

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 9 March 2021

Title: Council Housing and Development Resident Involvement Strategy 2021 - 2025

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 20 April 2021

Report of: Director for City Development, Housing and Supporting People

Title: Council Housing and Development Resident involvement Strategy 2021 - 2025

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

The report presents the Council Housing and Development Resident involvement Strategy 2021 – 2025 and requests the increase in resources necessary to deliver the Strategy's Action Plan.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That Executive supports the Council Housing and Resident Involvement Strategy 2021-2025

2.2 That Council approves the Council Housing and Resident Involvement Strategy 2021-2025 and the increase in staff resources required to deliver the Action Plan

3. Reasons for the recommendations:

3.1 This revised Strategy will provide the foundation for delivering a successful resident involvement service for the next four years. The extra staffing resource requested will enable us to deliver the Strategy's Action Plan.

3.2 In updating the Strategy we have acknowledged the principles of the Government's recent White Paper which promoted transparency and accountability and set out a new Charter for Social Housing Residents. This Charter included, among other commitments, the expectation that social housing residents should know how their landlord is performing and should have their voices heard.

3.1 We are also following the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing which expects social landlords such as Exeter City Council to involve tenants in:

- Forming policies
- Making decisions about how housing-related services are delivered
- Examining and commenting on how well their landlord is performing
- How repairs, maintenance and improvements are carried out
- Agreeing standards of service delivery.

3.4 The Strategy itself will define how we will involve residents over the coming years. It is as much about *how* we do it as *what* we will do; with a commitment to consultation and involvement. The Strategy will be reviewed every two years in consultation with residents, the Council Housing and Development Advisory Board and other stakeholders.

3.5 As the service develops, particularly with regard to the consultation required for our ambitious housebuilding and retrofit zero carbon programmes, additional staff may be needed in which case a further report will be brought to Committee.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources.

4.1 To deliver the Resident Involvement Action Plan will require two permanent, full-time staff. We envisage two Community Initiatives Officers at an indicative grading of H will cost (at the top of the grade):

2 x £41,206 (salary point 28 plus oncosts) = **£82,412**

4.2 However, as 1.6 posts already exist as part of the establishment (one Housing Officer and one part-time Housing Communities Partnership Officer) the increase in the establishment would be 0.4 post costing in the region of **£16,482**. This will be met from the HRA budget.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

The contents of the report are noted. The posts will be financed in 2021-22 by requesting a supplementary budget arising from savings in 2020-21. Members should note however that savings will be required from 2022-23 in order to fund the additional costs on an ongoing basis.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 All people-related aspects of the proposed structure changes will be carried out in line with the Exeter City Council Organisational Change Policy. The Policy operates above the statutory minimum parameters ensuring that the organisation is compliant with employment legislation throughout the proposed restructure process. Employment law advice will be provided by Human Resources throughout the restructure process.

6.2 The Final Business Case proposal will be submitted following a period of meaningful consultation between the organisation, affected employees and Trade Unions to ensure a fair and transparent process. Human Resources will be engaged with the consultation throughout.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 Introduction

The revised Strategy took the following into account:

8.1.1 As a Registered Provider of housing we are expected by the Government Regulator to give tenants a wide range of opportunities to become involved in our work. This includes:

- Tenants helping us to formulate our policies and strategic priorities
- Tenants helping us to decide what services to provide and to what standard
- Tenants scrutinising our performance and making recommendations on how that performance may be improved
- Providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved

8.1.2 Following the Grenfell tragedy the Government published a Housing Green Paper in 2018 followed by a White Paper in 2020. The White Paper set out a number of Government priorities including the expectation that social housing residents should know how their landlord is performing and should have their voices heard.

8.1.3 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

Working successfully with our tenants can contribute to all of these priorities.

8.1.4 Lastly we believe strongly that resident involvement benefits both residents and Exeter City Council's Housing Service and we wish to promote it. It benefits us both because it can:

- Provide services that residents actually want
- Improve existing services in line with residents' needs and preferences
- Improve communication and understanding between landlord and tenant
- Give clear and visible accountability
- Improve the health and well-being of residents
- Provide relevant training opportunities
- Reduce anti-social behaviour; increase community coherence
- Improve the local environment
- Create financial dividends – for example possible savings in terms of designing and delivering new services/products; reduction in voids and so on

8.2 How the Strategy was created

8.2.1 Residents' Survey

A survey was conducted across all of Exeter City Council's tenants and leaseholders in 2019 to find out what service areas people were interested in; how they wanted to be communicated with and consulted; what was most important to them; and whether they would like to get involved in any of our work or activities. 555 people responded to the survey.

8.2.2 Focus groups

Following the Residents' Survey it was decided to run a short series of focus groups concentrating on areas identified in a previous STAR Survey (a biennial satisfaction survey last carried out in 2019) as being areas of relatively low satisfaction. This was both to understand why people had expressed some dissatisfaction and also to potentially recruit a number of interested residents with whom we could consult in the future.

In all four focus groups were held:

- An introductory focus group in which the findings of the STAR survey were discussed
- A repairs and maintenance group
- A service standards and complaints group
- A leaseholder group

All these groups contributed ideas to the Strategy.

8.2.3 Consultation exercise

Once the Strategy had been written, and following a discussion with a small number of residents on the production of an accessible version, we ran an online consultation exercise for four weeks.

We received 25 responses. The main results were as follows:

- Over ¾ of the respondents were of the opinion that they agreed with the benefits of resident involvement as outlined in the strategy
- Over 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed goals for resident involvement
- 80% of respondents agreed with the proposed content of the new strategy
- More than 75% of respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed with the aims for resident involvement to 2025
- 36% strongly approved and 44% approved of the new Resident Involvement Strategy

8.3 Main points of the Strategy

8.3.1 The main objectives of the Strategy are as follows:

- Promote resident involvement
- Drive service improvement through resident involvement
- Encourage community engagement
- Provide effective support for resident involvement
- Improve and develop communication and publicity
- Promote equality and diversity

8.3.2 We intend our Resident Involvement Service to look something like this by 2025:

- A new resident involvement structure that allows residents to pick their level, extent and type of involvement
- Regular resident events such as fetes, open days, gardening projects

- Some thriving local residents' associations
- Resident involvement embedded across the service to influence and inform our core business and services
- Residents actively scrutinising performance and undertaking their own projects to improve services
- Increased resident satisfaction levels with being listened to and having their views taken into account
- Successful community engagement projects being undertaken with residents to meet local needs
- Regular tenant training being provided to increase capacity
- Improved two way communication, especially via internet, smartphone and social media
- Better publicity to show what can be achieved through successful resident involvement
- Involvement from all parts of the community particularly those who have been unrepresented in the past to create a truly diverse group of involved residents
- An accepted way of measuring success.

8.4 Resourcing

8.4.1 To deliver:

- a full resident involvement service
- a project-based, neighbourhood community development service, and
- a housing development and improvement consultation service

will require at least two full-time permanent staff. Rather than have specialist staff, we believe two generic Community Initiatives Officers covering these functions would be more efficient and effective, especially in terms of project-based work that often has a number of peaks and troughs.

8.4.2 Two Community Initiatives Officers at an indicative grading of H (subject to the job evaluation process) will cost (at the top of the grade):

2 x £41,206 (salary point 28 plus oncosts) = **£82,412**

8.4.3 However, as 1.6 posts already exist as part of the establishment (one Housing Officer and one part-time Housing Communities Partnership Officer) the increase in the establishment would be 0.4 post costing in the region of **£16,482**. This will be met from the HRA budget. If the additional 0.4FTE is approved the 1.6FTE (Housing Officer and

one part-time Housing Communities Partnership Officer) posts would be deleted and replaced with the 2 FTE Community Initiative Officers.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

9.1 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

Working successfully with our tenants can contribute to all of these priorities.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

10.1 There are significant risks in not adopting an up-to-date resident involvement strategy that conforms to Government expectations; regulatory requirements; Council objectives; and our own residents' opinions.

10.2 Any risks that arise from contact with residents; running events; providing training; holding meetings; organising projects and so on will be identified at the time or will be part of our health and safety risk management procedures.

10.3 Based on these proposals, there is a small risk of redundancy to one employee if there is not a successful internal appointment for one of the newly created posts. However it is deemed that the new posts would be considered an automatic job match based on the existing skills within the team and as such the risk of compulsory redundancy is minimal.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority

from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equalities Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 Important to complete this section in light of the Council declaring a Climate Emergency. Consider whether the recommendations you are making in the report will help, hinder or have no direct impact on delivering our carbon reduction target (carbon neutral by 2030).

12.2 You should think about things like:-

- Travel (and, if travel is unavoidable, whether lower carbon options will be pursued e.g. walking, public transport, electric car);
- Infrastructure (e.g. LED lighting, energy efficient heating/hot water, solar panels, electric car charging points);
- Waste (e.g. recycling, composting, reducing non-recyclable waste); and
- Any other specific carbon reduction initiatives.

12.3 If there are no direct carbon/environmental implications for the decision please state:

No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

13. Are there any other options?

No.

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Author: Mark Jolly, Housing Lead Performance, Strategy and Resident Involvement

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

1. The Government's Regulatory Standards
2. The Government's White Paper: *The charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper 2020*

Contact for enquires:

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