



**Exeter City Council Housing Services**

**Council Housing Strategy  
2023 - 2027**

## Table of Contents

**Foreword..... 3**

**National Policy Context ..... 5**

**Local Context..... 7**

    How we are performing-some key statistics from 2022/23:..... 9

**Priority 1: Enhancing Resident Experience ..... 9**

**Priority 2: Providing the Right Homes in the Right Places ..... 13**

**Priority 3: Providing Value for Money Services ..... 16**

**Priority 4: Supporting our residents..... 18**

**Priority 5: Ensuring the Safety of our Homes and Residents ..... 21**

**Conclusion..... 24**

This is a controlled document whilst viewed at 22/12/23. Once downloaded or printed it becomes an uncontrolled copy. Please check the S:drive to ensure you are using the latest version.

Version:	Created By:	Approved By:	Effective Date:	Review Date:
1			01.04.2024	2027

## Foreword

Exeter City Council owns and manages 4,800 rented homes and just over 1,000 leasehold properties. We are proud that we are a stock-retaining authority that looks after its tenants and leaseholders and provides an excellent level of service. We believe we are forward thinking, with an ambitious new homes programme building to the highest standards and we ensure that our existing properties are retrofitted to future-proof our tenants against rising heating costs and maintained in a timely manner. It has been recognised that our staff take pride in the delivery of services. Indeed in a recent Peer Review of the service the Local Government Association (LGA) said ‘there is a strong moral imperative to ‘do the right thing’, not just because it’s a statutory service, but because providing the best possible service is the cornerstone of the Council’.

Social housing providers across the country are now part of an increased regulatory regime, and Exeter City Council’s Housing Service is no exception. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 follows on from the 2020 Social Housing White Paper and will introduce a wide-ranging consumer regulation regime. We are well prepared for this increased scrutiny and have put in place policies, procedures and practices that will ensure compliance with these requirements.

The Housing Ombudsman issued a new code of practice in March 2022. This Complaint Handling Code has been fully adopted by Exeter City Council’s Housing Service.

The safety of our tenants has always been at the core of our provision of housing. The Housing Services function includes a Compliance Team which have and will continue to, ensure that our tenants live in homes that are safe and well maintained.

Anti-Social Behaviour on our estates is an issue that is high in our priorities and we continue to look at ways of improving how we play our part in tackling it. Our Housing Officers follow a detailed procedure to ensure that both victims and perpetrators are treated fairly and that action, when it is needed is taken swiftly.

Increasingly, especially after COVID-19 ‘lockdowns’ people became more aware of their immediate neighbourhood. Our Resident Involvement Team continues to work with communities to improve the areas in which they live. Following the introduction of our new Resident involvement Strategy our staff have improved the methods and scope by which our tenants can engage with us to help shape and ultimately improve our service.

In Exeter, as well as the rest of the country we face a series of complex challenges not least a shortage of social rented housing. We have been forward-thinking in this regard and have already built 205 new homes, with a further 91 in the pipeline. All these homes have been constructed to the highest standards of energy efficiency, something we pledge to continue to do. These homes will be built on existing HRA owned sites.

We in Housing Services are contributing to the strategic priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2022-26 [Corporate Plan 2022-2026 - Exeter City Council](#) . We are building housing,

great neighbourhoods and communities. Our staff provide customer focused services and we manage our housing assets well.

We have five key objectives of this strategy:

Priority 1: Enhancing Resident Experience

Priority 2: Providing the Right Homes in the Right Places

Priority 3: Providing Value for Money Services

Priority 4: Supporting our residents

Priority 5: Ensuring the Safety of our Homes and Residents

All these will take our Housing Services forward over the next five years, continuing to improve our provision so that we can tackle both high profile national issues and the issues that matter to residents in Exeter.

**Cllr Barbara Denning**

Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Support Services

## National Policy Context

The Government's Social Housing White Paper '[The Charter for Social Housing residents](#)' launched in November 2020 set out seven key commitments that residents in social housing can expect from their landlords. These have been incorporated into the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

- 1. To be safe in your home** – the Government will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure
- 2. To know how your landlord is performing** – including on repairs, complaints and safety and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account
- 3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly** – with access to a strong Ombudsman, who will give you swift and fair redress when needed
- 4. To be treated with respect** - backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants
- 5. To have your voice heard by your landlord** – through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its board. The Government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens
- 6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in** – with your landlord keeping your home in good repair
- 7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership** – so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

The key overarching themes within the Act are building safety, resident voice, and accountability. To ensure compliance, a number of measures have been passed into law, while the role of the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman has also been reviewed and strengthened.

**The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)** sets the standards that landlords have to meet to promote a well governed sector and deliver a high standard and quality of service and homes. The RSH will start to move from a reactive form of regulation, to a proactive one which will see even closer working between landlords and the regulator.

There are four consumer standards: Home, Tenant Involvement & Empowerment, Neighbourhood and Community and Tenancy. In July 2023, the RSH published its updated [Consumer Regulation Review 2022-2023](#) with the following key lessons for providers:

- 1.** Landlords must maintain a tight grip on the quality of the homes they manage
- 2.** Local authorities must act now to ensure compliance with the consumer standards
- 3.** Effective tenant engagement is fundamental to meeting the requirements of the consumer standards
- 4.** Meeting statutory health and safety requirements, including landlord gas safety requirements, is non-negotiable

**The Housing Ombudsman** has recently expanded its scope, underlined with the publication of its [Complaints Handling Code](#) in July 2020. The code streamlined the complaints process, enabling assessment against the code to ensure ongoing compliance. For landlords, any cases which are judged to show severe maladministration will be published by the Ombudsman.

**The Building Safety Act 2022** gained Royal Assent in April 2022 and is the result of many years of work following the Grenfell Tower tragedy and the Hackitt Review which followed. The [Building Safety Act 2022](#) will bring further secondary legislation, but the key areas of focus for landlords were:

1. The creation of a Building Safety Regulatory role, as part of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), as well as a National Regulator of Construction and a New Homes Ombudsman
2. Specific provisions for high rise (18m in height or more) buildings, including the role of 'Responsible Persons'
3. Amendments to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 where the responsibility for historic remedial works now sits with the developers or landlords as opposed to tenants or leaseholders
4. An establishment of three 'gateways' which must be achieved before a building can be occupied – Planning, Pre-construction, and Post-inspection

**The Renters Reform Bill** looks to improve conditions and rights for tenants in both the private rented sector and the social housing sector. [This bill](#) will extend the Decent Homes Standard into the private rented sector, ban Section 21 'no fault' evictions, empower and strengthen the ability of private landlords to take back their property if there are rent arrears or ASB, and establish a new Private Renters Ombudsman. The bill further emphasises the principles of transparency, scrutiny and regulation from the White Paper for residents of social housing.

**The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill** begins to develop the framework to deliver against the targets and principles contained within the [Levelling Up White Paper](#). There are four key elements contained within the bill:

1. **Providing a legal basis for the setting and reporting against the levelling up missions** – placing emphasis on the government to report on the progress and achievement against the missions outlined in the Levelling Up White Paper with clear metrics to measure success
2. **Devolving powers to all areas in England that want them, providing more control over budgets, transport and skills** – ensuring that all parts of the country, not just major cities, can benefit from bespoke devolution deals which will empower local leaders to meet the needs of their communities
3. **Empowering local leaders to regenerate towns and cities and restore local pride in places** – enabling regeneration and releasing land, it also empowers local authorities

to double Council Tax on any home left empty for longer than a year, with the aim of bringing more empty properties back into use.

- 4. Improving the planning process** – giving communities control over what is built, where it is built and what it looks like, delivering an incentive to welcome development in their local areas

**The National Planning Policy Framework** sets out the governments planning policies for housing. It was first established in 2012, with the [latest revision in 2021](#). The 2021 revision places a greater emphasis on ‘beautiful’ housing, empowering local authorities to reject low quality scheme proposals. Local authorities have also been mandated to develop their own local design codes, while there is an increased emphasis on biodiversity and access to nature.

**The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** placed new duties on local authorities to work with homeless families to prevent or relieve homelessness before a homeless duty is accepted, this was in addition to the existing statutory duty outlined in the Housing Act 1996. In addition to this, the Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 set a target to halve rough sleeping by 2022, and to end it by 2025.

Finally, the cost of living crisis is sure to impact households in Exeter, and across the whole country over the short to medium term of this strategy. Inflation is currently at 10.1% (May 2022) putting increased pressure on the cost of goods, while wages are not keeping pace in real terms. The energy price cap has seen growth unlike anything seen before and the Government consulted on proposals to cap rent increases for the financial year 2023/24. Exeter city Council decided to cap its rents at 7% as against the 12%+ increase that could have been levied. With all this combined, it is certain to be a challenging economic climate for both the Council and our residents alike.

## Local Context

The Council Housing Strategy for 2023 – 2027 forms part of a wider strategic approach at Exeter City Council. The ambitions outlined in this strategy directly support the five priorities of the Corporate Plan:

- Prosperous local economy
- Healthy and active city
- Housing and building great neighbourhoods and communities
- Net zero carbon city
- Thriving culture and heritage

Alongside the Council Housing Strategy, there are several other supporting documents which will help us to achieve our aims. These include:

- Exeter City Council Asset Management Strategy
- Exeter City Council Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan
- Exeter City Council Homelessness Strategy
- Exeter City Council Private Sector Strategy
- Exeter City Council Tenancy Strategy
- Exeter Local Housing Needs Assessment. [Evidence base for existing adopted Local Plan - Local Housing Needs Assessment \(LHNA\) - Exeter City Council](#)
- Exeter City Council’s Emerging Exeter Plan (2020-2040)
- Exeter City Council’s Core Strategy (2006-2012)

Exeter City Council owns and manages 4,800 homes, which is made up of the following:

Property type	Bedroom size	Specialist	Numbers of homes/properties
<b>House</b>	1	0	3
	2	0	527
	3	0	1,353
	4	0	83
	5	0	7
<b>Flat</b>	1	376	1,324
	2	125	906
	3	0	8
<b>Bungalow</b>	1	56	138
	2	45	103
	3	0	10
<b>Maisonette</b>	1	2	2
	2	1	109
	3	0	85
<b>Bedsit</b>	N/A	25	142

*\*Specialist includes supported housing, housing for older people, sheltered housing.*

The Exeter Local Housing Needs Assessment identifies that there is a need to provide 627 new homes each year to 2040 in order to meet the need and demand in Exeter. This is based on the Government’s ‘standard method’ for determining housing need. This figure will change during the lifetime of this strategy as it is based on a formula related to The Office for National Statistics (ONS) population data.

There are 2,160 households on the waiting list and 128 in Council temporary accommodation. There are also over 600 formerly homeless households in supported temporary accommodation in the city who require more permanent re-housing. We will be looking to work closely with our partners to deliver these much-needed homes over the life of this strategy.



The average cost of a property in Exeter has been identified in the table below:

Property size- Bedrooms	Average rent (private – median)	Average rent (social)	Average rent (affordable)	Open market ownership
1	£148.34	£74.95	£106.91	£150.85
2	£183.98	£85.69	£126.31	£183.84
3	£217.33	£94.79	£145.31	£254.05
4 +	£498.60	£114.72	£160.83	£337.98

*\*Figures are weekly costs taken from the Local Housing Needs Assessment*

How we are performing-some key statistics from 2022/23:

- We have carried out 15,718 repairs to our properties
- 91% of these were completed at the first visit
- By April 2023 we had completed retrofit works to 650 properties
- Since 2021 we have delivered 75 new affordable homes
- We have re-housed 638 households people under the statutory duty
- Rent arrears were 2.4% as at March 2023
- We had resolved 121 ASB cases resolved
- Number of complaints handled and closed: 127
- Overall satisfaction with repairs: 80.1% for General Needs and Older Persons' Housing & 64.6% Leaseholders
- 83 % of our General Needs and Older Persons' tenants were satisfied with neighbourhood as a place to live (71.9% Leaseholders)
- Overall satisfaction with our service: 81.8% General Needs & Older Persons' Housing, 54.7% for Leaseholders
- Average re-let time: 43 days

**Note: Throughout this document we refer to 'residents' to mean both Council Housing tenants and leaseholders, the latter living in formerly Council owned properties.**

## Priority 1: Enhancing Resident Experience

Service expectations are continually changing and evolving, and this has been further accelerated by experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. With the increased emphasis on resident engagement, voice and empowerment from both the Government and the RSH, it is essential that we begin to look at our service from our tenants' and leaseholders' perspective to enhance their experience with us.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 clearly outlines an expectation that residents will be more closely involved with service design and delivery, and we need to ensure that we have the right systems, processes and procedures in place to facilitate this.

We want our tenants and leaseholders to feel pride in the homes and neighbourhoods that they live in and know that they are empowered and listened to by us as their landlord.

### **Where are we now?**

Our Resident Involvement Team is made up of a Strategic Lead and two Housing Community Initiatives Officers, together they work together to offer a wide range of activities and events to encourage participation in shaping our service and to capture the 'tenant voice'.

There are 7 priorities outlined in more detail in the Council's Resident Involvement Strategy 2021-2025:

1. Promotion and support for more resident involvement, providing a range of opportunities to become involved including the encouragement of residents' groups to promote a sense of community and local pride.
2. Use customer insight to improve our services, embedding resident involvement in business planning and shaping services. Have tenant representation on the Council Housing and Development Advisory Board (established in 2020). To enable tenants and leaseholders to have direct influence over housing strategy, policy, standards, and performance targets and that they are involved in performance monitoring and management.
3. Setting up projects that will help local communities, understand in their priorities, help them develop solutions and the capacity to address issues, linking community engagement to the Council's wider priorities and help communities to access the Exeter Grants Programme
4. Support for individual residents by offering training/capacity building, mentoring where needed. Arranging training and development for staff across the housing service on the skills needed to promote resident involvement.
5. Improving the ways we communicate with tenants and leaseholders, in the way they choose using their views to inform the direction of their services. Creating a method of feedback, providing evidence of the benefits of engagement. Encouraging the greater use of new technologies to increase access to information and to allow feedback and ideas to be shared in a digital/virtual way. Promotion of opportunities for tenant and leaseholder involvement, using a variety of media channels.
6. Promotion of fairness and equality, to encourage involvement from all residents irrespective of their personal characteristics, recognising that some people and groups find it difficult to have their voices heard and work to find the hidden voices. Tailoring opportunities for involvement to meet different needs/expectations.

7. Measuring our performance better, to look at outcomes, developing methods to measure social value. Enabling residents to monitor the progress of this Strategy through regular consultation. Evaluation of the changes brought about through resident involvement and publicising these with staff, tenants, leaseholders, communities and stakeholder organisations.

Currently there are a number of ways that our residents-both tenants and leaseholders can engage with us. We have a well-established 'Tenants' Voice' group who meet regularly to discuss and contribute to new policies and service standards. A similar group 'Leaseholders' Voice' also exists to consult with leaseholders as they have a slightly different relationship with us.

We have a new Complaints and Performance group who will scrutinise the key performance indicators produced by the housing services team and will act to help people resolve their complaints with us. We also have online consultation groups who offer their assistance in virtual ways.

The team set-up and organise many events and activities in the community such as drop-ins or housing surgeries, social events, both large and small and are helping to reduce social isolation amongst our older tenants by arranging interesting activities.

The team work alongside colleagues who undertake planned works for example to ensure that our tenants and leaseholders are consulted and informed about improvements to be made to their homes.

The work of the Resident Involvement team will expand as demand increases and they will ensure that the requirements as laid down in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 are met.

### **Where do we want to be?**

We want our tenants and leaseholders to have a great experience every time they interact with us. We are pragmatic and realise that we won't always get everything right, but when things do go wrong, we will make it easy for our residents to tell us, and make things right in the most efficient way possible.

We want to see this reflected in our customer satisfaction results, but also in the culture of how we work at Exeter. We should have our residents at the forefront of our thinking in everything that we do, and making sure that we deliver our services in this way will enable and enhance resident experience.

## **How will we get there?**

We will work collaboratively with our residents to ensure that the opportunities for co-design are maximised. We value the voice of our residents in how our services are delivered and performing and will embrace resident input to design and deliver a service that is fit for purposed now and in the future.

### **We will do this by:**

- Carrying out a compliance assessment against each area in the RSH regulatory framework (consumer standards) to evidence how we meet the standards expected of a provider of social housing
- Carrying out a customer journey mapping project to fully understand how our residents experience our services, and where the opportunities are for improvements.
- Delivering a programme of customer service training to all colleagues within housing services, to embed a new cultural approach as well as our revised service standards
- Consider carrying out research to understand best practice for customer service.
- Reviewing our service standards (developed in 2022) in partnership with our residents, fully reflecting what they expect from us when they engage with us.
- Reviewing our Resident Involvement Strategy (2021-2025) with our residents to develop a new strategic approach
- Undertaking the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Perception Surveys as prescribed by the RSH and analysing these results.

## **How will we know when we have got there?**

We have set the following targets and deliverables which will help us to assess when we have successfully delivered on this strategic objective:

- The launch of co-designed service standards, developed with our Tenants' Voice group, complete with measurable indicators that will become part of our Key Performance Indicators
- Services that have been reviewed and redesigned with the resident experience in mind. This will take time to do, but will be delivered over the life of the strategy
- All staff within housing services have received customer service training, accurately reflecting the resident first approach that will flow from this strategy
- We will use the following metrics to report on the achievement of this strategic objective:

Measure	Performance 2021/22	Target 2027
Overall satisfaction	81.9%	85%
Exeter gives residents the opportunity to make their views known	55.4%	80%
Complaints responded to within timescales	89%	90%

## Priority 2: Providing the Right Homes in the Right Places

There is an ambition for the Council Housing & Development Services Team to build 500 new homes for social and affordable rent on Council owned land in the City. Work has already commenced on 56 homes. There are constraints and challenges on how many we can afford to build due to the increasing costs of construction and borrowing, but this target remains. Financial viability will continue to be assessed against current market conditions. These homes will be built to a very high standard, providing warm secure homes for our tenants for many years to come.

We will aim to build most of our new Council homes on previously developed land (known as brownfield land), in line with the City Council's Liveable Exeter initiative. This is so we can protect our valuable green spaces which we know are important to local people. On Council owned housing schemes, the City Council will look to provide for a range of affordable housing needs, including social rent, where this is viable.

We will remain aligned to the [Exeter Vision 2040 - Exeter City Council](#) and will continue to have a balanced approach between our development aspirations and the ongoing maintenance and capital investment to our existing stock.

We know that there is a high level of demand for affordable housing, and a drive to make these new homes more energy efficient and desirable. The Local Housing Needs Assessment identifies that there are 627 new homes a year required in Exeter in order to meet demand, and we will work with our partners to deliver against this target. This translates to a total of 12,540 additional homes required over 20 years from 2020 to 2040 in Exeter. There has been a specific need identified for homes for older people, and single occupancy homes in Exeter.

When looking at affordability in Exeter, the Local Housing Needs Assessment has highlighted that households who are in receipt of Universal Credit would be unable to meet the lower and median quartile rents in the private sector, further highlighting the need to develop more affordable housing in the city to meet need in line with affordability.

It is equally as important that these homes are delivered in the right areas too, building homes and neighbourhoods that are fit for the future and meet the needs and expectations of residents in Exeter.

Our Homelessness Strategy is intrinsically linked to this strategic priority. In 2021/22 we had an average of 3,131 households who were on our waiting list for housing, with a rolling average of 121 households in temporary accommodation and 193 identified as rough sleeping in Exeter. We are fully committed to delivering against the government Rough Sleeping Strategy to eradicate rough sleeping by 2025, while we understand the financial pressures that are brought by utilising temporary accommodation solutions for homeless households, the majority of which will be housed within private sector accommodation.

There were 537 empty homes in Exeter at the end of 21/22, and we will work to bring these properties back into use to help increase the supply and provision of suitable housing for those households that need them the most.

### **Where are we now?**

Exeter City Council has 4,800 homes that it owns, and we provide responsive, planned and cyclical works to these homes to keep them in good and safe condition. In the last five years, we have delivered new homes in Exeter through our partnership with other organisations with 523 being new affordable homes. We have recently received the outcomes of the Local Housing Needs Assessment, which enables us to accurately predict the need for new homes in Exeter, and we will be working closely with developers to deliver against these targets for the residents of Exeter.

Policy CP7 of the Exeter Core Strategy requires developments of 10 or more homes to include 35% affordable homes subject to viability. We will be looking to include a similar replacement policy in the emerging Exeter Plan, with the percentage based on affordable housing and development viability.

### **Where do we want to be?**

We want to make sure that we are building and enabling the development of the homes and neighbourhoods that our residents need. We aim to deliver on the target of 627 new homes each year and will ensure that we utilise our powers under Section 106 agreements to deliver desirable neighbourhoods which go further than just bricks and mortar.

We want to reduce our re-let times to ensure that available homes are fit for occupation as soon as is practicably possible. This will also help us to maximise our rental income and further strengthens our ability to do more with a strong Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Alongside this, we also want to continue our 'whole-property' retrofit programme and

deliver energy efficiency benefits to all tenants – on completed properties, tenants are currently benefitting from reduced electric and gas costs of between 40% and 60%.

### **How will we get there?**

We will work closely with our partner agencies, Registered Providers and other departments within the council to deliver the homes that are needed within Exeter over the life of this strategy through our development and enabling function. We are in a unique position where we provide services to those who need homes the most, and yet are not able to provide the number of homes needed without the assistance of other partner organisations such as Housing Associations. A collaborative and productive relationship is required for us to meet this demand moving forward.

We will maintain a comprehensive Asset Management Strategy, alongside a Private Sector Strategy which will give us clarity over the areas that we need to focus on in the coming years. We will utilise the data that we hold to make sure that the decisions that we take are based on evidence and fact, enabling targeted provision for the needs of our communities now and into the future.

We will work to bring empty homes back into use across the city, providing an additional source of supply to meet demand, and strengthen our links with private landlords to further grow our availability to help those households that need it the most.

### **How will we know when we have got there?**

We have set the following targets and deliverables which will help us to assess when we have successfully delivered on this strategic objective:

- The delivery of 627 new homes per year in Exeter, in line with the findings from the Local Housing Needs Assessment
- The delivery of our planned maintenance programme to keep our existing stock modern and safe
- The development of a new Asset Management Strategy, which will set out our ambitions and financial position to develop and maintain homes in Exeter including completion of the full retrofit of properties
- The establishment of new resident groups to work closely with us on all aspects of development and upkeep, including elements of our planned investment programme
- We will incentivise and proactively target bringing empty properties in Exeter back into use.
- We will use the following metrics to report on the achievement of this strategic objective:

Measure	Performance 2022/23	Target 2027
Number of new homes built	544 (20/21 figure)	3,135 (627 per year x 5)
Number of new affordable homes built to date	101	500 by 2030
Number of households on the waiting list	2,200 (Devon Home Choice figure)	N/A
Percentage of our planned investment programme successfully delivered	90% - £10.3m of a budget of £11.5m	100%
Retrofit Programme - Number of properties completed	650	4700 (by 2038)
Satisfaction with works carried out as part of our planned investment programme	80% (May 2023)	90%
Re-let times	43 days	30

### Priority 3: Providing Value for Money Services

#### Where are we now?

In an increasingly challenging economic climate, we strive to provide services that deliver value for money for our residents. From the provision of our responsive and planned maintenance service to the upkeep of our estates and improvements to our leasehold properties, we consistently seek to strike the right balance between cost and quality for our residents.

The provision of most of these services is funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which is a ring-fenced account purely to fund the delivery of housing related services. The Exeter Housing Revenue Account Business Plan details our financial planning for future years to 2042, and the amounts that we will invest in the maintenance and upkeep of our existing homes as well as the provision of other services.

We want to ensure that the rent and other income that our residents pay to us is spent in an effective and efficient way and will ensure that we are financially prudent in how we procure goods and services to residents.



Additional factors can also affect our financial position, such as the number of our homes that are empty in Exeter and the time it takes us to let our vacant properties. We will work to ensure that our re-let times meet challenging targets and bring empty properties back into use.

### **Where do we want to be?**

We want to maintain a healthy Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to enable us to deliver more services for our residents, maximising our income from rent and service charges. This in turn will allow us to procure and deliver more for your money that you pay to us, delivering better services for our residents.

We want to be proactive in the management of our existing contracts, reviewing the performance with suppliers and contractors on a regular basis to ensure that we are delivering real value for money in our current service provision.

### **How will we get there?**

We will:

- Carry out a review of our existing contracts and supply chain to ensure that the money invested in these services is delivering value for money for our residents
- Move our income collection service to a preventative and proactive model, working with our residents to sustain their tenancies and maximise the income into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- Continue to publish our financial performance yearly to be accountable, open and transparent as part of our annual report
- Benchmark our financial performance against other similar landlords to ensure we are performing in line with the rest of the sector, and act where we might be an outlier
- Consult with our involved residents to ensure that our money is being spent on the things that matter to the residents of Exeter
- Look at the potential of technology to help with the management of rent arrears (predictive analytics, opportunities to pay rents in different ways).

### **How will we know when we have got there?**

We have set the following targets and deliverables which will help us to assess when we have successfully delivered on this strategic objective:

- Top quartile financial performance achieved and reflected in benchmarking
- Achieving a target of 2% or below for rent arrears in our homes

- A decrease in residents being evicted for rent arrears as a result of a preventative model of rent management
- High performing contracts and supplier relationships built on resident facing metrics
- We will use the following metrics to report on the achievement of this strategic objective:

Measure	Performance 2022/23	Target 2027
Rent arrears (%)	2.40% as of March 2023 Housemark average 2.80%	2%
Total spend vs budget (for Housing Revenue Account [HRA], capital budgets and general fund)	Revenue - 84% Capital – 90%	100%
Repairs cost per property	£741	£433
Number of repairs per property	3.3	N/A
Repairs completed at first visit	91% (March 2023)	95%
Satisfaction with the repairs service	94% (March 2023)	96%
Satisfaction that rent provides value for money	84.1% (GN & OP only)	90%

## Priority 4: Supporting our residents

### Where are we now?

We know that our residents will need more support from us now and in the coming years. With the current cost of living, higher than normal rent increases, inflationary pressures and numbers of affordable homes that are insufficient to meet demand means that we must work harder than ever to support our residents living in our homes.

In 2021/22 we successfully sustained 282 tenancies, preventing evictions through conversations with our residents and agreeing repayment plans for arrears. This is something that we will look to make a cornerstone of our approach in supporting residents.

We continue to see significant demand for affordable housing in Exeter. While we are working to provide homes for all of those who need them, there is a shortfall between the level of need and demand. In 2021/22 we accepted a statutory homelessness prevention

duty for 423 households, with 76 of those housed within Exeter City Council homes in (55 in 22/23) and a further 85 in accommodation provided by our partner housing associations (70 in 22/23), the remainder were accommodated in the private rented sector.

There were 193 people rough sleeping in Exeter in 2021/22, and this is an area where we recognise the need to focus support for residents in partnership with other organisations in Exeter.

### **Where do we want to be?**

We want to work with our residents and partners to provide as much support to our residents as is needed. We want to utilise our data, knowledge, relationships and insight to move our income management to a proactive model, engaging with residents before they fall into arrears.

We will aim towards ending rough sleeping in Exeter by 2025 in line with the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy, and we want to utilise the findings from the Local Housing Needs Assessment to ensure that we are delivering the numbers of homes identified as being required to meet local need.

We want our residents to be able to engage with us, knowing that we are there to support them with whatever difficulties they may face, and that even where we cannot provide direct support, we can utilise our extensive network of partners to signpost or refer to in order to help.

We want to maximise the supply of good quality, affordable housing in order to meet demand. To enable us to do this, we need to work closely with private landlords and other housing providers in Exeter.

### **How will we get there?**

We will develop partnerships with agencies throughout Exeter to ensure we can provide support to our residents when they need it. Through the analysis of our resident voice through complaints, contact and involved groups, we will be able to proactively understand where our residents need our support the most, and we will track this on a regular basis to enable us to respond and react accordingly.

We want to ensure that there are no rough sleepers in Exeter by 2025, and we will develop a toolkit of interventions with our partners to achieve this, focusing not only on the provision of homes but also tackling the root causes and complexities that lead to rough sleeping in a holistic way. This will help to sustain those who will transition from rough sleeping into settled accommodation.

The provision of money advice and support will become ever more important, and we need to make sure that our staff have the knowledge and skills to be able to provide this level of support. We are pragmatic in our view that we cannot be specialists in every field, and we will look to partner with agencies who can provide advice and support in areas such as energy, mental health and broader money advice. We refer to many organisations from supported housing providers to support agencies, CAB, Homemaker, Children’s Social Care, Fearless, Together Drug and Alcohol for example.

The importance of using our data to provide targeted and proactive support cannot be underestimated, and we will carry out assessment to see how we can improve our insight and analytical capabilities. We will also review the information provided on our website and revisit our wider digital offer, so that we are available to support our residents when they need us, and they can communicate with us in a wide variety of ways.

Our Planning Team and their adopted strategies-such as the Exeter’s Core Strategy and the emerging Exeter Plan provide help in delivering affordable homes.

**How will we know when we have got there?**

We have set the following targets and deliverables which will help us to assess when we have successfully delivered on this strategic objective:

- The establishment of a network of support agencies and a process for referral and engagement, both within Exeter but also nationally where the expertise is required
- No rough sleeping in Exeter by 2025
- The commission and completion of a data audit and data maturity assessment
- The review of our digital offer for residents, looking at the options for multi-channel contact across the council
- The review of information held and provided through our website so that residents can access information when they need it
- A reduction in the number of evictions as a result of rent arrears, through the provision of a pro-active, people centred approach to income management.
- We will use the following metrics to report on the achievement of this strategic objective:

Measure	Performance 2022/23	Target 2027
Number of evictions as a result of rent arrears	2	0
Numbers of individuals/households identified as rough sleeping	193	0

Measure	Performance 2022/23	Target 2027
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Exeter City Council is easy to deal with	62.95% (all tenures)	90%

## Priority 5: Ensuring the Safety of our Homes and Residents

### Where are we now?

A key priority for us is to ensure that our tenants and leaseholders are safe in our homes. We do this in a variety of ways, from the electrical and gas safety checks that we carry out, the management of anti-social behaviour (ASB) on our estates, to the maintenance and upkeep of our properties through our responsive and planned maintenance service.

In 2022/23 we carried out:

- More than 15,700 responsive repairs jobs
- More than 4,500 gas safety checks
- Just over 1,200 domestic electrical safety checks
- Over 1,000 Health and Safety inspections, including asbestos, legionella and lifts
- More than 500 Fire Risk Assessments

There has been an increased emphasis on building safety within the social housing sector following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower, the Hackitt Review that followed and the Government White Paper now the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 all deal with this. There is now a clear and consistent standard that landlords have to meet around building safety which is significantly more comprehensive than it was previously, and we have more work to do to continue to ensure our residents are kept safe.

### Where do we want to be?

We want to take a zero-risk approach to any health and safety matters relating to our homes and residents. We will ensure that we are completing all health and safety checks within the mandatory timescales to protect our residents, and will work closely with our involved residents to deliver on this aspect.

We want to investigate how new technology can also help us to move towards a more proactive approach to safety in our homes. In-home devices can now let landlords know when

an element (such as a boiler, or a smoke alarm) is about to fail, which removes risk even further than the current approach.

We want to play our part in making our environment more sustainable, looking at energy efficiency options and maximising our green spaces on our estates. We will develop an Environmental Sustainability Strategy for the whole council which will look at our homes and estates, identifying areas where we can start to deliver improvements in our approach to the environment.

It is important for us to be compliant with both legislation and the regulatory standards, and we will commission a review to look at how we comply with the new Building Safety Act as well as the Home Standard within the regulatory standards. We will carry this out in partnership with our residents to make sure that the resident voice is heard in this important area.

A tiny minority of tenants make it extremely difficult for us to carry out safety inspections in their homes. This impacts not just their own wellbeing but also the safety of their neighbours. It also adds to costs and takes away resources which would be better used to improve our service. We will work closely with our tenants and our Legal team to create strategies which ensure we gain access when we need to so that we are always compliant and all our residents live in (and next to) safe properties.

We take all reports of anti-social behaviour (ASB) on our estates seriously, and we will work with our residents, the Police, and other organisations, to tackle and eradicate ASB as quickly and successfully as possible. To make sure that our service is in line with best practice, we will carry out a review and benchmark our performance in this area to allow us to continually improve.

We take all accidents seriously, we work closely with our residents and when appropriate/necessary we collaborate with other organisations and contractors. When things do go wrong, we actively, impartially and thoroughly investigate the event. We do this to make sure that the same event does not happen again. To date, this action has further significantly increased safety with homes and has enable us to put in place improved practices to help keep everyone safe.

### **How will we get there?**

We will review and enhance the data that we hold on our homes to ensure that we remain fully compliant in all aspects of health and safety and are protecting our residents. By reviewing our performance in this area, we will be able to understand where there are opportunities for improvement, and we will introduce a 'Safety First' culture for both our colleagues and residents which will ensure that this area is at the forefront of how we operate.

We will develop strategic approaches to environmental sustainability, health and safety and ASB which will give us a clear direction on the evolution and improvement in these areas. We want to be in the top quartile performance for tackling ASB, while our no risk approach means that we will have none of our key health and safety inspections out of date (e.g. gas, electrical safety and fire risk assessments).

Key to us achieving in this area will be the partnerships that we develop with our residents, suppliers and partner agencies. We will work to develop processes and networks that will provide a seamless multi-agency approach to each of these areas.

**How will we know when we have got there?**

We have set the following targets and deliverables which will help us to assess when we have successfully delivered on this strategic objective:

- Exploration of the potential of new technology in relation to Building Safety
- Achieving top quartile performance in relation to ASB
- All relevant colleagues will have undertaken mandatory health and safety training to help build a ‘Safety First’ culture including asbestos awareness for all staff
- We have a package of 15 mandatory health & safety courses that all staff must undertake including COSHH awareness, legionella awareness, DSE awareness, lone working, manual handling, electrical safety awareness & risk assessment training
- Review completed on our compliance with legislation and regulation, with an action plan produced
- We will use the following metrics to report on the achievement of this strategic objective:

Measure	Performance 2022/23	Target 2027
Percentage of homes with a valid gas safety certificate	99.73%	100%
Percentage of homes in receipt of an electrical safety check (where required)	95.85%	100%
Percentage of fire risk assessments completed (where required)	100%	100%
Numbers of relevant housing staff completed mandatory health & safety training	39%	100%
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Exeter City Council provides a home that is safe and secure	79.8% satisfied neither 9.8%, dissatisfied 10.4%	95%

## Conclusion

We believe that this strategy offers the best and most appropriate priorities for the tenants of Exeter City Council by setting out how we are going to take our services forward over the next four years. By enhancing the resident experience, making it easier to contact us and ensuring that our tenants can play a part in shaping our services; providing new homes of the right type where they are needed; ensuring that the monies we receive in rents is spent wisely in the most cost-effective manner; supporting our residents in their homes and making sure that our homes are safe for our tenants to live in will all contribute to improving our vision so that we can respond to national issues and the issues that matter to residents in Exeter.