion
- the Council's Chair of the Scrutiny Committee (Community)

The PRC has agreed a timetable of quarterly meetings that coincide with the publication of the Housing Unit's Performance Digest. At each meeting responsible managers will attend to take the committee through their own targets and answer questions on their overall performance.

The committee will also have regular reports on progress against the Unit's major action and service improvement plans contained in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and the Housing Strategy.

Tenants & Residents Associations (T&RAs)

The Council will continue to encourage the creation of area based Tenants' and Resident Associations.

A group may come together for a whole range of reasons, for example to tackle environmental problems on an estate or campaign for improvements to services, and can become involved in all types of activities from running a community building to organising activities for young people.

New and existing T&RA's are supported because they have an important role to play by campaigning on local issues and creating a sense of community spirit. T&RA's act as a means of encouraging the two-way exchange of information with the Council and can be a valuable tool in testing customer satisfaction.

Start up grants will be made available and the Council supports groups by carrying out the administrative functions for a limited period whilst the new Association seeks to establish itself. Training will be provided as necessary to give members the knowledge and experience in managing their own business.

A Tenant and Residents Association Starter pack has been developed for new groups and is available in hard copy, on the Exeter City Council website www.exeter.gov.uk and on the Exeter tenants website at exetertenants.org.uk. – under 'helpful documents'.

Each T&RA is encouraged to become involved in the Council's new Neighbourhood Management process (see below) and in helping to plan and monitor Estate Improvements.

Resident Auditor Team

The Resident Auditor Team was established in early 2006. The aim was to create a small internal team of residents that would undertake inspections of the housing service using similar techniques to the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate.

The project, although managed by the Tenant Participation Team, has been administered and co-ordinated by an outside consultant with expertise in this field. To recruit to the team adverts were placed in the Tenants' Newsletter asking for residents who were interested to complete a formal application. Following selection interviews, a team of 10 Resident Auditors was established who were all subjected to a rigorous and comprehensive training programme.

During their first year the Resident Auditor team have concentrated on assessing the housing service against the Customer Care and Access KLOE and have produced a number of reports of their findings together with recommendations for improvement.

Recently, the team have undertaken an impact assessment of their first year highlighting how they believe their work has influenced the Council and made real changes to the housing service. The assessment includes a response from the Council setting out how it has responded to each recommendation.

In the future the Resident Auditor Team will be given a four year rolling programme of work that will complement the Housing Units service review programme and ensure findings are fed into the consultation process.

The Council will continue to promote the work of the team and seek to recruit new volunteers.

Service Review Groups

The Council's housing unit has established a four-year rolling programme of service review. Each review group will include officers and members from the Council and a number of interested residents drawn from the membership of the TALC and the Resident Involvement Register.

The Service Review groups will oversee the review process and ensure:

- that sufficient consultation is undertaken with service users to measure their satisfaction and assess the needs for changes/improvements
- that value for money is a major consideration of the review
- that historical information on performance, satisfaction levels, complaints etc are collected and analysed
- that benchmarking information is collected and used to drive changes within the existing service
- that any changes made as a result of the review are assessed to understand their impact on the service

Other Groups

As well as the above, there will always be a need to establish other formal consultation groups when specific issues are being discussed. For example, when producing any written information for residents it is essential that the literature is clear, concise and easy to understand, and that it takes account of the varying needs of our tenants. The Council have therefore established an Editorial Board to oversee the production of literature and ensure its text and design meet the highest standards.

The Editorial Board will agree a cycle of at least 8 meetings per year to oversee the production of the 'Insight' tenants newsletter. Meetings will review the proposed story list, make suggestions and amendments as necessary, read and comment on draft articles and agree the structure and style of publications.

Informal Groups

The Council recognises, and the recent STATUS survey confirms, that the vast majority of residents do not want to become involved in formal structures and attend regular meetings. It is therefore essential that a number of informal structures are created to give tenants the opportunity to become involved but without having to commit to attending regular meetings.

The strategy therefore looks at what type of informal structures can be created and will seek to promote these structures where appropriate to encourage resident involvement.

Area Forums

Where the Council becomes aware of local concerns in a particular area but there is no active Tenants & Residents Association, an area forum can be a useful means of gauging opinion. It can also be a precursor to an estate based T&RA.

The advantages of area forum are that:

- Anyone can attend – invites are sent to all residents in that area
- It can be a forum for explanation and discussion
- It can generate new ideas
- It can provide people with the opportunity to have their say

However, there are also some disadvantages:

- The forum may only attract those people affected by a particular issue
- It requires skilled chairing as some local activists may try to dominate proceedings

The Council is currently trialling this model in three areas of the city - Beacon Heath, Hamlin Gardens and Shilhay.

The Hamlin Gardens and Shilhay 'pilots' are relatively new and cover a clearly defined, and smaller geographic area. However, attendance has been encouraging and the Council believes continued support for these areas will see the forums develop in terms of the direction they wish to take and the issues they wish to cover.

Beacon Heath is a larger geographical area that contains a range of Council, Housing Association and private dwellings. The area has a range of issues that affect the quality of lives for everyone in the neighbourhood. The Area Forum meets on a quarterly basis. All residents living in the neighbourhood are invited. A range of services, including housing staff, the Police, County Council, elected members etc, also attend to answer questions. Each meeting discusses issues of concerns and seeks viable solutions. Minutes and action points are circulated to the relevant agencies and departments. Future meetings use these action points to monitor progress.

It is intended that the experience gained in the Beacon Heath area will help to develop this model in other parts of the city that cover similar geographical areas and contain a similar number of landlords and tenure types. It is important that if residents are to be encouraged to take a greater role in the management of their homes that they build a good relationship with the agencies that provide services to them and their views are incorporated in future service provision in the neighbourhood.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are an excellent way of consulting on specific policy issues or areas of service. It enables officers and members to discuss at first hand current services and new initiatives and gauge resident opinion to them.

Members of focus groups will be drawn from the Tenant Involvement Register. Focus groups will be brought together in a structured way and facilitated by one officer, tenant or outside consultant. However, it is important that they maintain a level of informality to allow participants to freely enter into the discussions. Recently, a review of the Council's reactive repairs service was a subject of a focus group that provided a wider response and greater range of ideas than other existing formal structures.

The Council intends to create three focus groups – one for sheltered tenants only and two containing general needs tenants. Each group should attempt to be representative of the community they are drawn from and consist of residents who play no part in other formal tenant participation structures. The method of establishing these groups will follow the general guidelines and principles set out by the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate.

The Council believes these groups will give an invaluable insight into the range and quality of services we provide and help to ascertain overall levels of satisfaction among our customers. The focus groups will meet at least once a year and be overseen by an external facilitator.

These focus groups will help the Council gauge if any improvements that have been implemented are having an impact across our neighbourhoods.

Tenant Involvement Register

The existing Tenant Involvement Register continues to expand as new tenant volunteers are entered onto it. However, the register needs to be better maintained and that existing tenants are regularly engaged to sustain their initial interest.

Work will be undertaken to increase publicity of the register. This will include information within the new tenant 'sign-up' pack, regular articles in the Insight newsletter, a specific leaflet pointing out the benefits of being involved and the time commitment required.

As the Council develops a greater range of service specific satisfaction surveys, and increases the use of focus groups to supplement it's service review programme, it is anticipated that tenants included on the register will play a greater role in this process.

Leaseholder Participation

Exeter City Council will continue to improve formal and informal leaseholder participation arrangements.

In the recent STATUS survey the same questionnaire was sent to 800+ leaseholders to help the Council understand their overall satisfaction levels with the housing service and to drive improvements in the future.

In general terms the satisfaction results from the leaseholders survey were lower than the results from our tenants. Although this demonstrates the different relationship the Council has with its leaseholders it also shows that further work is required to ensure leaseholders not only understand their rights and responsibilities within the terms of the lease but also the standards of service they can expect from the Council.

Results from the leaseholder survey showed that:

- 68% were satisfied with the overall service provided by the Council
- 65% said the service charge represented 'value for money'
- 93% were satisfied with their accommodation
- 89% were satisfied with the condition of the accommodation
- 73% were satisfied with the area in which they lived
- 62% were satisfied with the way the Council undertakes repairs
- 77% felt that they are well informed
- 65% say their views are taken into account
- 53% are satisfied with the opportunities to be involved in the management of their homes

Leaseholders are consulted about planned maintenance works in accordance with legal requirements. They are also involved in joint estate-based consultation exercises with tenants.

A Leaseholders Consultation Forum was established some years ago and should meet quarterly. However, recently despite sending invites to every leaseholder less than 10 people attended. Further work will be done to re-establish this forum to enhance leaseholders involvement in the service.

Leaseholders can also be elected onto the TALC, can attend Area Forums and be involved in the tenant involvement register.

General Consultation

The Council will seek to undertake a range of consultation exercises with its residents where the provision of services will directly affect them or their neighbourhood. Examples include:

Major works programme: The Council has a comprehensive procedure for consulting its tenants and leaseholders prior to any improvements works starting in their homes. The Council employs two Tenant Liaison Officers (TLO) who act as the tenant's first point of contact throughout the whole process. They will contact the tenant in advance of any work starting and talk them through the project, explaining the extent of the work and the timescales involved. Where the tenant has choices to make (i.e. in the kitchen and bathroom programmes for example) the TLO will explain the options available. Assistance maybe offered with packing and clearing rooms and alternative facilities maybe available where work will take a period of time to complete.

New Developments: Residents living in the neighbourhood near to new development sites will be fully consulted on the design of any planned development. This is particularly important where the Council plans to develop smaller in-fill sites within existing housing estates.

Environmental Improvements: Fencing schemes, landscaping, demolition projects etc

Housing Management Issues: Where a particular issue is affecting a neighbourhood (e.g. anti-social behaviour) residents will be consulted to ensure the full extent of the problem is understood and that proposed solutions are agreed jointly.

Reaching The 'Hard To Hear' Groups

It is important that the Council acknowledges that within its tenant base there will be a range of groups that historically have not engaged with the housing service through traditional tenant participation structures. This may be for a number of reasons, ranging from not being able to find the time within a busy

family life through to a general mistrust of the Council and its reasons for wanting engagement.

Not all these groups are classed as a 'minority'. Young people or single parents, for example, form a large part of the tenant population and yet they are among the most reluctant to become involved and share their views. The Council also has a small population of BME tenants who, once again, have not traditionally become involved in our consultation exercises.

To try and engage with these groups the Council plans to undertake the following in order to encourage engagement with three priority groups:

1. BME Tenants: Identify through the Tenant Census BME tenants within the housing stock and use this information to undertake a series of home visits to build up trust and encourage greater participation. Ideally the Council would like to establish a BME focus group to discuss both general housing services and issues particular to these groups. However, if this is not possible an alternative would be to establish a panel of volunteers who would be willing to be consulted on new policy ideas and undertake satisfaction surveys etc.
2. Young/Single Parents: Undertake regular visits to the network of Children Centre's across the city (including Surestart) to establish contact with young parents who live in our housing to talk through their common concerns and start a dialogue on the best way for them to be consulted. Once again, it is hoped that we can establish a bank of volunteers who are willing to be consulted and comment on how policy and procedures specifically affect them.
3. Young People (particularly those aged 11 and over): Take part in the Council's annual 'Youth Liaison' event (normally arranged during the Autumn term) to make contact with children who live on our estates and talk through the issues that concern them. Also, contact the Head Teachers of those schools whose catchment areas include large numbers of council properties to try and establish workshops/briefings within the school.

It is recognised that each of these groups will have specific needs and concerns. However, they will also have views and opinions on the housing service in general that can be fed into the service review process.

Whilst this process is clearly more time consuming and resource intensive than more traditional methods of engagement the Council believes it is essential for views to be gathered across its whole tenant profile rather than just those who are happy to volunteer. By pro-actively engaging the harder to reach groups in this way we not only gather vital information on their views of the housing service, but also start to break down the barriers that may exist and encourage people from these groups to become involved in more formal tenant participation structures in the future.

NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT

The Council introduced a Neighbourhood Management Policy in October 2006. The policy sets out to achieve a number of objectives that will seek to help build sustainable communities across our neighbourhoods. The policy aims to achieve:

- Better overall resident satisfaction at neighbourhood level;
- Identify neighbourhood issues and seek solutions with local residents
- Improve information on neighbourhood issues to help residents and facilitate the contribution of external agencies;
- Keeping neighbourhoods attractive and sustainable;
- Giving Neighbourhoods a chance to organise and develop representation;
- To foster co-operation on neighbourhoods across the city between different sections of the Council, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations and landlords. For example liaison with Environment Health Officers, Social Services, Police, other Housing Associations;
- Facilitate periodic inspections of communal areas;
- Encourage a sense of responsibility by tenants;

A key element of the policy has been the introduction of neighbourhood inspections on a number of priority areas. These 'Priority A' Neighbourhoods have been selected based on a range of criteria regarding historical levels of anti-social behaviour, fly tipping, graffiti, environmental issues etc. Inspections are scheduled to take place every two months with accurate records kept of what problems are found and the action taken to rectify them. The overall aims of the neighbourhood inspections are:

- To contribute towards a high profile, pro-active housing management service
- To identify issues regarding communal areas within each neighbourhood
- To identify issues regarding individual properties within each neighbourhood
- To enable local residents to become involved in the Council's estate management service
- To help highlight on-going issues across the neighbourhood and influence the content of the Neighbourhood Action Plans
- To provide an audit trail of issues and action taken for future reference.

The following people are notified of the dates of future inspections and invited to attend:

T&RA Representatives – where one exists within a neighbourhood, representatives of the Association will be invited to attend every inspection.

Where no T&RA exists - the Estate Officer should invite anyone living in the area that is either:

- entered on the Council's Tenant Involvement Register and/or,
- a member of the Tenants and Leaseholders Committee (TALC)
- Other residents may be invited if they showed an interest in the past.

The Council aims to increase resident satisfaction across its neighbourhoods, in particular resident's satisfaction with the local environment. To monitor the level of satisfaction the Council will use a variety of methods. This information should be used to influence changes in the way services are delivered.

Examples of how satisfaction is measured are:

- STATUS survey (every 2 years)
- Complaints System
- New Tenancy Surveys
- Exit Surveys
- Service specific surveys (for example following major works and environmental improvements)
- Feedback through Resident's Groups/area forums/focus groups etc

COMMUNICATION

The most important part of the resident involvement strategy is improving the quality of communication between the Council and its residents. This includes the way we produce literature, write letters, talk to people and engage with them on a daily basis. Only by improving this aspect of our service will we encouraged more residents to become involved in the management of their homes.

To assist in this process the following principles will be adopted in all our communications:

- ***Truth and honesty*** – we will provide a true picture of any situation and only withhold information for valid reasons of confidentiality; be proud of our achievements, but admit to limitations; we will respect confidentiality and data protection.
- ***Simplicity*** – we will use jargon-free language and word lists (glossaries).
- ***Openness and ease of understanding*** – we will provide information for all those residents that are affected by the decisions we make and by ensuring processes are in place to give everyone the information they need to contribute to effective decision-making.
- ***Inclusiveness*** – we will give 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** – we will listen to all views and questions; recognising that all residents have a right to express valid views.
- **Accountability** – we will give clear messages about who is responsible for making decisions and explaining how decisions will be reached.
- **Consistency** – we will ensure that reports, publications and all other documents and letters are clearly identified and are consistent with current policy
- **Accuracy** – we will ensure that information is accurate and up to date

The objectives for communication are:

- To enable everyone affected - tenants, leaseholders and all other stakeholders - to participate fully in housing services and at a level and pace they are comfortable with.
- To ensure open and accessible channels of communication between stakeholders and decision makers which in turn shape and inform the Council's views on housing services.
- To encourage, listen and respond to the views of all residents.
- To increase opportunities for tenants and residents to contribute to service development and decision making through this process.

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 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

DIVERSITY ISSUES

The Resident Involvement Strategy takes account of the diverse needs of existing Exeter City Council tenants and will actively seek to include people who are vulnerable to social exclusion.

The Council will throughout 2007-2008 undertake a Tenant Census exercise to identify a range of equality and diversity issues among our tenant population. The census information will be entered into our housing management system and used to enable us to tailor our services to each individual household depending on their needs. It will also enable us to target the most vulnerable tenants to ensure they are not excluded from the range of services available. The survey will ask for information on:

Ethnicity: The 2001 census recorded that Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) residents made up 2.4% of the population in Exeter, but with no clear largest minority ethnic group. The Tenant Census will enable us to fully understand the ethnicity of our tenants and the particular needs they may have.

Literacy Issues: Although by its very nature this tends to be hidden and therefore difficult to quantify, it is important to take account of the possibility that some people may have difficulty with written communication. The Census will ask tenants for their preferred form of communication with the Council so that future services are delivered in a more accessible way.

Frailty due to age: A high proportion of Exeter's tenants are older people. Its housing stock includes 552 homes within fully sheltered schemes. However, there is also a large number of older people residing in our general needs housing stock. The recent STATUS survey found that 36% of households contained a tenant aged 65 years or over. 20% of these households were over 75 years of age. 33% of tenants described themselves as 'retired'.

Disability: 53% of the respondents to the STATUS survey considered that their household contained a family member with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity. Of those, 82% indicating that it limited their activities and of these, 8% used a wheelchair.

Involving 'hard to reach' or 'vulnerable' groups.

The Council will work hard to involve people who are either vulnerable or from different ethnic backgrounds who are traditionally easy to reach but very often hard to engage. Initiatives to be taken include:

- ❖ offering to translate publications into other languages where required
- ❖ offering to provide documents in large-print, audio tape and Braille versions of publications
- ❖ communicating through the local media

- ❖ offering face to face meetings and home visits
- ❖ offering to arrange transport to events and meetings
- ❖ offering to pay for child care facilities while carers attend a TALC, T&RA or other organised event relating to the improvement of housing services
- ❖ communicating with and through partner statutory and voluntary agencies, faith communities, religious centres and community organisations throughout the City
- ❖ talking to advocates of people unable to speak for themselves e.g. relatives of frail elderly people

REVIEW OF THE RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

This strategy will be formally reviewed in 2009. However, some annual updating may occur to take account of the developing role of residents in the housing management service and changes in Government legislation, industry best practice, the Housing Revenue Business Plan and the Housing Strategy.

Resident Involvement Strategy (2007 – 2010)

Action Plan

Action	Date	Responsible Officer	Progress/Action
Continue to develop the Tenant and Leaseholder Committee. Agree a comprehensive training programme to help build capacity and equip each representative with the tools to play an active role in its work.	October 2007	Tony Bodgin	
Publish the 'Insight' tenants' newsletter four times a year (In January, April, July and October). Agree with the Editorial Board a cycle of meeting to oversee the content and design of each publication.	On-going November 2007	Tony Bodgin	
Publish a 'Chatterbox' sheltered housing newsletter four times per year	On-going	Tony Bodgin	
Promote the benefits of forming a Tenants' and Residents' Association on the Council's estates wherever possible and publicise the work of existing T&RA's in the Insight newsletter.	On-going Annually	Tony Bodgin	
Manage and maintain the Tenant Involvement Register and seek to use/invite those entered on the register to a range of events/surveys etc each year. Place an article in the Insight newsletter every year promoting the register and advising tenants of how to join.	On-going Annually	Tony Bodgin	
Undertake a STATUS survey every two years with the next one commencing in September/October 2008	September 2008	Tony Bodgin	
Maintain and support the existing Area Forum's (Beacon Heath, Hamlin Gardens and Shilhay). Use the model to create similar forums in areas of the city where no TRA exists and local interest is high.	On-going	Tony Bodgin	
Establish a Leaseholders Consultation Forum to increase the level of consultation with this group, and agree a cycle of future meetings.	April 2008	Tony Bodgin/ Mike Hopton	
Continue of manage the Resident Auditor Team to ensure that they regularly receive training, that new members are recruited and that they have an annual work programme to complement the Housing Unit's Service Improvement Plan	On-going November 2007	Tony Bodgin	

Action	Date	Responsible Officer	Progress/Action
Establish three new focus groups for the mock housing inspection in September 2007 – one for sheltered tenants and two for general needs tenants. (in accordance with the guidance issued for this purpose) Maintain regular contact with each volunteer and seek to re-convene the focus groups every six months to undertake further survey work	September 2007 Every 6 months	Tony Bodgin	
Continue to develop the work of the Tenant Liaison Officers to ensure full consultation is undertaken prior to the major works programme and that new areas of consultation are explored.	On-going	Tony Bodgin	
Introduce innovative ways to reach 'hard to hear' groups by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and contacting a sample of BME tenants and inviting them to take part in surveys/focus groups to discuss their particular views and requirements • Undertaking regular surgeries/visits at the local Children's Centres to make contact with young single parents who live in our housing • Seek to increase contact with young people living on our estates through the annual 'youth liaison' event and by organising sessions in local schools 	December 2007 April 2008 Annually & October 2008	Tony Bodgin	
Review this Resident Involvement Strategy in 2009		Tony Bodgin	

Tenant and Leaseholders Committee

CONSTITUTION MAY 2007

1.0 Objectives of the Committee

- 1.1 To represent the views of the residents of Exeter City Council property with reference to repairs, improvement of housing stock and conditions of tenancy and to make comment/recommendations as appropriate on strategies, policies and customer services.
- 1.2 To represent the views of residents in local partnerships established to improve the quality of life in neighbourhoods and to receive reports on progress in such groups.
- 1.3 To ensure effective liaison with Exeter City Council and the elected tenant representatives in particular and to promote the establishment of resident associations and neighbourhood groups.
- 1.4 To keep under review the training needs of TALC members in order to enable effective participation.
- 1.5 To consider policy issues and make recommendations where appropriate, and where practically possible, to obtain the views of residents before making any decisions or recommendations.
- 1.6 To promote and oversee effective resident involvement and consultation, participation and new initiatives.

2.0 Equal Opportunities

The TALC is aiming to be an equal opportunities organisation. The TALC will therefore ensure that: -

- 2.1 We will not discriminate on any grounds. This includes those of race, colour, age, religious or political beliefs, disability or illness, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, class, learning difficulty, appearance or employment status.
- 2.2 The TALC will ensure there is full participation and equality of opportunity of all members in the composition and operation of its committee, sub-committees and general meetings, and in the election of its officers and in particular, will encourage representation from those currently under represented.
- 2.3 In its meetings and the conduct of its business generally, the committee will not tolerate any racist, sexist, or other discriminatory remarks. Racial or sexual harassment are grounds for expulsion from the committee.
- 2.4 The committee will consider the needs of different communities when booking venues and arranging times of meetings.
- 2.5 The committee will arrange training for all members of the committee on equal opportunities and provide training opportunities for its members to enable them to develop skills in equal opportunities.
- 2.6 The committee will monitor the participation of different groups at meetings and on the committee, and will set targets for improvement of involvement each year.

3.0 Membership

- 3.1 The committee will consist of 17 directly elected voting members from the six identified areas of Exeter.
- 3.2 A maximum of four members (pro rata) will be elected from each of the six areas. Each Tenant and Resident Association (T&RA), recognised by Exeter City Council, will have the right to nominate one member to represent the T&RA on the Tenant and Leaseholder Committee.

- 3.3 In the case of the representative not being available, each Tenant & Resident Association will have the right to nominate a deputy who will have full voting rights.
- 3.4 The Sheltered Housing Forum (SHF) will have the right to nominate two representatives to represent the SHF on the TALC.
- 3.5 In the case of either of the representatives not being available the Sheltered Housing Forum (SHF) will have the right to nominate up to two deputies who will have full voting rights.
- 3.6 Membership of TALC shall be open to all residents of Exeter City Council estates regardless of age, gender, sexuality, marital status, ethnicity, religion, disability or political persuasion.
- 3.7 Elections will be carried out under the supervision of Exeter City Council on a two yearly cycle.
- 3.8 Vacancies that occur within the directly elected members will be filled by asking potential members from the appropriate neighbourhood to seek the support of a minimum of three tenants from different households. Nominations have to be made on the form available from Exeter City Council. Applications will be processed by a subgroup, which will include the Chair and Vice – Chair, which will arrange an interview with all applicants before co-option.
- 3.9 Formal co-option will be agreed at the next available committee meeting.

4.0 Quorum

- 4.1 Eight members will form a quorum of the Committee

5.0 Change of Constitution

- 5.1 Should the TALC wish to change its constitution then a 60% majority of at least 50% of the membership of the Committee will be required, with the notice of the motion together with the names of the proposer and seconder being received in writing seven days prior to the next TALC Annual General Meeting or Special General Meeting.

6.0 Election of Officers

- 6.1 Officers of the TALC, including the posts of Chair and Vice-Chair, will be elected at the first meeting of the Committee and thereafter bi-annually at the Annual General Meeting.
- 6.2 The Committee may decide to make other appointments, for example Secretary and Treasurer and these appointments will be elected at the first meeting of the Committee and thereafter bi-annually at the Annual General Meeting

7.0 Sub-Committees

- 7.1 The Committee will have the right to form Sub-Committees. Any decision that such Sub-Committees make will be recommendations to the main Committee and, until further ratified, will not be binding on the main Committee.
- 7.2 Three members will form a quorum of a Sub-Committee.

8.0 Grounds for Dismissal

The members of the Committee will cease their membership if: -

- 8.1 They are no longer residents of Exeter.
- 8.2 They fail to attend three consecutive meetings of the TALC unless incapacitated through illness or injury or send in apologies.

8.3 They are considered to act against the interests of the Committee by bringing it into disrepute or by failing to adhere to the Constitution.

8.4 They are judged by the TALC to have breached the code of conduct agreed by the TALC.

9.0 Code of Conduct

9.1 All members shall at all times abide by the 'code of conduct' agreed by the Committee.

10.0 Decision of the Committee

10.1 All the decisions of the TALC will be recorded in the minutes and will be signed by the Chair after the agreement of the Committee has been obtained that they reflect a true record of the decisions taken. Should decisions be required between Committee meetings, then the Chair, in conjunction with the Vice-Chair, is empowered to act subject to subsequent ratification by the full Committee.

10.2 All relevant decisions and recommendations of the Committee will be reported to the Head of Housing.

10.3 If Exeter City Council does not accept a TALC recommendation, a full written explanation of the reasons for the decision will be given.

11.0 Meetings

11.1 The Committee should meet at least four times each year to coincide with the publication of Performance Information. Additional meetings shall be called as necessary.

11.2 Meetings will be arranged and the venues booked by Exeter City Council for the following years meetings.

11.3 The AGM will be held bi-annually in the month of June.

11.4 Reminders for meetings will be received three weeks prior to the meeting.

11.5 Any items for the agenda are to be received by the Chair/secretary at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

11.6 The agenda will be agreed by the Chair and sent out to members to their home address

11.7 Minutes will be taken at each meeting and presented to the next quorate meeting for approval.

11.8 Meetings will be held at venues and times that are acceptable to members.

11.9 Help with travel and reasonable expenses will be provided where necessary.

12.0 Dissolution

12.1 If the TALC, by a simple majority, decides at any time that on the grounds of expense or otherwise that it is necessary or advisable to dissolve the committee it shall call a special meeting of all members of TALC.

12.2 A minimum of twenty-one days notice of a special general meeting shall be given in writing to all members of the TALC.

12.3 The notice shall be posted to the last known address of the members and will state the terms of the resolution to be proposed.

12.4 Postal voting will be allowed in the case of dissolution.

12.5 If such a resolution shall be confirmed by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting at such a meeting, the general committee shall have the power to dispose of any assets held by or in the name of TALC.

12.6 Any assets remaining after all debts and liabilities have been settled shall be applied to Tenants and Residents Associations recognised by Exeter City Council for the benefit of the inhabitants of the estates covered by the said Tenants and Residents Association.

Formally adopted by the Tenant and Leaseholder Committee on 30 May 2007.

THE SCHEDULE OF AREAS

North	Central	West
Stoke Hill	Newtown	Alphington
Beacon Heath	Sidwell St area	St Thomas
Pinhoe	South St area	Exwick
Summerway	Holloway St area	Cowick
1010 (3)	Shilhay area	Flowerpot area
	Heavitree	750 (2)
	St Leonards	
	900 (3)	
East	South	South East
Whipton	Wonford	Countess Wear
Whipton Barton	St Loyes	Topsham
Hamlin Gardens	1190 (4)	379 (1)
1366 (4)		

5900 properties – 5100 General Needs & 800 Leaseholders = 327 per representative equating to 17 members

THE TENANT & LEASEHOLDER COMMITTEE (TALC) CODE OF CONDUCT

- All members shall be open and honest in their dealings and show respect for other members
- All speakers will address themselves through the chair or lead speaker
- Only one person shall speak at a time
- All speakers shall be polite and not raise their voices
- All speakers will keep to the subject under discussion
- Each member of the Committee wishing to speak on an issue will indicate and the Chair will pick each in turn at his/her discretion.
- If a member does not abide by the code of conduct, the chair/lead speaker will warn that if they break the code of conduct they may be asked to leave the meeting
- The chair/lead speaker will warn the member that three warnings will be given and this is the first warning
- The chair/lead speaker may give the member two further warnings and at the third case shall ask the meeting to vote on whether the member should be asked to leave the meeting
- No member shall raise individual issues unless as a means of illustrating a point
- No political references shall be made

For ratification by the Tenants & Leaseholders Committee meeting on 4 July 2007

Signed on behalf of the TALC:..... Chairperson

Date: