

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Thursday 3 December 2020

Time: 5.30 pm

Venue: Legislation has been passed that allows Council's to conduct Committee meetings remotely

Members are invited to attend the above meeting.

If you have an enquiry regarding any items on this agenda, please contact Howard Bassett, Democratic Services Officer (Committees) on 01392 265107.

During the Corona Virus outbreak, meetings will be held by virtual means. The [live stream can be viewed here](#) at the meeting start time.

Membership -

Vizard (Chair), Mitchell, M (Deputy Chair), Begley, Foggin, Mrs Henson, Mitchell, K, Oliver, Martin, A, Quance, Sparkes, Wardle and Warwick

Agenda

1 Apologies

2 Minutes

(Pages 3 -
16)

To approve and sign the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 8 October 2020.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillors are reminded of the need to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests that relate to business on the agenda and which have not already been included in the register of interests, before any discussion takes place on the item. Unless the interest is sensitive, you must also disclose the nature of the interest. In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, you must then leave the room and must not participate in any further discussion of the item.

Councillors requiring clarification should seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer prior to the day of the meeting.

4 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public

It is considered that the Committee would be unlikely to exclude the press and public during the consideration of any of the items on this agenda but, if it should

wish to do so, then the following resolution should be passed:-

“RESOLVED that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the particular item(s) of business on the grounds that it (they) involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraph(s) of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.”

5 **Questions from the Public under Standing Order No. 19**

For details about how to speak at Committee, please click the following link - <https://exeter.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-meetings/public-speaking-at-meetings/overview/>

Questions must be submitted by 10am three working days before the meeting. For example, if the meeting is being held on a Thursday, questions must be submitted by 10am on the Monday before the meeting, in this case Monday 30 November 2020.

6 **Questions on Covid-19 Recovery from Portfolio Holders and Questions from Members and Answers**

(Pages 17
- 34)

Portfolio Holder briefing notes attached.

Portfolio Holder for City Management - Councillor Harvey
Portfolio Holder for Communities and Culture - Councillor Ghusain

Details of questions from Members relating to the two Portfolios above on Covid-19 recovery issues only should be notified to the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support by 10.00am the Monday before the meeting – Monday 30 November 2020.

Date of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee will be held on 4 February 2021 at 5:30pm.

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CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
(HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING)

8 October 2020

Present:

Councillor Matthew Vizard (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Foggin, Mrs Henson, Mitchell, K, Sparkes, Wardle and Warwick

Apologies:

Councillors Martin and Oliver

Also present:

Director City Development, Housing & Supporting People, Democratic Services Officer (HB) and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Ruth Williams

Councillor Laura Wright

Councillor Diana Moore

- Portfolio Holder for Supporting People
- Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Services

22 Apologies

These were received from Councillors Martin and Oliver.

23 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 16 July 2020 were taken as read, approved as correct, for signing by the Chair at the earliest possible convenience.

24 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

25 Questions from the Public under Standing Order 19

No questions from members of the public were received.

26 Presentation on Covid-19 Recovery by Portfolio Holders and Questions from Members and Answers

The Chair invited the two Portfolio Holders to present their respective briefing notes.

Questions from Members submitted in advance of the meeting with the answers given at the meeting together with the supplementary questions and answers made at the meeting are set out below for each Portfolio.

Portfolio Holder for Supporting People - Councillor Williams - in presenting her briefing note highlighted the following:-

- expressed her thanks to Councillor Morse, the previous Portfolio Holder, for her dedication and hard work in this role;
- a recent virtual anti-social behaviour conference hosted by the City Council attended by local and regional leaders and partners including the Bishop of Exeter, the Chief Constable of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Councillor Hart, Leader of Devon County Council, Ben Bradshaw MP as well as representatives from city's in Portugal and the United States. The City Council would be progressing many of the initiatives discussed; and
- her attendance at the Exeter Community Safety Partnership, chaired by the local police commander.

Questions from Members of the Committee.

- 1 **Councillor Wardle** - *Can the Portfolio Holder update us on the new test and trace Support payments?*

From 28 September 2020, Government has changed the legislation so that certain people will have to self-isolate due to the current Covid-19 crisis. A package of legislative measures has been introduced both to ensure that those who are required to self-isolate, do so and, that those on a low income, receive a payment to assist their finances and to encourage compliance with the legislation. The Council is administering both the Standard Scheme and the Discretionary Scheme for Exeter. Both schemes are currently due to run until 31 January 2021.

The Standard Scheme has been determined by criteria set down by Government and is primarily aimed at all applicants who are working or self-employed; are unable to work from home and will therefore have a reduction in income and are in receipt of certain qualifying benefits (Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, Income-related Employment & Support Allowance; Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance; Income Support; Housing Benefit or Pension Credit). Government has confirmed that it will reimburse the Council for all payments correctly made under the Standard Scheme.

The Discretionary Scheme is intended for any individual who meets all of the required criteria for the Standard Scheme except that they are not currently in receipt of a qualifying benefit. The reason for this could be, for example, that a claim for a benefit has not yet been made or is being appealed, or that the individual, whilst normally resident in the UK, is unable to gain access to public funds. The Council will be receiving £29,277.09 for the four months that the Discretionary Scheme is intended to last and the Government has confirmed that no additional monies will be given to the Council. This funding equates to only 58 awards. Given that the funding for the Discretionary Scheme is limited, Government has stated that it will be up to each Council to determine additional criteria that have to be met if a payment is to be made. The additional criteria has been developed with other authorities within the County and is designed to focus on those applicants who are not in receipt of a qualifying benefit, are on a low income, have relatively low capital, have had

their income reduced and are therefore facing financial hardship due to self-isolation.

Policies for both the Standard Scheme and the Discretionary Scheme have been submitted for approval and was now live and available on www.exeter.gov.uk/testandtrace.

The support will take the form of a single payment of £500. An individual may make an application more than once but only if the individual is told to self-isolate multiple times and they meet the eligibility criteria for each individual application, and the periods of self-isolation do not overlap. Individuals in the same household can each make an application to receive a Test and Trace Support Payment, if they each meet the criteria in full.

Applicants must have been instructed by the NHS Test and Trace to stay at home and self-isolate either because they have tested positive for Covid-19, or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive. All applicants will be required to provide the 8-digit unique ID number which has been provided to them by NHS Test and Trace.

Individuals meeting the eligibility criteria who have been instructed to self-isolate on or after 28 September are entitled to a payment, and Government requested that local authorities have an application process in place by 12 October. Officers, along with Strata, have designed one on-line application form to cater for both schemes, which is currently being tested with a planned go live of 12 October. On-line and telephone applications will be accepted. Eligible applications can be backdated to 28 September. In order to capture those backdated claims, www.exeter.gov.uk/testandtrace has been live since 28 September offering information and the capability to register an interest in claiming. Exeter has received 15 registrations of interest so far and those residents will be emailed a link to the application form once it is live. Applications will be dealt with by benefit staff as there is a need to check benefit eligibility through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)'s Searchlight system which has restricted access. The benefit staff allocated to this task are working closely with their Customer Support colleagues dealing with the Exeter Wellbeing Support Hub so that support can be provided if other vulnerability issues are identified.

The Portfolio Holder thanked all staff who had worked to implement the scheme in a short time period.

Supplementary questions and answers.

Will those self-employed individuals previously excluded from the support system be left outside the circle of entitlement again?

Will the Council be reimbursed for the scheme and by how much?

The summary of the scheme, circulated to all Members, details the information in response to the questions, including the figures sought.

- 2a **Councillor Foggin** – *As you are providing accommodation for rough sleeping what plans are there to remove tents and other items from, in and around the High Street?*

2b **Councillor M. Mitchell** - *Rough Sleepers. In recent weeks there appears to have been an increase in the number of individuals and groups rough sleeping in and around the city centre. What actions are the council taking to ensure that these individuals are supported and helped as winter approaches?*

(Combined response to 2a & 2b)

The Council co-ordinates responses to city centre (including the High Street) encampments via contact and assessment by the outreach team working closely with the Council's rough sleeper co-ordinator and housing advice team. Rapid assessment for emergency accommodation, or reconnection to home area, is undertaken with a view to provide a service offer as soon as possible. A number of services are simultaneously informed including Civil Enforcement, city centre police and Environmental Health (if anti-social behaviour is being committed). If a service offer is not available (e.g. if there is no legal duty and no discretionary option) or is declined, and if not already initiated then enforcement action is taken serving notice and removal of tents where necessary. Not all encampment dwellers are homeless and in such cases notifications are made to their housing providers to support interventions to ensure a swift return indoors.

The Council continues to provide accommodation for many rough sleepers through discretionary accommodation placements into temporary accommodation stock as well as bed and breakfast spaces purchased from hotels willing to accommodate rough sleepers (many hotels will not). The Great Western Hotel (GWH) has the majority of occupants with recent rough sleeping experience and all arising vacancies at the hotel are prioritised to rough sleepers nominated by the outreach team. In anticipation of the award of capital funds through the government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) the plan is to resettle all current occupants of the hotel into move-on housing as and when it vacancies and new spaces come online. The first spaces are expected at the repurposed 11-bed hostel at 62 Howell Road. A further 10 bed units are to be delivered by local partner Bournemouth Church Housing Association (BCHA) under the first successful part of the NSAP capital bid. This will increase vacancies for rough sleepers to move into the hotel as interim accommodation whilst awaiting purchase and opening of up to 25 further NSAP-funded beds to be available as soon as possible before 3 March 2021.

In the meantime, the Council is specifically supporting BCHA in maximising moving on of residents in Gabriel House and its move-on Morwenna Court in order to free up further spaces for people to move on from the GWH. Work is also underway exploring opportunities to lease Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) properties through third party investors and property agents in order to increase temporary accommodation capacity.

The Council is also leading a review and overhaul of the supported housing pathway in order to recalibrate and concentrate the availability of housing related support in some of the services and ensure clearer processes and targets around move-on and throughput in the system. This is being done through a number of measures:

- reviewing of rents in key accommodation
- reviewing the priorities of the floating support service (commissioned by County) to upstream their work
- revised move-on panel and pathway including social housing referrals

- increasing financial incentives and support to private landlords.

There remains a key issue regarding the loss of emergency overnight bed spaces as a result of covid impact. With the continuing restrictions permitting no shared bed spaces capacity for rough sleepers' bed space numbers are still severely reduced. The Junction night shelter is currently accommodating a maximum of six people (20 beds down on its 26 capacity). A works assessment to build in private rooms on the ground floor has to date proved cost-prohibitive. Gabriel House is seven beds down due to single occupancy of the bunks and no night chair facility and two further spaces are suspended at Esther Community. The young persons' Night Stop scheme has also been in abeyance since March as have other hosted beds through Countywide provider Young Devon. This issue has been raised with Public Health and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Council is awaiting guidance documents understood to be a set of principles for re-instating some bed spaces with increased risk management measures where possible. It is also understood that there may be an opportunity for local housing authorities to apply to MHCLG for emergency winter funds to support added capacity for bed spaces in areas of high unmet need. It is understood that the remaining £13million of the £105million NSAP revenue fund has been reserved for such purposes.

Supplementary question and answer.

Will steps be taken to prevent rough sleeping outside the Guildhall?

The Portfolio Holder advised that rough sleeping had been one of the issues discussed at the Exeter Community Safety Partnership on 7 October 2020 and was very much on the radar. Accordingly, this and other locations in the city were constantly monitored.

The Portfolio Holder also advised that Members would be provided with contact numbers to report rough sleeping. Details below:-

Contact information for reporting a suspected rough sleeper:

- Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm - Assertive Outreach Team 01392 284287 exeter-outreach@julianhouse.org.uk
- Weekends - Streetlink - <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/>

Contact information for reporting suspected criminal behaviour / ASB on the street.

- Devon and Cornwall Police Call 101 or 999 (in an emergency) 101@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk

- 3 **Councillor M. Mitchell** - *Recovery Plans. Could the Portfolio Holder provide more detail regarding the use of the allocated government grant of £440K from the Next Steps Accommodation Programme and elaborate on the availability of other 'temporary placements'?*

The £440,779 award is broken down as follows:

- £315,420 – Accommodation costs (GWH)
- £49,980 – Security (at GWH)
- £13,325 – Cleaning (including needle sweeps) and Repairs (at GWH)

- £38,000 – Support (two x workers at six months)
- £15,362 – Food and clothing support
- £8,712 – Laundry support

Other temporary placements are outlined in response to Q2a/2b. The Council's 130 units of procured temporary accommodation (95 units plus a further 35 move-on units) are consistently full with voids being re-let within 24-48 hours. In addition to the 33 rooms at the GWH the Council currently has a further 15 persons in spot purchase hotel accommodation as at 06.10.20.

Supplementary questions and answers.

It is understood that this is a retrospective payment for services already provided and, if so, is there funding available to take this programme through to the end of the financial year?

The funding provided was not retrospective as such. When the Government requested Councils to bring rough sleepers into accommodation there was a certain amount of funding allocated but additional funding was provided, on the agreement of the Portfolio Holder, from in-year savings from within the service. The funding now provided will enable the continuation of the service until the end of the financial year.

Can the funding made available be used to lease small or medium sized hotels for accommodating rough sleepers for a five year period?

Because of the piecemeal nature of funding it is difficult to plan long term. The funding provided by Government was specifically for bringing the homeless indoors to cover accommodation itself and including the other elements listed.

- 4 **Councillor M. Mitchell** – *Winter Emergency provision. In the current crisis many tenants in all sectors are experiencing financial hardship not of their own making. What actions can the Council take to ensure that if the number of eviction orders rise due to non-payment of private rentals, tenants and their families are able to remain in their homes to provide the social and other stability they need at this time?*

The Council's homelessness prevention service is working alongside welfare and benefits staff to ensure read-across of tenants approaching the service for housing advice especially where rent arrears (or the risk of) are involved. A homelessness prevention advice update is being drafted in order to circulate on social media and via the website to provide early advice and contact information for households at potential risk. Financial support utilising discretionary funds (e.g. hardship) to provide rent contributions are already in place for some households. Housing advice staff also negotiate with payments plans with some private landlords especially as more workable alternatives to the extended and more convoluted evictions process. Other measures regarding rent arrears and payment plans are in place with Council tenants as per Q3 below.

Questions from other Council Members.

- 1 **Question from Councillor J. Moore read by the Chair** - *What level of delays before receiving their first payment are new applicants for Universal Credit typically experiencing in Exeter*

Our DWP Partnership Manager has confirmed that they do not have any first payment delays. All Universal Credit claims are processed and paid on time in the first month, unless they do not verify their information, or contact the Job Centre Plus (JCP) to verify their claim. Around 97% are paid on time.

- 2 **Councillor D. Moore** - *Benefits and Welfare: Since April how many new benefit and welfare claimants are there in Exeter, how many are predicted to the end of the year, and does the Council have the capacity to process the current and expected workload to ensure no delays to claimants?*

The table below gives caseload figures for Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Support (CTS).

Month	Council Tax Support	Housing Benefit
March 2020	7371	6119
April 2020	7910	6049
July 2020	7976	5917
October 2020	7813	5742
Change (Mar to Oct)	+442	-377
% change (Mar to Oct)	+6.0%	-6.2%

CTS cases continue to trend slowly down. HB caseload has been reducing at a fairly consistent rate since the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) and hasn't been hugely impacted by COVID-19. Some of the reduction in HB will be due to existing claimants starting new jobs and claiming UC instead of Working Tax Credit (WTC), not just customers losing their jobs and claiming UC instead of Jobseekers Allowance.

If the current trend continues, CTS caseload is expected to reduce by a further 200 by April 2021. However, realistically, there is likely to be a second wave of financial impact and job losses leading to an increase in claims. If this is half the size of the first wave it would mean an additional 300 claims, but it is impossible to predict at this point.

Officers anticipate being able to manage a second wave of claims as they did in the spring without undue impact on processing times, and if necessary, staff can be diverted from less urgent work, and delays in making decisions on CTS claims can be offset by flexibility on the recovery side.

- 3 **Councillor D. Moore** - *Payments and Collection: Will the Council be implementing or give consideration to its own voluntary extended ban on evictions of council tenants who have fallen behind on rents due to the impact of COVID pandemic?*

Whilst there are no plans to extend the eviction ban once it expires Members can be assured that there are a number of checks and balances in place to ensure tenants are given every opportunity to resolve any debt issues with

the Council as its landlord. As is often the case the officers have to determine who cannot pay and those that will not pay. Evictions are only ever an action of last resort for any breaches of tenancies including non-payment of rent. As a landlord we must always balance the needs to support our tenants as much as is practical against the need to generate the income to provide the services to all tenants.

Supplementary question and answer.

What action has been taken to assist those who are unable to pay council housing rent as a result of the pandemic?

Council staff continue to support those in financial difficulty on the same basis as before the pandemic. The financial position of those in difficulty is discussed in detail including assessment of their income and expenditure and, as the Council is often not the only organisation owed money, steps are taken to prioritise debt re-payment including referrals to other agencies. It is important to keep track of debt even if this involves small repayments being made. A continuing income stream to the Council is necessary to support other housing services.

- 4 **Councillor D. Moore - Rough Sleeping.** *What specialist support is the Council providing for those rough sleepers who have been evicted or abandoned emergency accommodation?*

The Council's policy towards rough sleepers recently evicted or abandoning emergency accommodation is one of continued contact and ongoing assessment of housing and health need. Outreach provide welfare checks and support for the individual to learn from the issues that led to the accommodation loss. Health needs are monitored by the Clock Tower surgery staff in the main alongside outreach staff and where relevant an individual may also have a housing navigator worker advocating for them to access alternative services felt to be needed in order to support the issue underlying the eviction (e.g. mental health, substance treatment, social care etc.). The housing navigator plays an important role in following the client to establish a relationship.

The Council supports specialist support engagement on the street via RSI-funded interventions through a specialist drug and alcohol outreach worker plus nurse and GP outreach sessions. The Council also led the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) - bid for a mental health navigator to work with rough sleepers and Housing Needs is also engaged with a revision plan for the Devon Partnership Trust (DPT)'s mental health community offer to complex and vulnerable individuals including rough sleepers. Rough sleepers (including those recently evicted) are also being supported to access covid testing where needed through combined planning and interventions between the usual services plus public health support.

Supplementary questions and answers.

What specialist support is available to those rough sleepers with complex issues?

Specialist support is through the mental health navigator as part of the RSI bid. City Council officers initiated the bid in conjunction with other partners

including the setting up of Colab. There have been successes and it is hoped that further progress can be made in this challenging area.

How many of the 22 individuals who have abandoned the accommodation provided are within the 28 identified as rough sleepers?

The Council seeks to find alternative accommodation for those who leave the Great Western Hotel for whatever reason. Some of these are likely to be rough sleeping but it is difficult to identify the precise figure. The Portfolio Holder referred to two success of re-housing individuals by referral of one to a Devon District Authority in Devon and the other to an authority in another county.

Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Services – Councillor Wright – thanked the Director and all housing staff for their outstanding commitment to tenants and, in presenting her briefing note, highlighted the following:-

- the difficulty in undertaking emergency and essential repairs during the lockdown, although there had been a reduction in requests for non-essential repairs during this period; and
- the positive feedback received from tenants supported by Council Officers during the lockdown

Questions from Committee Members.

- 1 **Councillor M. Mitchell – Fire.** *Can the Portfolio Holder in the light of the concerns within the private sectors of the implication of External Wall Fire Review Form (EWS1) certification for the safety of tenants and home owners state whether local authority housing in Exeter has or will be inspected to the same standard as that required by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors?*

Background

The government recognised that following Grenfell and subsequent MHCLG guidance to landlords it became more challenging for some households to obtain mortgages for high-rise residential properties. It therefore supported of industry efforts to apply consistency in how such properties are valued. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) developed a procedure designed to secure a proportionate valuation judgement to buildings over 18 metres or lower if there were specific concerns; e.g. cladding systems contain combustible materials without fire stopping, wooden balconies, etc.

In short, a) is the building over 18 metres or b) if it is less, would the exterior construction allow fire to spread? The EWS1 form is used by a surveyor making an assessment to record their findings. It must be remembered that the EWS1 form is not a fire risk assessment but provides information for the valuer/lender when deciding whether to provide a mortgage. It is not a legal requirement although of course we take great note of all ministry guidance, have risk assessed all our blocks of flats and are planning detailed compartmentation assessments for all our blocks of flats over the next 4-5 years. The form itself says: *“This form is intended for recording in a consistent manner what assessment has been carried out for the external wall construction of residential apartment buildings where the highest floor is 18m or more above ground level or where specific concerns exist. It should not be used for other purposes”.*

There was an article in the Guardian newspaper about this last month. They identified a capacity issue – “there are only 300 or so experts certified to carry out these inspections and they have been prioritising taller buildings, and those where there is known to be cladding” (none of our blocks have cladding). Further, they found that it could take until 2026 to complete EWS1s just on the 18m+ high-rise blocks and those with cladding. The article also quoted the MHCLG as saying “We do not support a blanket approach to EWS1 forms on buildings, and where owners are able to demonstrate their buildings are safe using other equivalent evidence, we would encourage lenders to accept that. We are investigating further actions we can take to support the industry, including looking at ways to address capacity issues.”

The background information above is provided to help explain our status.

Our status

- We have one block above 18 metres which is Rennes House. It does not have cladding and there are no external features which would facilitate fire spread.
- All our other blocks are less than 18 metres and none have cladding or features which would facilitate fire spread
- We do have some blocks with vertical tiles held on by wood battens, these are very common however fire spread would be slow, easily reached by the fire service and quick to extinguish
- Our ‘clear and safe’ policy ensures communal areas are free from combustible materials as possible – we also ask for combustibles to be removed from balconies (e.g. barbeques)
- Our fire risk assessments now look at surface features
- We make our fire risk assessments available to our leaseholders and third parties on request
- We will be carrying out compartmentation checks of all blocks and have already begun to involve procurement, identify frameworks, etc. One specification is that they make a recommendation if they believe an EWS1 would be beneficial (a double-check for us)

In summary, there are no specific concerns currently that warrant the instigation of an EWS1 form by us, the freeholder. We are nevertheless expecting a continuation of demands for EWS1s. If the lender accepts our stance that none are needed then we normally hear no more. Alternatively, if the lender will not accept our position then the leaseholder is free to engage a suitably qualified consultant to carry out an EWS1 survey and we will take note of its findings but it is not the same as a formal fire risk assessment undertaken by ourselves and for our purposes. Its purpose is to assist the valuation.

A South West Housing Association has adopted a similar approach and attempted to engage with RICS but their request have been ignored.

Comment by the questioner.

This issue is being faced by all local authorities who, although able to authorise inspections, the same is not possible for tenants, including those seeking to proceed with Right To Buy.

Questions from other Council Members.

- 1 **Councillor D. Moore** - *After the national ban on evictions ends at the end of this month, will the Council be implementing or give consideration to its own voluntary extended ban on evictions of Council tenants who have fallen behind on rents due to the impact of COVID pandemic?*

Answer provided in response to the question from the Non-Committee Member in Question 3 above.

The Portfolio Holder stated that every scenario was examined to help those in difficulty including benefit support and other forms of financial assistance, The Director advised that monthly arrears were monitored to check trends over time.

Supplementary question and answer.

What is the period of time during which individuals will not be pursued for failure to pay rent?

The ban on evictions ends at the end of October.

- 2 **Councillor D. Moore** – *How will meaningful tenant participation be enabled as part of the recovery process and how can the Council support the formation and operation of tenants' associations?*

We are very keen to improve our resident involvement service and to meaningfully involve residents in our work.

After much discussion with residents we have reviewed and re-written our Resident Involvement Strategy which is currently out for consultation. We would encourage anyone who has an interest in this area to comment on the new Strategy which they can via a link on our website or Facebook page.

Full details of our plans are recorded in the Strategy itself.

Once the consultation period has ended on 21st October and the Strategy has been approved by the Executive, we will be able to start on our action plan which will include:

1. A new resident involvement structure that allows residents to choose how they want to get involved and to what extent;
2. Regular resident events such as fetes, open days, gardening projects etc.;
3. Some new thriving local residents' groups;
4. Residents undertaking their own projects to improve services and their local environment;
5. Regular tenant training to increase capacity;
6. Improved two way communication, especially via internet, smartphone and social media; and
7. 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.

Specifically on the subject of forming residents' associations we will:

1. Find out what appetite there is for such groups among residents;

2. Set up initial meetings with any involved residents to discuss the aims and objectives of any association;
3. Help establish the constitution, together with a code of conduct;
4. Help decide on the number and regularity of meetings;
5. Help to elect key officers;
6. Help with booking rooms; providing refreshments; paying reasonable expenses; providing stationery and suchlike; giving help and advice on running such meetings;
7. Provide reasonable grants for any work they wish to undertake; and
8. Provide any reasonable capacity building training.

The key, of course, to all this is to work with local residents and help them to achieve what they want to achieve. Once local associations are established, there will also be two places on the Council Housing Advisory Board for the Chair and Deputy of the overall associations to represent tenants and leaseholders.

Supplementary questions and answers.

What can the Council do to help increase connections with tenants and support tenant activity many of whom played an important role in helping neighbours during the lockdown as many residents felt isolated? Can tenant participation be encouraged through other areas of Council activity such as Home Call as part of the stock condition work and other work streams so that as many residents as possible have the opportunity to engage?

The purpose of the consultation on resident participation is to hear how resident and neighbourhood associations wish to become involved with the Council and the use of Home Call would be an appropriate means of promoting this process. The Council tenants' magazine "Insight" encourages tenants to participate as well as advising them of services within and outside the Council. Housing officers on routine visits also encourage tenants to participate in the consultation on the resident involvement strategy. Similarly, Customer Service staff, on receiving phone calls from Council tenants encourage them to complete the survey.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Council possessed 4,976 council houses.

Supplementary question in addition to those on the agenda and answer.

What is the current number of voids and are they on schedule to be ready to be re-occupied?

There are 23 major voids with five weeks being the average period a property is left void at the present time as a result of the Covid-19 crises as it had not been possible to clear properties, deliver rubbish to the tip etc. during lockdown and there was also a legal restriction on moving households. Advantage was taken to use some of the voids to house the homeless as part of the "Everyone In" Government initiative. It is hoped that the backlog will be addressed within two to three months.

The Chair, Portfolio Holders and Committee Members asked that their thanks be passed on to staff for their commitment, hard work and significant efforts during the current crisis.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.04 pm

Chair

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CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

03 December 2020

Cllr David Harvey – Update on Portfolio Holder Priorities

<p>City Management</p>	<p>Environment and City Management deliver a large number of the council's front line practical services. They are front facing and have regular daily interactions with our communities. The City Management element of the directorate have largely been focussed with business as usual and making sure service delivery could be adapted to keep staff and residents safe.</p> <p>Our Business Continuity Plans have proved to be extremely useful and allowed us to prepare and be able to maintain the most critical services during the whole period.</p>
<p>Waste, Recycling and Fleet</p>	<p>Waste Management is one of our critical services and a great deal of work has been done to enable the service to operate as safely as possible under current conditions. All waste and recycling collections have continued as normal throughout the pandemic.</p> <p>For our operational workforce we implemented appropriate risk control measures recommended by the Waste Industry Safety & Health Forum, including restriction on collection crew size, 'cohorting' of crews to ensure the same people worked together as much as possible, staggering of start times & locations, social distancing at break times, ample supplies of PPE and hand gels & wipes and instruction in how to use them. These measures were discussed with the workforce and union prior to implementation.</p> <p>We initially prioritised the core services of refuse and recycling collection in anticipation of higher staff absence levels and temporarily suspended bulky waste collection and new garden waste subscriptions. This suspension was lifted in April when it became clear we had adequate staff resources which have remained largely consistent throughout.</p> <p>We used our usual communications channels to encourage residents to carry on recycling as normal. Materials such as glass and garden waste saw increases of 25% in the early weeks, cardboard levels are still high as more people shop on line.</p> <p>It is a great credit to all the waste and recycling staff that all collection rounds for refuse, recycling and garden waste have been completed on the scheduled day throughout the whole period. Their focus continues to be on delivering this vital service.</p>
<p>Public and Green Spaces</p>	<p><u>Public Toilets</u></p> <p>Public Toilets initially saw a huge amount of work, firstly in closing the 11 public toilets that were open, in line with</p>

government guidance. Paris Street toilets remained open throughout the period, barring an initial few days while we gathered the resource required. Then as the restrictions from the lockdown eased in the summer, work focused on reopening more public toilets safely. This included completing Covid-19 compliant risk assessments, and putting in place the signage, training, resources and additional cleaning materials for increased cleaning regimes.

The additional costs, together with some of the layouts of our toilets meant that only five of the 11 toilets could be opened safely. We opened Exeter Quay, Cowick Barton Playing Fields, Heavitree Pleasure Ground and Topsham Quay in addition to Paris Street. These are our most well used toilets and are now cleaned thoroughly with virucidal cleaning agents every hour.

Exeter Quay toilets were in great demand as the good weather and the reopening of hospitality venues for takeout beer and food, brought out large numbers of people to the Quay. With the assistance of our colleagues in Environmental Health and the Police, we employed Covid Marshalls to extend the toilets opening times to 10 pm.

Outdoor play and sports facilities

Around 80 of our Play Areas / Skateparks / Tennis Courts / MUGAS (multi use games areas) were initially closed and this was an enormous task to close and keep closed areas that are designed to be easily accessible. When the first lockdown restrictions started to ease in the summer, play areas were then re-opened with strict Covid-19 compliant cleaning regimes and signs advising of numbers to be using the area at any one time. We employed six additional people (now reducing to four people because of the shorter days) to ensure that these play spaces were kept as clean and safe as possible in line with the guidance.

Skateparks and tennis courts have recently been closed in line with the guidance for the second lockdown and we hope to open them again as soon as restrictions are lifted.. Skateparks are seeing a high number of incidents of people breaking into them to gain access. The governing body (Skate England) appealed to the Government to be given an exemption to keep skateparks open but it was turned down. At Flowerpots Skate park we have had to fence off the skate park with temporary fencing and switched off the lights to deter skaters using this site after dark. We are also seeing issues with skaters breaking into the electric cabinet and turning the lights on to light the park at night. This is clearly very dangerous and additional measures have been taken.

Burials and Cemeteries

Burials teams were initially split up to ensure some degree of resilience and additional plant and equipment were secured in case of increased demand. The teams were ready to work in shifts covering a 14 hours a day period if required. The management team worked with Devon County Council Excess

	<p>Deaths Team, preparing for any increased demand but thankfully did not materialise.</p> <p><u>Cleansing</u></p> <p>Sweeping team members were used to backfill the refuse teams that were either shielding or having to self-isolate. This meant the refuse service was able to keep going. The sweepers that remained within the service saw a significant increase in litter accumulations as businesses changed from eating in, to increased outdoor eating and take out. The teams also complete enhanced cleaning regimes focussing on touch points such as bins and street furniture. The service has remained agile and flexible in responding to the demands of the pandemic and keeping people as safe as possible when returning to our public spaces.</p>
<p>Waterways and Harbour Team</p>	<p>During the initial lockdown period water use on both the canal and estuary was restricted, with only obvious commercial activity being permitted. Our Harbour Patrol team undertook regular checks to provide guidance and advice as necessary.</p> <p>Canal Operatives made use of this quieter period to carry out maintenance tasks that might have otherwise inconvenienced users or prolonged the work (repairs to pontoons etc.).</p> <p>Topsham Ferry ceased service for the lockdown but as restrictions eased, was able to operate for the peak summer weeks, with revised COVID protocols. In order to help meet emergency in-year savings the Ferry service was suspended from September 2020 with plans to restart in April 2021.</p>
<p>Engineering</p>	<p>Engineering staff were heavily involved in planning and implementing of social distancing measures across the city. This included distancing reminder signage, marking pedestrian one-way routes and providing 'safe queuing areas' outside some of the key stores. They continue to improve, expand and refresh the signs and floor stencils.</p> <p>A number engineering projects with the potential to cause disruption to the public were undertaken during the lockdown period (for example the resurfacing of Magdalen Road car park). This had the additional benefit of providing work and therefore cash flow for contractors during an uncertain period.</p> <p>The team also took advantage of the closed play parks and refurbished major elements of play equipment in King George V, Anne Close, Haccombe Close, Cowick Barton and St Thomas play areas.</p> <p>Other schemes such as the renovation of the Station Road Playing Field pitches have continued as normal.</p>

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CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

03 December 2020

Cllr Amal Ghusain – Update on Portfolio Holder Priorities

Overall Service Position

RAMM's Saturday 24 October reopening following the first lockdown, was preceded by two preview days, with invitations targeted at supporter groups and Membership Scheme. Smaller visitor numbers on these days allowed RAMM to implement and adapt the routines and practices that have been put in place to create a Covid-19 safe environment. This includes free pre-booked ticketing (based on 30 minute slots); the use of the Garden Entrance for arrivals and Queen Street for departures; a one-way route around the museum; new signage and cleaning protocols. These are set out in more detail in a Covid-19 Risk Assessment developed and signed off by ECC's Health & Safety Team. To prevent any over-crowding or group 'cross-overs', this places a tight cap on numbers in the building at any one time and therefore the overall total daily numbers that can be achieved.

This together with a visitor route 'bottleneck' on the one-way route through Gallery 20, will limit visitor numbers in this period of Covid-19 operations.

RAMM staff were monitoring visitor 'turn up' rates, bookings, 'walk-ups', behaviour and duration of visit, to set booking availability at appropriate levels, compliant with the Risk Assessment. This will be kept under review when RAMM's second re-opening is permitted. Visitor response to RAMM's reopening has been very positive, with supportive and appreciative feedback.

Details of visit numbers for the ten day period to 2 December are outlined at the end of the report.

Furloughed staff had been returning to work in phases, with the focus on the roles and required for the building's physical reopening. The final group of returning staff re-joined their colleagues on 1st November. Following the Prime Minister's announcement about a second lockdown; the extension furlough and the closure of RAMM, some members of the museum team have been furloughed or part furloughed. As before, a skeleton team remains alongside colleagues associated with Arts Council England funding; all largely working from home. Systems and processes remained in place, allowing for a smooth second re-opening, once permitted.

Collections and Content Work

RAMM re-opened with four temporary exhibitions:

Brian Rice: 60 Years of Paintings & Prints (24 Jan- 17Jan 21)
John Paul Evans: A Different Story (11 Feb- 22 Nov 20)
Anita Corbin: 100 First Women (- new exhibition 24 Oct- 21 Feb 21)
By Royal Appointment; Devon lace-makers (8 Feb- 1 Nov 20)

The lockdown period has been very disruptive to planned exhibition programming and this will have long running impacts, requiring re-scheduling and renegotiation with touring partners and lenders. Other collaborative projects have been badly affected by the closure of museums and galleries across the UK.

Exhibition development and projects led by RAMM staff placed on furlough, have in the main been 'paused', which will cause delays in project delivery and postponements. Lack of access to museum collections and their documentation has impacted on the type and volume of work the remaining team has been able to carry out. We have however been able to progress some existing

priorities and respond to the new challenges presented by the pandemic lockdown. Work undertaken or completed in this period includes:

Contemporary Art Commissions & shows

Covid-19 art commission - Amy Shelton's 'Biophilia: The Exeter Florilegium' be a unique lightbox artwork. The flowers contributed by staff and patients from the Royal Devon & Exeter hospital as well as specimens from the gardens and window boxes of people self-isolating have now been removed from the flower press.

Seedscaapes art commission - Léonie Hampton's photographic work, 'Language of Seeds', will explore her relationship with seeds and gardening during the coronavirus-induced isolation. In September Léonie made several virtual and in-person visits to explore and photograph RAMM's collection of seeds and plants from around the world with the Natural Sciences curator. Her work will be shown alongside specimens from the collection as part of the exhibition 'Seedscaapes: Future-proofing Nature' at RAMM from February 2021. Conservation work on her selected specimens has begun.

Michelle Williams Gamaker – Michelle is a critically-acclaimed moving image and performance artist. 'The Silver Wave' is inspired by objects from the Arctic region in RAMM's collection. It tells the story of Ada Blackjack, an Iñupiat woman from Nome, Alaska, who became the sole survivor of a doomed expedition to Russia's Wrangel Island, in the Arctic Ocean. This commission to celebrate RAMM's year of 'untold stories' is now displayed in the World Cultures gallery. Attendees at RAMM Lates (virtual event) on 12 Nov were able to watch this new piece and join RAMM's Contemporary Art Curator in conversation with the artist.

In Plain Sight Commission - Joy Gregory continues to work on her commission for next year's exhibition 'In Plain Sight: Transatlantic Slavery and Devon' supported by the curatorial team. New content for black history month is available on the RAMM website where she discusses Devon's local links to the slave trade, her research into the RAMM collections, and her creative practice.

Simon Pope and Wassailing – 'Here's to Thee' is a joint commission between University of Exeter Arts and Culture and RAMM and Simon Pope (an internationally renowned artist). It will explore the more-than-human ecology and cultures around cider-making. Cider-farms are rich and complex ecologies, where people, other species, and abiotic natural and synthetic things come into contact with each other. Work has begun on the programme of public events and displays, hosted by the University, RAMM and project partners, will allow audiences to discover more about the rich and fascinating world of microbiomes and better understand how we are all connected. The new project builds on an event with the artist in Jan 2020 where Pope worked in close-collaboration with folk singer-songwriter [Jim Causley](#), and ceramic artist [Abigail North](#) to produce a new folk song and experimental wassail bowl that will be displayed at RAMM in 2021.

New digital content on collections

Remote working has meant that unfurloughed staff have been able to contribute to our own digital resources and respond to the many opportunities that have arisen.

Some of these are:

- Collections Explorer: adding new records, new images or new content to RAMM's Collections Explorer website - 130 records added to CE since July; 34,614 page views on CE from 5,961 unique users
- Untold Stories tweets: adding new tweets to the ongoing series of untold stories for 2020 based on the hidden stories in RAMM's collection (71 so far this year.)
- Twitter account has had an average of 97,600 impressions per month since July
- Google Arts & Culture: new story on the Monatgu's collection of shells (a recently Designated collection) set to launch 18 Nov 2020
- Three more research blogs published on CE since April including one to mark Black History Month. Responses demonstrate international readership.

Digital work in progress:

- Bedrock and Education versions of Minecraft maps being launched later this month; enables interaction with the collections through play
- Work in transferring the HMS Challenger website to a new provider ready for 2022 150th anniversary – platform more user friendly.
- Google Arts & Culture: two new stories in progress including translating 'By Royal Appointment' exhibition to online content.
- Developing and testing a better search system for Collections Explorer – the faceted search will let people filter results so online visitors can find what they want quickly and easily. That's being deployed to the live site this week

New Acquisitions

While collecting activity is reduced (the furlough of curatorial staff has reduced the capacity and expertise required for grant applications), RAMM has made several significant new acquisitions. The temporary easing of lockdown facilitated transport of the items to RAMM and external conservation specialists. Acquisitions include:

'The interior of Exeter Cathedral' by Thomas Girtin, 1797. This exceptional watercolour is by far the most informative view that survives showing the cathedral interior as it was before the major changes undertaken 1810-30. Purchased with support from the Art Fund, Kent Kingdon bequest and Friends of RAMM. Display date spring 2021. Online content available and featured on BBC Radio Devon.

'Breathe' by Michelle Sank. A series of eight works by internationally acclaimed and Exeter-based social documentary photographer taken in March and April 2020 whilst the artist was isolated from her partner and social group during lockdown. Supported by a grant from the Contemporary Art Society's Rapid Response Fund. Display date spring / summer 2021.

James Chadwick's lap desk. Chadwick (1771-1855) spent some 15 years in Exeter where he was editor of the *Exeter weekly news*. In 1837 he and his family moved to the USA (taking the desk with him). His son became the 'father of American baseball'. Considerable cost of shipping from the USA covered by the donor. Blog article pending.

Press releases are pending for two other significant artworks.

Audience Development Activity

Online engagement

Whilst the museum building has been closed, the focus has been on engaging with audiences online. Online events continue to be important, both when the museum is closed but also upon reopening as there is currently no space in the museum for physical events. This is due to the one-way system in the museum and the use of the Courtyard area for café seating. We are therefore having to be creative about online activity, with an aim that, covid situation permitting, we might be able to reinstate some limited physical events from April 2021.

Achates Philanthropy Prize 2020 National Showcase

RAMM was chosen as one of the eight arts organisations chosen for the Achates Philanthropy Prize National Showcase, taking top place in the South West. Normally, Achates awards a prize that celebrates cultural giving but this time they wanted to shine a light on the work the organisations such as RAMM are doing throughout the pandemic. RAMM was selected as the South West project by a 19-strong panel of judges representing some prestigious cultural and philanthropy organisations. The showcase celebrates the many ways in which art generates value – looking beyond economic value alone to encompass intrinsic value, with proven benefits to mental health, physical health and social wellbeing, community building, educational value and innovation.

Lockdown Legends

RAMM's Lockdown Legends exhibition went live in September, showcasing the stories of local people who had shown particular kindness, courage, humanity or ingenuity during the Covid-19 crisis. We received a wide range of nominations from refuse collectors to face mask creators, fundraising heroes to taxi drivers-turned-delivery men, and many more. All of them were truly inspiring, showing how our communities have pulled together during the crisis. The nominations were reviewed by a panel which consisted of broadcaster and presenter Angela Rippon CBE, President of Exeter City Football Club, Julian Tagg, Exeter City Councillor Amal Ghusain, and RAMM Museum Manager Camilla Hampshire. The stories now feature in an online exhibition on [Showcase](#) and a physical exhibition hosted in several venues around Exeter and Devon including Exeter's Historic Guildhall, Princesshay; a number of libraries across the county, Barnstaple Museum and Powderham Castle. They will also be held for posterity in the Devon Heritage Centre. The project gained a considerable amount of positive press and social media coverage.

Roaming with RAMM

Following our successful RAMM at Home project, we developed an activity aimed at encouraging and inspiring people to get out and about and enjoy some fresh air, after the long months of lockdown. Roaming with RAMM was an exciting historic treasure hunt. It took the form of a series of six weekly summer challenges aimed at encouraging families to explore the city on foot, discovering fascinating historic objects along the way. Each challenge started directly outside the museum, with six clues released weekly via our social media channels and RAMM's website. As well as providing an opportunity to get out and enjoy the beautiful city of Exeter, Roaming with RAMM was also an opportunity for people to re-connect with the museum whilst it was closed. The project allowed families to continue to be inspired by RAMM's collections, finding out more about how they are linked to the city of Exeter along the way.

Online events

In August, storyteller Clive PiG brought the museum's objects to life through a series of dramatic and interactive tales, entwining music, song, rhythm and rhyme. We released these across our social media and website for people to enjoy from the comfort of home. Over a thousand people have viewed these stories to date. We have held a number of online Zoom events including an art history session on The Grand Tour, two musical composition workshops in collaboration with the Devon Philharmonic Orchestra for GCSE and A-level music students, a CEDA networking talk (see below) and a very successful artists Q&A event as part of our 'Out and About' project. We have also used the opportunity of national 'virtual events' to shine a light on RAMM's rich content resources. In July, we brought together a wealth of online content for the virtual Archaeology Week and in September celebrated the Heritage Open Days festival, showcasing Hidden Nature from the RAMM collections. This brought together videos, games, online articles and stories.

RAMM Lates Online

We hosted our first RAMM Lates Event online, an evening of talks, tours, games and musical entertainment. The theme was Women and the event was a great success with 260 tickets booked, and a host of positive comments received online. The evening included live zoom talks and Q&As: Photographer Anita Corbin introduced her exhibition: 100 First Women Portraits. Beth French, ocean swimmer and one of Anita's First Women, talked inspiringly about how she has tackled seemingly impossible feats of endurance and adventure. Moving image and performance artist Michelle Williams Gamaker talked about her work The Silver Wave which was inspired by objects from the Arctic region in RAMM's collection.

Throughout the evening, people were encouraged to participate on social media, following a cocktail recipe from Oddfellows; listening to a specially-created Spotify soundtrack featuring female performers who are outstanding in the world of music; playing an online game of First Women Bingo and joining in discussions about who should be in the next 100 First Women exhibition. Videos shown on YouTube throughout the evening included a talk from RAMM's Fine Art curator highlighting some of the most impressive paintings we have in our collection painted by female

artists, a talk about Constance Sladen and why is she important to RAMM and a performance of Camden Reeves' composition 'Music for Glass Cabinets', a beautiful piece of music celebrating the museum as a whole.

Headline social media stats for the day (not including previous marketing of the event):

Instagram – 5,535 impressions in total across Lates content

Facebook – reach 4,492 in total across Lates content

Twitter – 34,000 impressions in total across Lates content

Volunteering

We launched our new online volunteer management system, iVolunteer, powered by Better Impact. All volunteers have been set up on the system and training has been carried out. The new system makes it easier to manage volunteers, track their hours, see their availability, create rotas and allocate shifts. It also makes recruitment, online training and reporting much simpler. When the museum reopened, we enabled the return to work of a number of volunteer visitor guides, providing training and support.

Ganesh Chaturthi

On 22 August, we opened up the museum briefly to welcome a small number of representatives from the Hindu Cultural Centre in to celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi with prayers. This was live streamed to the wider Hindu community. One person said on the day: "I cannot begin to express how much this means to us." Another said, "It was a striking reflection of how promoting diversity is at the centre of the RAMM management's direction, and very much welcome by Exeter Hindu Cultural Centre and the wider Devon community."

Disability and accessibility

We continued our collaboration with our disability partner, CEDA, moving our monthly arts and culture networking meetings online. Our Audience Development Lead presented an interactive session on community engagement and 'the new normal' to gain feedback into what might work in the future, receiving some valuable feedback on potential improvements to the accessibility of the museum.

This feedback from a deaf and disabled audience was incorporated into our re-opening planning and we were able to introduce a number of accessibility improvements for visitors, including updated accessibility information on our website and digitisation of all our labels, enabling blind or visually-impaired people to access information via screen readers on their smartphones. We also produced a BSL welcome back video for visitors.

Reopening communications and signage

A great deal of work went into the preparations for reopening. A communications campaign provided a drip feed of content about reopening, including providing information about what to expect and the need to book tickets online in advance. The website was extensively updated to reflect the changed circumstances in the museum.

We produced extensive new signage scheme for the museum. These ranged from exterior signage, wayfinding, instructional posters, floorplans, donation information, marketing posters and pieces signposting to further information online. We also took the opportunity to redesign our toilet signage to be gender neutral, following feedback from participants in our Queering the Museum project.

LGBTQ+

We continued our work on the Out and About: Queering the Museum project despite the museum being closed. The four commissioned artists for the project have all produced videos to introduce themselves and their work to RAMM's audiences. We hosted a very successful public Artists' Platform online event at the end of the month for further sharing of their work. We have carried out training in collecting oral histories and our project partners will begin working with members of the LGBTQ+ community on collecting queer stories and reinterpretations of RAMM's collections later this autumn. We have recruited a team of five research volunteers who are exploring the collections

through a queer lens over the coming months. We have had initial meetings with YAY! (LGBTQ+ youth Cornwall) and X-Plore youth to introduce the project and begin planning workshop sessions.

Young people

Over months when the museum has been closed, RAMM has been working with its youth panel to develop an engaging social media campaign. This campaign looked at the youth panel members' own personal collections. It told some fascinating stories about objects they collected but also, often quite unintentionally, revealed a poignant glimpse of the personality of the collectors themselves. The panel released a series of 12 weekly, one minute videos, which they each filmed and edited themselves during lockdown and the result was a fascinating assortment of collector's items ranging from bicycles to decorative masking tapes!

RAMM Operational Activity

Key staff have remained on site to meet building security and maintenance needs, also to provide contractor access for the installation of the Queen Street lift which was completed in time for the museum's reopening on 24 October.

Key functions maintained

Staff maintained building security and the 24/7 call-out rota as well as all H&S maintenance checks, weekly alarm testing, water flushing etc. and providing safe access for staff.

Site Covid safety

Covid-safe working practices were constantly updated and implementation continued for all staff who required access to RAMM sites as lockdown began to be lifted.

Monitoring & Response

Monitoring Environmental, Pest and Building Management systems continued, including responding to any problems found, including calling in contractors as needed. Environmental readings were provided to the Government Indemnity Scheme and lenders weekly.

Contractor and Staff Access

The team provide continued attendance to enable ongoing contractor and consultant access for key building works (e.g. Queen Street accessible lift installation, Queen Street flooring replacement). They also undertook enabling works, so contractors can complete pre-booked works at Bradninch offices (installation of new fire alarm). They provided emergency access to staff on request to all sites.

Planning & Preparation for reopening

Operational Plans were designed and implemented for reopening. Part-time unfurloughing of key staff enabled the team to design, develop, and deliver high quality signage and wayfinding strategy for the building; develop a system for offering a free timed ticketing system for safe entry on visitors' return; and refresh the shop at RAMM to maximise the potential of Christmas sales, including development of an online shopping offer

A full training package for returning Front of House staff was developed and delivered in the run-up to the first preview opening day on 21st October.

Practical works

A wide range of work was undertaken in preparation for re- opening. This included a deep conservation clean of all collections on open display; general cleaning; Installation of signage, ongoing redecorations throughout front and back-of-house areas, changing use of back office areas to facilitate social distancing in staff areas.

24 October- 4 November in numbers

A total of around 2,600 people visited across the ten days of public opening in the period 24 October to 4 November, with highest numbers across the weekend 31 October/1st November. Increased understanding of visitor patterns and ratio of 'turn up' rate to bookings, should allow the museum to grow these numbers after the second lockdown ends, but within the safe limits set out in the Covid 19 Risk Assessment.

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CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

03 December 2020

Cllr Amal Ghusain – Update on Portfolio Holder Priorities

Exeter Community Wellbeing

Exeter Community Wellbeing (01392 265000 / www.exeter.gov.uk/wellbeing)

Exeter City Council, Wellbeing Exeter have been working together to provide practical help and support for local people to get through the coronavirus pandemic. We set up **Exeter Community Wellbeing** to assist individuals and community groups to help and support each other at this challenging time. The community hotline is embedded within our ECC Customer Service Centre with several dedicated staff responding to calls, online requests and making outbound calls to vulnerable residents.

The hotline and online forms for residents to request support have been in operation since March and we have made over 2,850 connections through the platform with thousands more at neighbourhood level. The learning from the first lockdown, relationships with local organisations and an established system has been vital in providing an instant response during lockdown 2. Whilst demand was relatively low over the summer, an increase was experienced prior to Lockdown#2 in October. As such the programme was fully re-established and in operation for the first day of the second lockdown on 2nd November 2020.

During lockdown 2 there have been approximately 15 calls each day from residents needing support, with several spikes occurring in line with national and local communication.

Whilst many of the connections during the first lockdown were focussed at practical support such as food deliveries, prescription pick-ups and connections to local groups, the main theme for help and advice during lockdown 2 is for individuals and families in financial hardship. Residents are being supported to apply for the Wellbeing Support Fund, access to local free food resources and signposted to local services such as Citizens Advice

With support from Exeter Connect, a network of 7 local neighbourhood groups are supporting with local volunteer help and ECFC City Community Trust are providing emergency delivery response for food & prescriptions and wellbeing check-in calls. Insight from local community offers and themes of the support required is surfacing through Exeter Connect and our team of Community Builders through Wellbeing Exeter.

Clinically Extremely Vulnerable – CEV

Working in partnership with Devon County Council and district authorities across Devon we are providing direct support to those residents classified as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV), these are people who were 'shielding' during the first Lockdown.

A national letter & email providing government information and advice to CEVs was delivered to residents in England on 4-6th November, with Devon County Council sending a further communication to 35,000 CEVs in the county during w/c 9th November. This provided details of local district hotlines and further local support. There are over 3500 CEVs in Exeter.

Approximately 50% of the hotline demand is from CEVs per day, with 5-10 residents contacting ECC for support. Urgent delivery support is being provided by ECFC, wellbeing support through Wellbeing Exeter, connections to local neighbourhood groups and financial support through the Wellbeing Support Fund for individual CEVs and their families in financial hardship. Aldi food vouchers have been sourced and provided to those residents needing an urgent food delivery.

We are now receiving a daily data feed of CEV residents requesting support via national hotline. A daily outbound call list is completed by Customer Services team with 56 residents being directly supported so far. Many have appreciated there is local support on hand should situations change over the winter and practical support be required.

A funding allocation from Government via DCC of £27,295 has been agreed for current lockdown CEV support for Exeter, with resources being utilised to:

- Cover additional staffing costs and overtime required to service the hotline
- Provide direct communication to CEVs and vulnerable groups regarding the Exeter Community Wellbeing Offer
- Support wider citywide comms e.g. radio & visual signage
- Provide small seed funding grants to local mutual aid support groups to enable them to stand up their operations

A £2000 grant distributed to Exeter Connect for immediate local neighbourhood group support, to enable these groups to provide immediate support to their local volunteers and residents. Groups can access up to £250 for standing up their local support offer.

Access to Food

A public community food information resource has been developed for Exeter Community Wellbeing, its partners and the wider community. This contains information on:

- Local free food sources
- Local commercial food sources and delivery options
- National Supermarket delivery sources and priority food slots for vulnerable people

There is also a food information resource directly related to free food for street homeless. These are available via www.exeter.gov.uk/weelbeing and have been circulated amongst local networks and community groups.

There has been an incredible local community response to supporting people with food, with 8 local organisations providing a free food and local delivery offer to those residents in most need of support.

Devon County Council are coordinating the response to the Winter COVID fund, providing support for children on free school meals during Christmas and Half Term. A voucher system for supermarkets and local food networks is being explored to provide meals during school holidays. There are approximately 1200 young people registered for free school meals in Exeter.

Digital Inclusion – vulnerable families

An initiative has developed through the Education Strand of the City Recovery Plan to provide families on low incomes with digital devices to support children isolating with their learning.

We are providing immediate funding of £10k from existing discretionary funds related to COVID-19. Exeter City Council received a grant of £28,000 from the Alcoa Howmet Global

Foundation and funding from Devon County Council to support vulnerable families during COVID-19.

The project is being led by the Ted Wragg Trust on behalf of local education partners and will build a bank of devices to be used across the network of Exeter primary schools for families in financial hardship. A quote from Rachel Shaw, CEO of the Exeter Learning Academy Trust:

“Thank you so much for your efforts with this. I had the pleasure of popping into a school leaders meeting this afternoon and telling them the good news and they were delighted that the City was working in this way to support their families. It’s not only showing our families how much the City cares but also giving our school leaders a real boost at time when they most need it.”

A progress update on the impact of this initiative will be provided at the next Scrutiny

Financial Support

The Council has two key funds to support wellbeing of communities and residents during COVID-19

For organisations and groups:

COVID Community Grants since March 2020:

- o We have received a total 121 applications
- o Awarded 85 applications totalling - £115,168.95

For individuals in severe financial hardship:

COVID Wellbeing Support Fund since June 2020:

- o £174,850 received from Govt via DCC, eligible for spend to September 2021
- o Awarded £52,981 to 233 residents (emergency food, white goods, emergency fuel, transport to medical appointments)

Communications

Weekly briefing notes are being compiled and circulated internally to all staff and members. A weekly themed press release is being circulated through communication networks, partners and social media. The Exeter Coronavirus Facebook pages are in operation with 7100 followers, daily updates and interactions being provided.

The weekly Exeter Community Wellbeing blog is relaunched providing key information, advice & guidance and to share stories and local impact of community response to Lockdown#2

Exeter Connect

Exeter Community Initiatives were awarded the contract to run the new Voluntary Sector Support Service for Exeter in December 2019. The service is now called ‘Exeter Connect’

Staffing update

Exeter Connect has Service Manager role in place since April this year (job share). Two Development Workers (21 hours each) have recently joined the team, both are very experienced in community development. There is also a full-time administrator. There is still the scope to recruit one more full-time Development Worker, although recruitment is on hold due to lockdown.

Website launch

The Exeter Connect website was launched at the end of September. The resources section of the website will be updated regularly. Communities officers from the council are liaise closely with the Exeter Connect team on information, advice and guidance that would be useful resources for community groups and organisations.

Lockdown support for local groups

Exeter Connect have a weekly check in by email throughout lockdown with all the Local Area Teams to keep up to date with progress and offering support.

The connections and support networks which were formed previously appear to have been maintained with 7 local groups formally providing an offer of local support with key contact information.

Funding has been provided for Exeter Connect to respond (as highlighted above). One example is the request for a phone as a central point of contact. E.g. Pennsylvania needed a smart phone to enable WhatsApp conversations.

Some areas i.e Countess Wear & Topsham have expressed concern over their low volunteer numbers. Groups have been advised that others areas do have a surplus of volunteers if required.

VCSE Sector Survey

The survey is now live, and closes on 25th November.

Aims:

- To build a clearer picture of the state of the sector currently
- To find out what support needs there are in the sector
- To work out the best approach to help groups stay afloat moving forward

There have been 42 responses so far, with 21 of respondents asking for more support. A report will be compiled from responses form groups in the city by mid-December.

Citizen Advice Exeter

Citizen Advice Exeter were appointed by the Council in October 2019 to provide a city wide Independent Information Advice and Advocacy Service. The purpose of the service is to:

- Ensure free, independent, confidential and impartial advice, information and advocacy is available to help people resolve the problems they face.
- Help address the widening inequality gap for Exeter communities in terms of health, income, employment and access to services
- Work alongside the Council's Housing Needs Team to support customers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and are experiencing financial and budgeting difficulties

Citizens Advice Exeter continues to assist the wider community of Exeter, and those specifically affected by Coronavirus.

The latest statistics (below) show the increasing demand for advice, as the financial impact of Coronavirus has started to build in the last quarter. With the recent announcement of the extension of the furlough scheme until 31st March 2021, and extensions to payment holiday arrangements for mortgages and consumer credit, this is likely to give some breathing space to those facing income reductions and/or job losses in

the short term. However, any relief is only likely to be temporary without further Government support for those with housing arrears and placing uplifts to Universal Credit and other welfare benefits on a permanent basis.

	01/04/2020 – 30/06/2020	01/07/2020 – 30/09/2020	% Change
Clients	1797	1970	+9.6%
Benefit enquiries	1993	2731	+37.0%
Debt enquiries	463	658	+42.1%
Housing enquiries	177	241	+36.1%

In relation to employment enquires, we had 593 enquiries last year in the 6-month period 1st April 2019 – 30th September 2019, compared to 709 enquiries in the same period in 2020; an overall increase of 19.5%. The Citizens Advice Exeter report – We Can Work it Out – see: <https://www.citizensadviceexeter.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/We-Can-Work-it-Out-FINAL.pdf> highlights the challenges faced by employees and employers alike in the first three months of the furlough scheme.

Citizens Advice Exeter has been able to secure some short-term additional funding to help to support an increase in demand for its services, but is looking for longer-term funding to support its work as the impact of Coronavirus on people's finances, housing and employment situations is likely to last long past the medical emergency.

Ward profiles of the data are available on the Citizen Advice Exeter website.

The contract includes a requirement for the CAB Court team to identify clients who are at risk of homelessness and refer them to the Council to offer support to prevent this. Referral systems are being reviewed due to COVID restrictions. Citizen Advice have taken part in the Exeter Community Wellbeing partnership response to COVID. It has been really valuable to have a close working relationship, so that call handlers can make quick referrals for people who could benefit from financial help and support.

COVID-19 Community Grants Fund

The Exeter COVID-19 Community Action Fund was set up at the outset of the COVID pandemic to help community groups and organisations as they step up to help those people most affected by the pandemic. The fund is supported by Exeter City Council and a generous £100,000 contribution from the Exeter Chiefs Foundation.

The Fund is still open to support groups and organisations with a one-off grant of up to £1,000 to support projects for community led activities that will:

- meet urgent needs within the community
- cover transport costs for getting vital supplies to people isolated at home
- help people to stay connected and informed
- help people maintain and support mental health and wellbeing

COVID Community Grants since March 2020:

We have received a total 121 applications

We have awarded 85 applications totalling - £115,168.95

We plan to review the criteria for this grant over the next month depending on the demand from this second lockdown.

Ward grants have been available since the start of October and are progressing well. The main request for funding is through ward grants.

