



Council Housing & Development Services  **Exeter**
City Council

Tenant Annual Report 2019 - 2020



About this report...

Welcome to our 2020 Annual Report to Exeter City Council tenants. Inside this report you will find a wealth of information about what we have been doing over the past year.

Exeter City Council is regulated by the Government through the Regulator of Social Housing. They use a regulatory framework of standards to outline how we should be performing.

These Standards are:

- The Home Standard, which relates to the quality of the home and repairs and maintenance
- Tenancy Standard, this relates to allocations, mutual exchanges and tenure types
- Neighbourhood Standard, relating to neighbourhood management, local area co-operation and tackling anti-social behaviour
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, which relates to customer service choice and complaints, involvement and empowerment and understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

This report is set against these Standards, it also contains performance data on how well we are doing compared to other organisations within our HouseMark benchmarking group. HouseMark collects performance data from housing providers, so they can then analyse their results in order to better understand their performance.

We all hope you will find the report both useful and interesting. Please do let us know your feedback.



A welcome from Councillor Laura Wright

Our housing service is delivered by a team of dedicated people and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their valuable contributions, particularly in the last few months.

This report provides a summary of our performance for the year 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020. For this reason information about our response to the current Covid-19 pandemic will be covered in next year's report.

However, I would like to acknowledge that our housing services team adapted quickly and effectively to support the city's residents in this time of unprecedented disruption and hardship. Your patience and understanding during this period of profound change has furthered the feeling of community that our Council Housing team and residents are proud of – a big thank you for your part in this.

As you will see we achieved a lot last year:

- Continued to implement our Clear and Safe policy to reduce the risk of fire
- Managed to complete repairs more quickly than the previous year
- Made significant improvements to our housing stock
- Introduced specialist resident involvement
- Staff promoted health and well-being initiatives in our neighbourhoods
- Supported homeless people through the 'Housing first' initiative.

More details are given in the report itself.

A highlight of the year for me was the range of celebrations of '100 Years of Council Housing' culminating in the fun day at Merrivale Park.

Council housing is a great force for good in society so I am excited that the Council has plans to build at least 500 new carbon neutral properties over the next ten years and we are currently on track to go well beyond this so that future generations can enjoy safe, secure and affordable homes.

I hope that you find the information in this report interesting and relevant. While we are proud of many of our achievements this year, we are always looking for ways to improve and we welcome feedback and ideas. If you have any suggestions or would like to find out more about how you can help us improve our services, please visit our website or contact us on 01392 265815 or email us at resident.involvement@exeter.gov.uk



Councillor Laura Wright
Portfolio Holder for Council Housing
Development & Services

Introduction

This year was the 100th national anniversary of the building of the first Council houses and we celebrated this milestone with a fête day.

The fête day was an opportunity for us to hear your experiences of living in your Council home and highlighted the positive impact affordable housing can have.

We also had cause for celebration on a local level as we are making plans to build at least 500 carbon neutral Council homes over the next ten years.

This programme marks the start of us building a new legacy for Exeter and we look forward to updating you on the progress over the coming years.



The Lord Mayor, Cllr Peter Holland cuts the cake



L-R Lawrence, Cllr Wright, Bindu, Gary and Cllr Bialyk get ready to welcome the fête goers.

Health & Safety

The Health and Safety team have responsibility to monitor all our compliance obligations and ensure improvements are put in place where necessary.

Keeping you safe in your home is our top priority which is why this year we improved our fire risk assessments and worked hard to implement the new Clear and Safe Policy. The policy was developed with the support of Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and requires that all fire escape routes and communal areas in blocks of flats are kept free from any object which could burn or cause an obstruction: e.g. pushchairs and bicycles.

We have also made good progress on improving fire signage as well as outside and communal lighting. The legislation around emergency lighting has changed and traditionally 'borrowed' street lighting was considered sufficient but now it is recommended that we make sure that all such areas have their own independent lighting. We are currently working our way through a new lighting programme to make sure that this is the case.

This year we have also achieved the following:

- Risk assessed all of our footpaths making repairs as necessary
- Appointed a new gas contractor (Liberty) who will carry out safety checks on gas appliances and test smoke alarms
- Liberty will also test carbon monoxide alarms, check water temperatures (for legionella) and check fire doors
- Installed new lifts at Rennes House
- Carried out radon surveys
- Increased the asbestos safety improvement work we carry out



We have also made good progress on improving fire signage as well as outside and communal lighting

Voids & Response Repairs team

The response repairs service provides a variety of day-to-day repairs across our housing stock, these include anything from general 'wear and tear' repairs to emergency repairs such as fixing a leak from a broken pipe.

During the year the average number of days taken to complete a repair has reduced from 11.67 to 6.83 days which puts us in the top quarter of performance within our HouseMark benchmarking group.

The Voids team are responsible for making sure empty properties are ready to be re-let as quickly as possible. The average cost per property for responsive repairs and voids works was £882.25 which is an increase from £662.61 on the previous year. Whilst most other organisations within the HouseMark benchmarking group spent less in this area, our cost increased as a result of the additional important asbestos removal and safety work we completed.

The current response repairs contract is due to come to an end and during the last year we were busy working through a comprehensive procurement programme so we could appoint our next contractor. Awarding such a large contract is a big responsibility and commitment and that's why the procurement programme has involved various members of staff from the housing department as well as staff from across the Council who have specialist knowledge in different areas such as ICT management.

The new contract has been awarded to Mears. We look forward to bringing you more details of the new improved service once they have been finalised.

As well as the procuring the new contract we have also been busy making improvements to our processes and systems so that we can deliver our services as efficiently as possible.

These efficiencies include:

- Introducing a new telephony software programme called 'Anywhere 365/24' which will allow us to monitor and better respond to calls during our busiest times
- Introduced 'Total Mobile' which provided access to our systems remotely this allows staff to work on site
- Rolled out 'Mears appoint' programme which allows us to directly book appointments with our repairs contractor
- Set up regular void review meetings with staff across all relevant teams



Stock Condition & Planned Works Team

The Stock Condition and Planned Works team are responsible for delivering major repairs to our housing stock. This includes window and door replacements, roof replacements, kitchen & bathroom refurbishments and general structural repairs.

The whole team has made a significant step change in terms of developing our work programmes for the next five years and the team have been busy procuring new major contracts for the replacement programmes of kitchens, bathrooms, pitched roofs and for soil and vent pipes. All these new work programmes will improve the quality of the housing stock.

Sitting alongside the planned works activities are the Stock Condition team who have driven our stock condition survey programme forward with a target of undertaking surveys to 20% of our housing stock per annum. This work helps us to better understand the condition of the whole housing stock and identify improvement work priorities.

Over the last year the percentage of properties which did not meet the Decent Home Standard reduced from 1.8% to 1.44%. The improvement programme work scheduled for the next year will further reduce this figure.

This year we delivered:

- Decorations and repairs to over 300 properties
- Renewed fascias, soffits and guttering products to 164 properties
- Fitted modern stylish external composite doors along with new uPVC rear and store doors to 305 properties
- Fitted new energy efficient windows to 279 properties
- 92 bathroom refurbishments (including 18 wet-rooms/level access conversions)
- 64 kitchen refurbishments



Improvement work is underway at Flowerpot Lane with windows and fascias being renewed

Housing Development

The Housing Development team are responsible for delivering our new build Council homes programme.

The Housing Revenue Account has set an ambitious target of delivering at least 500 new build homes over the next 10 years. During the previous 10 years we delivered 67 homes, but due to changes in government financial restrictions we have been given much greater flexibility and opportunity to build more. Last year we developed a total of 0.44% of new homes as a total of our current stock, this is a low figure and most other organisations with our benchmarking group developed more. However, with our new development plans this figure will sharply increase over the coming years.

This year we:

- Identified potential sites and put together a development plan which will meet our target
- Commenced a building a development of 53 extra care apartments in Topsham Road
- Started development of 75 homes across 4 sites that will all be completed during early 2021

All homes will be built to a high standard and energy efficiency level which will dramatically reduce heating bills and carbon footprint. They are even modelled against future weather predictions to ensure that they are suitable for climate change.

We have also considered how we can improve the existing housing stock and redevelopment, refurbishment and carbon reduction opportunities are starting to be reviewed as part of the overall development strategy.



Construction is well underway at the Edwards Court Extra Care Scheme on Topsham Road.

Resident Involvement & Empowerment

We believe that effective and successful resident involvement is vital for the delivery of quality housing services. That's why this year we recruited a Resident Involvement Officer to develop this service and help update and co-produce our 'Resident Involvement Strategy'.

We also commissioned M·E·L Research to carry out a Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) to gather feedback from residents on how well we are delivering key services. The aim was to gain a better understanding of the levels of satisfaction residents have with their homes and the associated services provided.

We were pleased that 88% of residents surveyed were satisfied with the overall services we provided, this puts us in the top quarter of performance amongst our HouseMark benchmarking group. The survey results did indicate that satisfaction levels in some areas could be improved and as a result we set up a number of Tenant Forum meetings to learn more about our repairs, complaints and leasehold services from the point of view of a service user.

During the year we also started to actively work with tenants to promote the advantages of getting online. We are developing a programme of sessions which will help to improve skills and confidence in this area and tackle isolation.

We have also:

- Established a database providing information about which residents wish to be involved in our work so that they can be contacted and consulted with
- Created links with other social housing providers for future partnership working
- Increased the number of 'followers' of our Housing Services Facebook page
- Undertaken a tenants' and leaseholders' survey
- Used complaint feedback to improve service across the housing department



Find us on Facebook, at Exeter Housing Services



Neighbourhood & Community

It's important that you not only enjoy living in your home but also within your neighbourhood and community.

Tenancy services work in partnership with other agencies such as the police or local community groups so we can support communities to tackle any neighbourhood management issues. We also help to support local recreational activities.

We have:

- Worked with Premier Kicks to bring football into the community for 8-19 year olds
- Worked alongside Exeter City Living (ECL) in the consultation for the potential new development at Vaughan Road. The Team has worked closely with existing residents to consult with them and help with decanting those whose homes are directly affected
- Helped to tackle teenage anti-social behaviour in St Thomas by funding a night bus run by the 100 club



Neighbourhood & Community

Exeter City Council and Exeter Health & Wellbeing Board have stated their strategic ambition for Exeter to be the most active city in the South West. To achieve this, a range of opportunities to take part in physical activity need to be accessible from all communities in Exeter. The Resident Involvement Team have collaborated with Active Devon to provide seated exercise and seated yoga classes across our older persons' housing at no cost to the residents.

We have achieved:

- A saving of approximately £40.5k of value in the 12 months to December 2019, which includes saving to health care costs because of the improvement in balance for example, leading to fewer falls
- Good feedback from participants, indicating the positive impact the sessions are having physically, mentally and socially

We currently run free seated yoga sessions at three of our older persons' housing at York House, Grandisson Court and Globefield. We have free seated exercise classes running weekly at Amersham Court and Rennes House and the longest running sessions are at Shilhay and are 'Move it or Lose it' activities where there are regularly 14 attendees. We are keen to expand these sessions to other groups and areas of the city where the residents could benefit from this increased physical activity.



Tenancy

We let our housing stock using the choice based lettings scheme called Devon Home Choice.

We let our housing stock using the choice based lettings scheme called Devon Home Choice. This partnership is used by local authorities and other social housing providers across Devon and means that there is only a single housing waiting list across the area.

This helps to simplify the process of accessing affordable housing as well as allowing people to choose where they live. The scheme has its own independent application, decision making and appeals process which makes sure homes are allocated fairly using a transparent process.

Generally, all tenants new to us are initially granted an introductory tenancy before being granted a flexible or lifetime tenancy; this provides us with an opportunity to manage early on any problems within the tenancy.

During the year we relet 229 homes with an average relet figure of 26.7 days (as of March 31st 2020).

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Tenancy Services

The Tenancy Services team provide tenancy management support, this can include answering questions about your tenancy rights or dealing with an anti-social behaviour matter within your neighbourhood.

This year the team were delighted to work with our colleagues in the Homelessness department to deliver a new 'Housing First' initiative. The initiative supports people who are homeless by providing them with a home and the support service they need so that they can sustain their tenancy and go on to improve their life chances.

We have helped support the initiative by identifying suitable vacant properties which can be used. We have started to see some successes already as five people are currently being housed and are maintaining their tenancies.

We have also:

- Developed and delivered staff training sessions
- Supported the 'Clear and Safe' policy by providing designated bin and recycle storage areas
- Identified opportunities for scooter stores to meet future needs
- Achieved value for money in our housing management costs which were £261.74 per property per year which was a reduction from the previous year of £292. This figure also puts us in the top performing landlords within our benchmarking group
- We continue the tenancy visits



The team undertake regular tenancy and property visits which are also an opportunity for you to get to know your Housing Officer.

Kirsty (Tenancy Services Lead)
and James (Senior Lettings and Homeownership Officer)

Service improvement & complaints

This year the Council introduced agile & flexible working practices and shifted from being office based. This change, along with an upgraded housing management system called OpenHousing has allowed us to embrace mobile technology and new systems of working whilst improving our responsiveness and efficiency.

Our overheads as a percentage of turnover are 5.44% which puts us in the top performing quarter within our HouseMark benchmarking group.

Sometimes things do not go to plan and whilst we are often able to quickly put things right we understand that there are times when you may wish to make a complaint.

The Council operates a two stage formal complaints process. A Service Lead will investigate and respond to a Stage 1 complaint. If a complaint is escalated to Stage 2 then the Director will reinvestigate and provide a final response. We also provide a 'feedback' level (before Stage 1) and most of our complaints are processed at this level.

During the year we received a total of 216 complaints, 114 of these were upheld (found in favour of the person making the complaint).

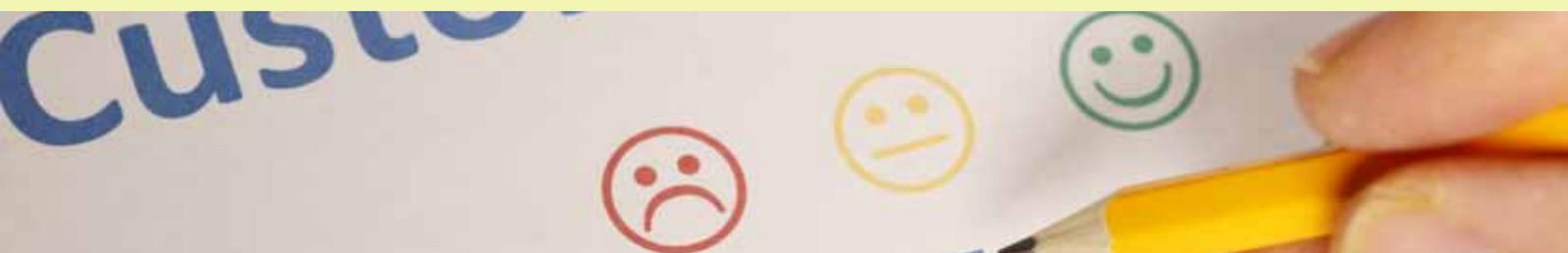
If someone has gone through the complaints process and remains unsatisfied with the outcome then they can take their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman who will independently review their complaint and provide a judgement which may

include recommendations. During the last year the Housing Ombudsman has not issued any determinations.

Complaints are a form of feedback so it's important that we learn from them. We have a dedicated Business Support Officer who supports the complaints process and helps to identify possible service changes such as improving the way one of our contractors issue their appointments.

If you would like to make a complaint or send us a compliment please contact:

housing.complaints@exeter.gov.uk
or call 01392 265759





Council Housing & Development Services



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Accessibility

We can provide this information in different languages and formats including braille, large print or electronically.

Please contact:

01392 265815

resident.involvement@exeter.gov.uk

We welcome your comments and involvement, if you would like to discuss anything to do with this report please let us know using the above contact details.

