Tenants' Voice
Terms of Reference

Introduction

Tenants' Voice is a tenant-led group made up of Exeter City Council tenants and leaseholders, working in partnership with the Council to help shape and improve housing services.

The group provides a collective and influential platform for tenants to contribute to the strategic direction, review and development of housing services.

Through a constructive and collaborative approach, Tenants' Voice members work alongside Council officers to ensure that tenant and leaseholder perspectives are at the heart of decision-making, policy development and service improvement. Members play an important role in supporting the Council, as their landlord, to deliver housing services that are high-quality, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all residents.

Overall objective and purpose

The overall objective of the group is to shape and improve housing services to tenants and leaseholders.

The purpose of the role of Tenants' Voice is to work as part of dedicated team which aims to:

- Provide scrutiny and critical review of Exeter City Council's Housing Service
- Take a tenants & leaseholder view across the Housing Service, reviewing policy, procedure, and strategy
- Participate in Housing initiatives and projects
- Commission and a participate in service reviews to improve the service delivered to tenants and leaseholders (see "Tenants' Voice: Special Project group")
- Consider how improvements might be made.
- Work co-operatively with Exeter City Council staff and tenants and leaseholders
- Assist in the preparation of reports.
- To act as a critical friend to ensure that the housings service meets expected standards

Members will be recruited as team members to work together on a voluntary basis with the Housing Service.

Tenants' Voice: Special Project Group

A sub-group of Tenants' Voice will meet as required to undertake special projects. Participation is on a voluntary basis, and all members of Tenants' Voice are invited to take part.

Special projects will include service reviews, focus-groups and one-off workshops.

Membership

Membership will consist of Exeter City Council tenants and leaseholders with support from relevant Council officers. Members are expected to actively participate and contribute constructively to discussions and activities.

Members will serve on a voluntary basis, however, they will receive support (see Appendix B "Expenses and Incentives Policy") to enable them to participate and to remove any barriers.

Roles and Responsibilities

Members

Members are responsible for:

- Attending meetings and contributing to discussions
- Preparing for meetings by reviewing papers
- Representing tenant perspectives fairly and constructively
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Acting in line with agreed behaviours and principles
- Identify the need for further information to enable the group to carry out its duties. For example, commissioning resident inspections or other survey work on a specific topics

Chair

The chair is responsible for:

- Facilitate meetings and ensure all members can contribute
- Work with officers to set agendas
- Ensure discussions remain focused and productive

Council Officers

The Council Officers are responsible for:

- Provide relevant information for discussion in advance of meeting (including draft policy, procedure, strategy, or other documents)
- Offer professional advice and context
- Support administration and coordination of the group
- Respond to recommendations and provide feedback on actions taken
- Recruit new members
- Minuting meetings
- Record-keeping

Key Activities

The key activities of Tenants' Voice will be to:

- Attend meetings, training and planning sessions
- Read documents in preparation for meetings
- Identify the need for further information to enable the group to carry out its duties. For example, commissioning resident inspections or other survey work on a specific topic
- Consider how improvements might be made and make recommendations
- Work co-operatively with Exeter City Council Officers and tenants and leaseholders
- Assist in the preparation of reports

Scope of the group

The range of services within the remit of the group includes all areas subject to Tenant Satisfaction Measures as defined by the Social Housing Regulator, as well as all areas covered by the Housing department, including:

- Housing management
- Housing Complaints
- Leaseholder services
- Resident involvement
- Community initiatives
- Older persons and general needs accommodation
- Repairs
- Planned works
- Voids
- Lettings
- Income collections (rents and service charges)
- Specialist housing such as Extra Care
- New build development
- Communal spaces, gardening and maintenance
- Health and safety / compliance
- Aids and adaptations

Meetings and attendance

- A minimum of three members is required for the meeting to be quorate
- The group will meet bi-monthly (every two months)
- Meetings will be scheduled at times suitable for the majority of members, which may include evenings
- Meetings will be held in a hybrid format, allowing attendance either:
    - In person, or
    - Virtually (online)
- In-person meetings will take place in fully accessible venues (typically Council offices)
- The Council will review the viability of the group if two consecutive meetings cannot be held due to non-attendance

Code of Conduct

Members will:

- Familiarise themselves with the policies and procedures of the group
- Carry out the role in accordance with the policies and procedures of the group including the Code of Conduct
- Act professionally and carry out their responsibilities with integrity and high standards of behaviour at all times
- Treat everyone with respect and ensure they are responsive to the needs of everyone in the community
- Be open and honest in their dealings and show respect for other members
- Observe confidentiality throughout the process

- Not talk over others
- Behave in a respectful manner when a member of the panel is speaking
- Be polite and not raise their voices
- Keep to the subject under discussion
- Not raise individual issues unless as a means of illustrating a point
- Not make personal, political or religious reference

If a member does not abide by the code of conduct, the chair/lead speaker will warn them that if they break the code of conduct they may be asked to leave the meeting. If they continue to break the code of conduct they may be removed from the group

Members who fail to attend three consecutive meetings without giving apologies will be removed from the group.

Any member that breaches the Confidentially Agreement may have their membership revoked.

Governance and Reporting

The group operates in an advisory capacity and does not hold decision-making authority.

Recommendations that are made by the group will be reported to senior housing management, and the Council will provide feedback on how recommendations have been considered and implemented.

Outcomes and key findings will be shared with wider groups (Council Housing and Development Advisory Board) and governance structures, and will be reported annually in the Resident Engagement and Feedback Impact Report (and internally on a quarterly basis).

Communication and Transparency

Meeting agendas and papers will be shared in advance. Minutes of meetings will be recorded and circulated following a meeting. Key outcomes will be communicated to tenants and leaseholders, where appropriate.

The group will promote openness, respect and transparency in all discussions.

Training and Support

Members will be offered training to support their role, both formally and as guidance provided by Officers to help members understand data and processes

Reasonable expenses and support may be provided to enable participation (see “Expenses and Incentives Policy”).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The group will proactively champion Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, as defined in the Equality Act 2010, in everything they do. Council Officers will support members to do Equality Impact Assessments if needed for particular projects.

The Council will provide training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for all members.

The group will actively work to include the views of tenants and leaseholders from diverse backgrounds and will challenge discrimination if we become aware of it. Members should escalate any concerns about discrimination.

The group will strive to strive to make everyone feel welcome and safe to participate, regardless of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

Approval

These Terms of Reference are agreed by Exeter City Council Housing Services and the members of Tenants' Voice.

I have read, understand and agree to abide by the Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct:

Name …….. Date ..……..……

Signature …….....

Exeter City Council

Council Housing & Development Services

Appendix A

Tenants' Voice - Confidentiality Agreement

As a Tenants' Voice member you may have access to sensitive and confidential personal and business information as a necessary part of your role.

Access to sensitive personal or business information will only be provided if it is necessary for the specific work that you are carrying out. Information is issued in confidence and on the condition that it is used solely for the purposes of carrying out your responsibilities. The information must be kept confidential at all times and should not be discussed with anyone, apart from Exeter City Council officers who have been involved in providing the information and other members of the group.

It is important to remember that the group will be consulted on issues that have not yet been made public. It would be wrong for both staff and the public to find out about proposals from group members, this information should always come from Exeter City Council. In particular you should never discuss any personal or business information with a tenant or third party unless you have been given approval by Exeter City Council.

Members of the Tenants' Voice may be asked to review the handling of a complaint. As part of this you may become privy to personal information about the complainant, staff, and details about the complaint itself, all of which must be keep confidential.

The procedure outlined in the Terms of Reference will be followed if the confidentially policy is breached.

Retention of Confidential Information
Confidential information obtained as part of your involvement must only be retained for as long as necessary to complete that activity and have the results ratified if necessary. Once the task is completed any data collected should be returned to Exeter City Council to destroy.

Breaches of Confidentiality Agreement
As outlined in the Code of Conduct, any member that breaches the Confidentially Agreement may have their membership revoked.

Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure the security of any information that is shared with you by the Council. It should be noted that unauthorised disclosure of or access to the Council's sensitive or personal information may result in a monetary penalty being served on the Council or legal action being taken against you directly.

Please sign, print your name and date the form below to show you understand the terms and conditions of this document.

I have read, understand and agree to the terms and conditions of this document:

Name …….. Date ..……..……

Signature …….....

Exeter City Council

Appendix B

Expenses, Incentives and Allowance Policy for Involved Residents

1.0 Introduction

Exeter City Council values the experience and expertise of tenants and leaseholders, and the Council recognises that it is important that no one is out of pocket for volunteering. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that expenses, incentives and allowances are paid in a clear, transparent and equitable way.

This policy will cover:

- Who is eligible to receive expenses, incentives and allowances
- What expenses will be covered
- What expenses will not be covered
- How expenses, incentives and allowances will be paid

2.0 Who does this policy cover?

The provisions within this policy will apply to all tenants and leaseholders who take part in recognised engagement activities organised by Exeter City Council's Housing services.

The policy does not apply to representatives (volunteers or paid staff) from voluntary or private sector organisations who take part in these activities.

3.0 Payment of Expenses

3.1 When expenses will be paid

Expenses will be paid for residents involved in recognised Exeter City Council resident involvement activates. These include:

- Attending meetings, focus groups, panels, forums
- Training organised by Exeter City Council
- Speaking at external events and conferences
- Helping to create publications
- Carrying out duties as part of a recognised panel or group

3.2 Qualifying expenses

The following expenses will be covered:

- Child care / carer expenses
- Any other reasonable expenses that residents incur in fulfilment of their role (by prior agreement)

Expenses are limited to actual costs (evidenced by a receipt) and should not be rounded up.

Appendix A sets out limits on certain expenses. Where no limit is set the amount shall be limited to reasonable costs.

In exceptional circumstances the Council may agree to reimburse expenses over and above the limits set out in Appendix A.

3.3 Exclusions (expenses)

The following expenses will not be covered:

- Loss of earnings
- Printer/ Ink/ cartridge costs
- Internet or telephone costs
- Stationery
- Meals
- Travel expenses (this is covered under **5.0 Allowance**)

The City Council can arrange for stationery, printing and will provide catering where reasonable so that involved residents are not out of pocket.

4.0 Payment of Incentives

4.1 When incentives will be paid

Incentives are used to encourage and reward tenants for their involvement with Exeter City Council Housing Services. Incentives will be paid to residents involved in recognised Exeter City Council resident involvement activities, by prior agreement and at the discretion of the City Council.

The City Council will pay incentives in a fair and equitable way with regards to protected characteristics under the Equalities Act.

In some instances incentives will come in the form of a prize draw, which the City Council will administer fairly and impartially.

4.2 Format of incentives

If the City Council wishes to incentivise an activity they will set the amount and format of incentive. Incentives might come in the form of money, vouchers or items.

4.3 Exclusions (incentives)

It may be that there are times when incentives are not appropriate, for example if there is a clear conflict of interest, or if residents have failed to adhere to the terms and conditions or code of conduct of a particular groups

5.0 Allowances for Travel

The City Council recognises that involved residents will often have to travel to attend meetings or to participate in recognised activities.

Travel expenses are not a qualifying expense, however, an allowance of £5 per meeting will be payable to cover such costs as mileage, parking, or public transportation. This will be provided in the form of a gift card.

6.0 How expenses, incentives and allowances will be paid

Payments will be made by BACS payment or voucher.

To claim a voucher residents must provide:

- A completed and signed claim form for each activity (Appendix B)
- All relevant receipts/ train tickets

The claim forms and supporting details must be provided to the person facilitating the activity within 5 working days of attendance at the activity.

In some instances involved residents may be paid in the form of gift vouchers or gift cards.

6.0 Financial Implications and taxes

Claiming and receiving payment for contributing to the Council's Housing Services may impact on your income. It is your responsibility to seek professional advice and declare payments in relation to tax, benefits and earnings.

This reward arrangement does not represent employment and should not be considered as a replacement for seeking employment.

Appendix A

Table of expenses covered, and limits.

Expenses Covered and Limits		
Description	**Amount**	**Conditions**
Taxi	N/A	Taxis will be ordered by Exeter City Council and paid for on their business account.
Child Care*	An hourly rate equivalent to the minimum living wage for the duration of the meeting plus up to 30 minutes travel time either side of the meeting or activity.	Residents can claim for children up to 14 years old or children with additional needs/disabilities who may be over 14 but require care. A receipt or invoice must be provided.
After school clubs & Activities*	Reasonable expenses for after school clubs and activities that take place during the meeting or activity.	A receipt or invoice must be provided.

Carers expenses*	An hourly rate equivalent to the minimum living wage for the duration of the meeting plus up to 30 minutes travel time either side of the meeting or activity.	Residents can claim if they act as a carer and require the services of a carer to substitute this duty while they attend a meeting, event or activity. Residents can also claim if they require a care or support worker to attend the meeting, event or activity with them. A receipt or invoice must be provided.
** The City Council is in no way responsible for the quality of care that is provided by the childcare professional or carer and is not commissioning their services directly.*		

Appendix B

Resident Involvement Payment of Expenses Form

Section 1: Resident details

Name:	
Address:	

Section 2 - Verification Checks

Please quote the reference number for one of the following:	
Driving licence:	
Passport:	
National Insurance No:	

Section 3: Contact Details

Email Address:	

Telephone Number:	

Section 4: BACS Details

Bank Name:	
Bank Address:	
Sort Code:	
Account No:	

Section 6:

Requested By (sign):	
Print Name:	