

DRAFT ONLY VERSION
Exeter City Council Neighbourhood Strategy 2022-27
Improving lives and communities



Foreword

A recent survey¹ funded by the National Lottery has found that almost half of the people consulted wanted more improvements to be made to their neighbourhoods. Almost half said that the Covid pandemic has made them more interested in their communities and 29% are thinking about how they can make a difference.

So I welcome this new Neighbourhood Strategy which could not have arrived at a better time.

The situation is not ideal at the moment. We are facing high levels of housing need in the city and we are all doing our best to deal with the effects of Covid 19, Brexit, a lack of national investment in housing, and a whole host of other issues, not least the climate crisis.

I think it only fair to say that expectations on Exeter City Council as the largest landlord in Exeter have also risen. We work across a range of communities in an increasingly diverse city. We are housing people and families often with many vulnerabilities at the same time as traditional support services are being cut back or stretched to the limit.

We need to adopt a different way of working in order to meet these challenges.

Our aim is to put communities at the heart of everything we do. As a modern organisation but with a rich history we need to evolve and innovate, seeking new ideas and learning from others while at the same time not losing sight of our traditional values.

In a nutshell, our vision is for every neighbourhood to be a thriving and resilient one where people can work together to achieve happy, healthy and successful lives. We cannot do this alone. So while we are determined to deliver the best services and projects we can, we will also need the co-operation and commitment of local people to work with us and find local solutions to local issues.

This Strategy provides a framework for doing this by promoting community investment; by committing us to performing to the best of our ability and by encouraging local people to get involved.

We are all currently facing difficult times and our best hope is to work together for a better future. I firmly believe this new Neighbourhood Strategy will help us do that.

Barbara Denning
Housing Portfolio Holder

Note 1: 2021: importance of communities set to remain high as people identify loneliness and isolation as a key issue to tackle in their local area | The National Lottery Community Fund ([tnlcommunityfund.org.uk](https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk))



INTRODUCTION

What is a Neighbourhood Strategy?

Definitions vary for what a Neighbourhood Strategy means but in its simplest terms we take it to mean an overarching plan to guide us in how we manage and invest in the communities in which we have our council homes.

These communities can be relatively large estates where we own and manage the majority of homes, to areas where we have a significant presence, to small pockets of land where we may have scatterings of properties.

Where we have concentrations of homes we will have more opportunity to make strategic investments ourselves in those neighbourhoods.

Where we have fewer properties dispersed over a wider area we will primarily work with local partners to support the aspirations of local people.

This Strategy should be read in conjunction with our Resident Involvement Strategy which goes into greater detail on how we will involve our residents in delivering and improving services. This Strategy focuses more on how we relate to and interact with the wider world in which our estates are situated. It is about neighbourhoods and our overall management approach to the services we provide for them².

Note 2: In this Strategy we use the word 'resident' to include both tenants and leaseholders of Exeter City Council. 'Exeter city residents' also includes people living in Exeter who are not tenants and leaseholders of the Council.

Why do we need a Neighbourhood Strategy?

There are a number of reasons for creating this Strategy and introducing a fresh approach to working with local communities.

- We acknowledge that many of our properties are located in areas that face multiple challenges, including those of health, poverty, unemployment, poor environment and so on
- We believe that these communities themselves are best placed to understand their issues and to find local solutions to local problems
- We know that there is a wealth of community know-how and assets that are under-used
- We have an abundance of expertise, experience and enthusiasm to help and support neighbourhoods
- We wish to move away from a 'doing to' to a 'doing with' approach to achieve better results

Our purpose/vision

To work in partnership to build and maintain successful, sustainable communities and to improve the health and well-being of the neighbourhoods in which we work.

This purpose can be divided into two main, but interlinked, areas both of which contribute to the success of a neighbourhood:

1. Community projects that will benefit all residents. These projects are sometimes described as 'community development' or 'community investment' initiatives and would include examples such as schemes to reduce fuel poverty, improve the natural environment, help people back to work, boost health and well-being and so on.
2. A high performing housing/estate management service. This would include the more traditional services provided by a social landlord such as cleaning and maintaining communal areas, landscape maintenance, fire inspections and other examples of health and safety compliance, tenancy and estate inspections, dealing with examples of anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping, abandoned cars and animal fouling.



BACKGROUND CONTEXT

A number of factors have informed this Strategy and led us to decide on our five priority areas.

Local context

Exeter City Council's Corporate Plan

Exeter City Council's Corporate Plan has the following priorities:

- Delivering net zero Exeter 2030
- Promoting active and healthy lifestyles
- Building great neighbourhoods
- Providing value-for-money services
- Leading a well-run council.

Housing Strategy³

We believe that we are more than just a landlord. We are committed to our residents having every opportunity to help improve Housing services.

Note 3: The Housing Strategy is due for renewal in 2022.

We undertake to show this through:

- Developing partnerships with local voluntary and charitable groups to deliver more appropriate and affordable services
- Providing information and support to help people improve their own lives
- Tackling fuel poverty
- Maximising income, especially welfare benefits
- Addressing health and well-being matters, particularly issues around loneliness and isolation
- Minimising anti-social behaviour.

Other strategies

All our work contributes to the development and support of successful communities but our detailed approach to other aspects of housing management are contained elsewhere. For example:

1. Anti-social behaviour: Anti-social Behaviour Policy [housing-asb-policy-2016.pdf \(exeter.gov.uk\)](#)
Allocations: Devon Home Choice [devonhomechoicepolicyv6effectivefrom1jan2017.pdf](#)
2. Resident Involvement Strategy [Resident Involvement Strategy \(exeter.gov.uk\)](#)
3. Complaints Policy [Tenants advice and information - Housing Complaints and Feedback - Exeter City Council](#)
Our overall approach to tenancy and estate management: HRA Business plan (currently under review)
4. Our overall approach to asset management and health and safety: Asset Management Strategy (currently under review)
5. Tenancy Strategy and Policy (currently under review)

Views of the Council Housing and Development Advisory Board

Our Council Housing and Development Advisory Board (which is a group of people comprising Councillors, external professionals and the Chair of our Tenants' Voice group of involved tenants) have made it clear that they favour the creation of a wide-ranging Neighbourhood Strategy to support local communities and to engage with social enterprises and community groups.

National context

Regulator of Social Housing ⁴

The Regulator of Social Housing expects landlords like Exeter City Council to:

- Keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the homes that they own clean and safe
- Work in partnership with their tenants and other providers and public bodies where it is effective to do so
- Co-operate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in the areas where they own properties
- Work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes⁵
- Consult with tenants in developing a published policy for maintaining and improving the neighbourhoods associated with their homes. The policy shall include any communal areas associated with the registered provider's homes
- Identify and publish the roles they are able to play within the areas where they have properties

Note 4: Regulatory standards, procedures and guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Note 5: See our Anti-social Behaviour Policy for details of how we meet this requirement

Government policy

The Government's Policy Paper "The Charter for Social Housing Residents" released in 2020 marked a significant change in Government policy. Resident involvement was a key theme, and an increased role for residents has been proposed for a number of areas, including (among others):

- To be safe in your home
- To know how your landlord is performing
- To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
- To be treated with respect
- To have your voice heard by your landlord
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in



CONSULTATION

We are in regular, day-to-day contact with residents as they report their repairs; ask for help and advice; start or end their tenancies; make complaints or give comments and compliments; request services or receive our regular tenancy review visits/telephone appointments. In this way we know and understand the areas in which we operate and what is important to residents.

However, to ensure that this Strategy was based on what residents wanted we also ran a special consultation exercise in May 2021 where residents were asked questions to gauge their views on the neighbourhoods in which they lived and what their priorities were.

We also ran focus groups to drill down into more detail of just what residents wanted.

A total of 279 people responded the questionnaire.

The results showed that the top five most important aspects of our housing services are:

- Tackling anti-social behaviour
- Having a well-maintained home
- Having a named Housing Officer to contact
- Looking after elderly residents
- Maintaining communal garden areas

Looking at their community, the residents' top four priorities were:

- Feeling safe at night
- A clean and tidy local area
- Feeling safe during the day
- A good natural environment

The top four areas residents felt the Council should focus on were:

- Estate improvements
- Tackling fuel poverty
- Building new affordable homes
- Supporting projects for young people/children

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CURRENT SITUATION

In terms of community investment, over the last two years we have run the following projects:

- Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) 'Curiosity Box' & 'Curiosity Shop' arts projects for older people
- RAMM 'Museum at Large' Project – a group of residents contributed to this
- RAMM 'Take Flight' project with older residents
- Active Devon, who provide seated exercise and seated yoga classes in our older persons' housing schemes
- ECC Community Development - Active & Healthy People Programme, Live & Move Exeter
- Exeter City Community Trust - Premier League Kicks-project working with children
- Devon & Cornwall Police - Community Action Day 2019
- St Thomas Youth Bus Service to provide a mobile youth club for an estate provided by DYS Space Ltd (formerly the Devon Youth Service)
- Exeter Community Initiatives Community Builders - various projects centered around older persons' housing and associated community rooms e.g. social activities & events, arts, tai chi, boules and so on

- Greening Heavitree gardening project at Hamlin Gardens
- Public Realm – gardening project at Bodley Close

We aim to build on the success of these projects and develop many more in the future.



MAIN THEMES

Some guiding principles that apply to all priorities:

1. We will treat people with respect and apologise and put things right if we get anything wrong
2. We will promote diversity and equality of opportunity
3. We will work with residents to manage their own affairs and improve their own communities through genuine consultation and involvement
4. We will deliver a high quality and accessible service and strive for excellence in all areas

We have five principal priorities:

1. *Understand and work with our communities*

We will:

- Make every effort to understand the individual needs and issues of residents including their physical, mental and financial well-being. This will be in order to use data and insight to tailor communication and support to individuals
- Create Neighbourhood Action Plans. We will start with one or two pilot studies to assess the value of such an approach. Neighbourhood Action Plans set out a neighbourhood's distinct characteristics, highlight key issues and assets, and identify priorities for action. They guide future activities and interventions
- Regularly consult residents over matters that affect them
- Provide opportunities for residents to participate in making decisions about their communities
- Support residents to fulfil their aspirations and potential through training and personal development opportunities
- Provide effective digital solutions and ensure people are aware of them to benefit both customers and employees

2. *Promote physical, mental and financial well-being*

We will:

- Help tenants to access appropriate external specialist services as their needs change
- Address issues of loneliness and isolation through opportunities for social interaction
- Promote healthy diets and activities
- Work to eliminate fuel poverty
- Increase income by advising on maximising welfare benefits and signposting tenants to debt advice organisations' where relevant
- Support tenants to gain employment where appropriate through providing help, advice, volunteering opportunities, work experience and training
- Support arts-based projects and cultural events

- Celebrate and reward community participation e.g. by investigating the possibility of paying residents to attend events
- Work with any other organisation (for example Sport England) to promote healthy living

3. *Invest in neighbourhoods*

We will:

- Monitor and review staffing levels and how they are deployed
- Establish and review new Neighbourhood budgets for projects to improve community well-being and enhancing the environment
- Enable the Tenants' Voice Group to assess and award grants to residents for local projects
- Deliver quality estate services to a standard that residents expect (established through consultation) and that achieve high levels of customer satisfaction
- Maintain and improve the local natural environment including supporting and facilitating community gardens
- Work to reduce carbon emissions
- Continue to invest in building new properties and retro-fitting existing properties to achieve high levels of energy efficiency and to address fuel poverty
- Attract external funding where possible and appropriate

4. *Work in partnership to improve relationships*

We will:

- Bring together all those who care about the local neighbourhood to work to make a positive difference – initially through our Neighbourhood Action Plans
- Work closely with other Council services, for example Environmental Health, Public Realm and all those involved in improving health and well-being in the city

- Take an 'asset-based' approach, drawing on, and working with the strengths in the community as well as physical assets such as buildings and public spaces
- Tap into the knowledge of individuals and their local networks, through our day-to-day contacts and through our local projects
- Work with statutory, community and voluntary groups as well as social enterprises and small and medium enterprises (SMEs)
- Involve any group that may not be being heard, including young people

5. *Sustain tenancies*

We will:

- Review our approach to letting properties in order to set tenants up for long-term success
- Have a clear service offer regarding housing management services and a high performing staff team to deliver it, through recruitment, training and support
- Review our Tenancy Strategy to promote a sense of security among tenants to encourage their personal investment in their neighbourhoods
- Carry out our regular tenancy review visits while acknowledging, understanding and working within tenants' individual circumstances, needs and expectations
- Where needed, support tenants throughout their tenancies with information and advice to help make their tenancies sustainable and successful
- Continue to tackle anti-social behaviour in an effective manner



THE FUTURE

Ideally, by 2027 if not before, we would like to see neighbourhoods:

1. That are safe and welcoming to everyone no matter what their origins or characteristics
2. With healthy residents
3. With good community spirit where people do not feel lonely or isolated
4. Where people get involved and where they help and support each other
5. Where people work together to find solutions to local problems
6. With a strong community volunteer base
7. Where assets are used to benefit the whole community
8. Where vulnerable people feel at home and are supported
9. With high quality, energy efficient, carbon neutral homes
10. That have accessible and popular green spaces
11. With clean streets and communal areas
12. Where residents express increased levels of satisfaction with both the area itself and any services provided

IMPLEMENTATION

In implementing this Strategy, we will balance the needs of individual tenants with those of their local neighbourhoods to promote health, well-being, safety, and a sense of community.

This Strategy provides a framework for changing the way in which we engage with neighbourhoods. It will lead to a new way of working.

Some of this new way of working will involve locally based housing teams, but more importantly it will be about seeing communities and residents as partners; recognising that meaningful, long-term relationships will only happen if we act with communities rather than upon them.

We need to think less about doing things for residents and more about supporting and encouraging the capacity, interest and enthusiasm of individuals and communities to do things for themselves.

Our expectations are that while we increase our investment of time and resources into neighbourhoods so residents will be keen to:

- Get involved in their community
- Care for the environment in which they live
- Be good neighbours and help to support those who need it
- Take care of their health and live healthy lives
- Give us honest and constructive feedback, including reporting issues and making complaints if necessary

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Measuring success

We will use some or all of the following performance indicators to measure our success:

- Evidence that we listen to residents
- Evidence that our estates are improving
- Evidence that we are working in partnership with other organisations
- Examples of applying innovative ideas
- The amount of external investment attracted
- Successful delivery of projects
- Reduction of time homes are empty between lettings, rent arrears, ASB
- Number and content of complaints, comments and compliments
- Amount of expenditure on estates/communal repairs
- Satisfaction rates e.g. STAR surveys, StarT surveys, tenancy audits
- The degree and extent of resident involvement
- Some measurement of social value delivered

Many of these indicators can be measured by satisfaction surveys; questionnaires; records of complaints and reports of various issues; minutes of discussions with residents including focus groups and Tenants' Voice meetings; visits to neighbourhoods; examples and reports of projects; financial expenditure; evidence of resident involvement and what changed as a result; impact assessments; case studies; and stories to be shared.

The list is not exhaustive and will develop over time.

Performance will be regularly reported to residents, ECC managers and to the Council Housing and Development Advisory Board.

CONCLUSION

We acknowledge that our estates can house some of the most economically disadvantaged people in Exeter who face multiple challenges in their daily lives. But we also believe there is a wealth of untapped energy, ideas and experience in these neighbourhoods and that working together we can significantly improve people's life chances and the environment in which they live.

We believe this Strategy will contribute significantly to these goals.

Appendices

Action Plan

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