

## **CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date: Thursday 1 February 2024

Time: 5.30 pm

Venue: Civic Centre

Members are invited to attend the above meeting.

If you have an enquiry regarding any items on this agenda, please contact Pierre Doutreligne, Democratic Services Officer (Committees) on 01392 265486.

Entry to the Civic Centre can be gained through the rear entrance, located at the back of the Customer Service Centre, Paris Street.

### *Membership -*

Councillors Vizard (Chair), Rees (Deputy Chair), Atkinson, Begley, Fullam, Hannaford, Harvey, Holland, Knott, Miller, Patrick, Sparling, Wardle and Warwick

## **Agenda**

### **1 Apologies**

### **2 Minutes**

(Pages 5 -  
12)

To approve and sign the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 30 November 2023.

### **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**

Details of questions should be notified to the Democratic Services Manager via the [committee.services@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:committee.services@exeter.gov.uk) email by 10.00am at least three working days prior to the meeting. For this meeting any questions must be submitted by 10.00am on Monday 29 January 2024.

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/>

**6 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order No. 20**

To receive questions from Members of the Council to the relevant Portfolio Holders for this Scrutiny Committee. The Portfolio Holders are:-

Councillor Denning - Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Support Services  
Councillor Foale - Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Democratic Services and Environmental Health  
Councillor Pearce - Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homelessness Prevention  
Councillor Williams - Portfolio Holder for Place and City Management

Advance questions from Members relating to the Portfolio Holders should be notified to the Democratic Services Manager via the [committee.services@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:committee.services@exeter.gov.uk) email.

**7 Portfolio Holder Update - Corporate and Democratic Services & Environmental Health** (Pages 13 - 18)

To consider an update report by the Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Democratic Services & Environmental Health

**8 Waste Recycling and Fleet** (Presentation)

To receive the presentation by the Service Lead - Environmental Health & Community Safety

**9 Street Cleansing Litter Bin Review** (Pages 19 - 26)

To consider the report of the Public and Green Spaces Service Manager

10 **Allotment Service Review**

(Pages 27  
- 32)

To consider the report of the Public and Green Spaces Service Manager

11 **Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan**

(Pages 33  
- 40)

Please see for noting a link to the schedule of future business proposed for the Council which can be viewed on the Council's web site. This online document is a source for Members to raise issues at Scrutiny on forthcoming Executive agenda items:-

<https://exeter.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-meetings/forward-plan-of-executive-decisions/>

Also attached is a draft work plan of future scrutiny items.  
Should Members wish to raise issues in respect of future business please notify Pierre Doutreligne in advance of the meeting.

**Date of Next Meeting**

The next scheduled meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee will be held on **Thursday 28 March 2024** at 5.30 pm in the Civic Centre.

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## CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30 November 2023

### Present:

Councillor Matthew Vizard (Chair)  
Councillors Rees, Atkinson, Begley, Fullam, Harvey, Holland, Miller, Patrick, Sparling and Warwick

### Apologies:

Councillors Hannaford, Knott and Wardle

### Also present:

Assistant Director of Housing (LB) and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

### In attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk	- Leader
Councillor Barbara Denning	- Portfolio Holder Council Housing Development and Support Services
Councillor Martin Pearce	- Portfolio Holder Communities & Homelessness Prevention
Councillor Ruth Williams	- Portfolio Holder Place and City Management

## 35 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 5 October 2023 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

## 36 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Fullam declared a non pecuniary interest relating to Minutes 39 and 40 as an officer with Sanctuary Housing.

## 37 **Questions from the Public under Standing Order No. 19**

No questions from members of the public were received.

## 38 **Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order No. 20**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the questions below to the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homelessness Prevention – Councillor Pearce had been submitted by Councillor Rees and had been circulated in advance to Members of the Committee. The response of the Portfolio Holder is set out in italics.

1). What are the portfolio holder's plans and what funds are available for helping people with the cost of living this winter?

*The question could also be answered by the Portfolio Holder for Housing Development and Support Services, and he referred to the Household Support Tranche 4, which had been considered by the Executive and Council and had the main share of the funding that was available. It was a well designed scheme and he referred the Member to the minutes of those meetings.*

Councillor Rees asked a supplementary question and referred to the excellent support detailed on the Council's web site and if similar support was planned for this year.

*Appropriate signposting would be in place this year.*

2). Can the Portfolio Holder indicate the likely level of grant funding he is looking to recommend for inclusion in the Council's budget for next year, to support the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau?

*The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homelessness Prevention said he was unable to advise that figure at present.*

Councillor Rees made a comment and referred to the work on the homeless working group and one of themes was around the continuity of funding. She asked if he was aware of plans for funding but did not know the figure currently.

*The Portfolio Holder Citizens Advice confirmed that no funding had been received since 2019, but there was a contract to provide information and advice services until the end of March 2024. No decision had been reached on a new contract or any alternative funding method if the service was continued.*

### 39 **Update from the Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Support Services**

Councillor Denning reported on the Council Housing Development and Support Services areas of her Portfolio, detailing the issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities, major ongoing programmes of work, issues impacting delivery, financial performance and budget requirements and potential changes being considered.

Councillor Denning responded to an advance question from Councillor Rees as follows:-

1). The Portfolio Holder report refers, to 'Council owned brownfield housing development sites are unviable, and will remain so without significant government interventions.' Is that every single site? How many of those did Exeter City Living assess? What is the funding gap between the Council funds and the additional funds required?

The cost of developing on brownfield land is higher due to the abnormal costs associated with demolition, asbestos removal, contaminated ground, utility upgrades and services diversions. The Housing team has assessed a number of sites, some in more detail than others due to the design development of each scheme, and due to brownfield development costs, tender price inflation and high interest rates all of the sites assessed are showing viability challenges. Each site is unique, and the size of the viability gap is different, but this will be a six-figure sum per property in most cases. Some of this gap can be met by bidding to Homes England for Affordable Housing Grant and that the pressure will reduce significantly if, and when the interest rates return to their previous levels. Exeter City Living have contributed towards the viability assessments carried out on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) sites as part of their engagement as Development Agent.

Councillor Rees asked a subsequent question, noting the uncertainty of the national position, and queried whether this would have a significant impact on the Council's housing building targets.

The Portfolio Holder responded that this should not have an effect and the Council will still attempt to reach the house building targets. She hoped the Government would increase the funding and reduce the cost of borrowing to enable the Council to build more houses.

The Portfolio Holder offered the following responses to Members' questions:-

- tenants living in the new passive houses built had adapted well. She had spoken to those tenants and although there was some adjustment, it was a good way to live as well as having cheaper energy bills.
- in referencing scrutiny under the Consumer Regulation Scheme, arrangements at Exeter City Council included residents' groups including a Tenants' Voice, and the Council Housing and Development Advisory Board which all offered the opportunity for dialogue. There was also a Compliance and Complaints Panel. Following a further comment on discussion with residents, the Portfolio Holder undertook to raise the comments in relation to the Residents' Engagement Terms Strategy at a Portfolio Holders meeting and discuss with the Director.
- the position in relation to the Laings properties at Newman Road and Merrivale Road, had been raised regularly and was a priority to progress when there was funding to do so. She had spoken to the Assistant Director Housing, as there were a number of other issues associated with the build and she invited the Member to email the Service Lead - Housing Assets.
- the funds for the completion of 25 properties as part of Phase 1 of Vaughan Road were available to completion.
- achieving the retrofit programme would depend on the funding allocation, but every effort was being made to retrofit as many as possible depending on the outcome of funding bids. The Assistant Director Housing also thanked his colleague, the Service Lead - Housing Assets, who had worked hard to secure funding, winning awards as well as sharing the experience at a number of conferences and events around the country.

The Assistant Director Housing also responded to the following comments in support of the Portfolio Holder:-

- relating to the mutual exchange scheme and a number of incentives for any resident wishing to downsize, where they may be under occupying any property. Any resident had the opportunity to work with the Housing Officer to help identify such opportunities.
- sites can be unlocked by working in partnership and with other housing associations and where land may be owned by the Council that may help result in a site becoming more viable. A fuller response could be offered.
- the acronym MMC stood for modern methods of construction.
- in relation to a comment on those tenants seeking Right to Buy who may have benefited from the retrofitting of their property. There had been a reduction of the right to buy applications more recently. He added that in the scheme there is what is termed a 'cost floor', if a significant level of work was carried out at the property then the discount would be reduced accordingly and may not be as attractive for the tenant to but under the right to buy incentive but the Council achieves more money to build more homes.

Members noted the report.

#### 40 Council Housing Strategy

The Assistant Director Housing presented the report which summarised the contents of the proposed Council Housing Strategy 2023-2027 and the context in which it has been developed. A copy of the full strategy document was circulated with the agenda. The Strategy set out the overarching plan for the next four years as well as setting out how they are going to manage and grow the service.

He referred to the following five key objectives of: -

- enhancing the resident's experience
- providing the right homes in the right places
- providing value for money services
- supporting our residents
- ensuring the safety of our homes and residents

The Assistant Director Housing sought Members' enquiries and comments: -

- the majority of the contracts were outsourced, Mears was the main contractor, and there is an innovative practice of maintenance for a set price per property and price for void properties to ensure that any empty properties are then offered to a lettable standard. A team of two electricians work in house carrying out small jobs in a reactive way.
- a new contract has been secured for the gas engineering and gas safety checks. Although overseen by his colleague the Service Lead (Housing Assets) he was able to advise that the Mears contract had been running for two years, but prior to procurement, an option paper for insourcing was considered by Members.
- he welcomed the suggestion of a year on year figure to better reflect satisfaction trends. The Government have introduced through the regulation tenant satisfaction measures, with an annual set of 21 questions that every social landlord has to ask all tenants. The analysis does help to offer a comparison with neighbouring and similar authorities with retained stock. The satisfaction levels are reported to the Council Housing and Development Advisory Board, but he would in future report the stock condition survey to this Scrutiny Committee. The stock condition survey was nearly completed and will meet the Government regulations and dictates of knowledge. He added that whilst they did take seriously any response to Councillors' enquiries, there was a process which they operated to with an explanation to the Councillors and tenants. They were reactive over a genuine problem.
- he would take the comments back to colleagues in relation to including the target performance in 2022/23 for referrals to external partner organisations and evictions. He added that evictions were rare and were at zero, but he would check that detail. The aim was to address proactively all cases where people fall into significant arrears offering support to pay or with the help of benefits.
- following a Member's comment that eviction may not necessarily be seen as a failure of service, and the importance of having a robust back up, he announced that he would be talking to the Portfolio Holder about formulating an Arrears Policy shortly.
- he would obtain a response to a Member who raised an enquiry in relation to the assessment of need made for homes of those individuals with a range of needs. He did reassure the Member around adaptations is that the HRA has

a significant sum ring fenced to provide aids and adaptations. The Council has an occupational therapist in their service, who can offer an assessment to make sure any referral was carried out quickly.

- with regard to buying in built properties, there was a small acquisitions budget to buy suitable properties from the open market. They were also able to use a portion of the Right to Buy receipts. Those people who have purchased under the Right to Buy Scheme were asked to give the Council first right of refusal when they wished to move on.
- Environmental Health oversee the Empty Homes, but there are grant incentives for owners to renovate the property requesting an undertaking that they could be used in the temporary housing stock for a period. It remained a challenging area.
- the Housing Officers were the first contact for dealing with anti-social behaviour, where there were 75 to 85 open cases at any one time, with up to 10 cases open and closed a month. The main complaints related to noise nuisance and child nuisance particularly during the summer months. A multiagency Anti-Social Behaviour Action team chaired by the Council's Environmental Health service with representatives from Housing, the police, social services and other registered social providers in the region to discuss more complex anti-social behaviour and agree an action plan. The Anti-Social Behaviour Policy Strategy was currently being reviewed and would be presented to Members in due course.
- the level of anti-social behaviour averaged at 120 cases a year with seasonal peaks and troughs ranging from 53 in April 2023, to 97 in August. The level did not dramatically increase during the Covid pandemic, but reports were still received during the lockdown.
- in terms of using recent technology, the component sensors for door entry systems for communal flats sit with the Council and they will be introducing a key fob system for contractors to monitor their visits. With the support of the Council's IT company Strata, an online tenant's portal will enable tenants to log onto their individual accounts as well as make payments and report repairs. He was proud that they were one of the first services in the Council to introduce this opportunity.
- all of the data would be included in the report to the Executive.

The Assistant Director Housing also responded to advance questions from a Member relating to whether the number of individuals in Council temporary accommodation was a static or rolling figure, of the projections for temporary need, as well as the pressure for temporary accommodation and managed as part of the service budget. The temporary accommodation figure was now at 150, and it was a rolling figure that changed with demand. His colleagues in the Housing Needs and Homelessness team were looking to lease properties to reduce the costs of bed and breakfast to aggregate the costs paying to meet those demands that we have.

He also responded to the Member's question on the assessment of need in relation to the Council Housing Strategy, and what assessment in relation to planning of need has been undertaken for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers (for fixed or travelling sites)? He stated that a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment was also currently being undertaken by consultants on behalf of the City Council. This will identify the need for permanent and transit pitches for the Gypsy and Traveller community (including Travelling Show-people). The results will be used to plan for the provision of additional accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers in Exeter, including through the emerging Exeter Plan. This information would be included in the Strategy.

The Assistant Director Housing agreed to feedback the comments and request for some training in relation to completing the Equalities and Assessment relating to providing an assessment of the impact on those members of society with protected characteristics. The Members thought that this was an area that might be strengthened through training. He would talk to the Policy Officer who looks after equalities within the Council. The Chair suggested a discussion on the support training for officers on the EQIA which may promote a be a wider question revisit.

The Chair referred to the importance of the knowledge of the housing officers of their tenants and the service, and he asked the Assistant Director Housing how the Scrutiny could receive feedback. In reflecting on the changing role of the Housing Officer, it remained a challenging and difficult job, dealing with more complex issues working with other support agencies such as police, health and social services who were under their own pressures. He was happy to arrange an opportunity to have an informal chat with housing officers to talk through the day-to-day changes. The Chair welcomed the opportunity to understand how the Council supported officers in this regard. The Portfolio Holder also referred to the good relationship and communication work with tenants and the Housing Officer.

Members welcomed the comprehensive and informative report.

**RECOMMENDED** that the report be noted, and that Executive note and Council approve the new Council Housing Strategy as summarized in the circulated report.

#### 41 **Tenancy Policy**

The Assistant Director Housing Service presented the report which summarised the revised Tenancy Strategy and Policy following a review and consultation. It is proposed that the revised Tenancy Strategy and Policy 2023-2027 be adopted and implemented. A copy of the Strategy and Policy documents was appended. The Council as a social landlord, had to have due regard as to how tenancies were managed with a Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy.

Particular reference was made to:-

- the proposed change of moving from a fixed term to a lifetime tenancy approach. The Council had introduced a fixed term tenancy policy in 2015 with a two to five years tenancy and introductory period for the first 12 months, provided the rent was paid and the terms and conditions of the tenancy agreement were met.
- the lifetime tenancy scheme was set out in paragraph 6.6 of the report. It was established that following a review of tenants housing circumstances that only 2% of tenants had to have their tenancy ended. A number had moved to a smaller or larger property, but the number of properties returned to let on the Devon Home Choice register was small.
- there were 418 responses to the consultation with 81% being supportive of lifetime tenancies. Reversion to the lifetime tenancy with a probationary period was around the Council's Corporate priorities on building communities to enable those tenants to continue to engage in their local area.

The Assistant Director Housing responded to the following enquiries: -

- there are very few non-statutory successions and he would obtain the answer. They will assess their person's housing need and if they move into a property and it was less than 12 months, if their need was less they would

facilitate them moving to a smaller property to free up the larger property or the succession would not be able to go ahead.

- he explained that the succession is where the tenant passes away and someone remains in the property and their succession to the property. There can only be one succession on a tenancy. The law is that the individual must have lived there for 12 months and must be a partner to reassign the tenancy. Children were not included, as that changed in 2012 after the Localism Act.
- there should be evidence of co habitation, such as joint household bills but the team took a sensible approach.
- there was no automatic move to a lifetime tenancy and if they had been there less than 12 months there would be a case review to establish if that was an appropriate property for them to have.
- the Member suggested that the joint to sole tenancies should be reported, and the Assistant Director would report back and take forward if Members saw that as a useful measure to see what is happening in the stock in the future.
- he clarified the term succession which is where someone dies and succeed the tenancy and an assignment was when the tenancy goes from joint to sole and sole to joint.
- the direct letting figure was in the public domain on the Devon Home Choice portal, but he could also provide that information. An example of a direct match is where someone is in hospital and returning to their existing home is not possible and move to find alternative accommodation to allow them to leave hospital and that is the exceptional circumstance when they use the direct match process. The vast majority use the Devon Home Choice portal.
- with the regeneration of areas those people will be offered alternative and similar accommodation from the Council's stock at the same rent and receive a financial remuneration to assist with moving home, as well as a decamp officer to support people moving house. We are obliged to find alternative accommodation and the opportunity to return to the regenerated area.
- a number of downsizing schemes have been offered in the past, which was at one point was up to £2,000 but the take up was still low. He had spoken personally to people who did not wish to move when they had lived there all their lives. Currently there was an offer of £500 removal fee for people to downsize as well as access to the decamp officer for support.

Members also made the following comments:-

- more houses were needed as there was little turnover in the waiting list and the Member understood the dilemma of those that remain in a property all of their lives. it was appreciated that the ending of a tenancy was difficult, and the lifetime tenancy was a sensible approach but there was underoccupancy in both the private and social sector against the number on the Council Housing waiting list. The Member hoped that those people with less need for the space might be encouraged to downsize their Council property. The Member was disappointed over the outcomes of the fixed term tenancy approach but welcomed the move to the lifetime tenancy approach.
- of concern for the current housing market with not enough social housing being built. The Member hoped there would be cross party working to discuss this further.

The Assistant Director Housing was invited to respond to an advance question from a Member in relation to Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) and of any impact on those aged 16 to 18 years and on care leavers, in accessing housing. He stated that tenancies were only issues to those over the age of 18 years. He thanked the

Member for the comments, and they will amend the EQIA to reflect the comments around young people. Discussions were currently taking place with colleagues from Devon County Council over the issue of housing and moving on of care leavers and housing and the support network and the discussions are still taking place. It would be unusual to offer a tenancy for someone under 18 years, a guarantor would be required either from Audit Social Services or a parent or grandparent.

**RECOMMENDED** that Scrutiny Committee and Executive note and Council approve the new Tenancy Strategy and Policy as summarised in the report.

#### 42 **Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan**

The Chair referred to the work plan and to look at what business was coming forward and to encourage Members to look at what is moving forward and to submit any proposal for consideration using the proforma form.

A Member enquired about the circulation of the Scrutiny proforma list. It was noted that this matter would be considered by a forthcoming meeting of the Scrutiny Programme Board. A Member referred to the list of the topics raised over the last three years and suggested it be made available to Members. Following a request, a link to the scrutiny proposal form would be sent to Members.

Members also noted the Director Finance was due to attend the Scrutiny Programme Board meeting to discuss the opportunity to feed into the annual budget process at an earlier stage in the year.

Members noted the Forward Plan and the Scrutiny Work Plan.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.05 pm

Chair

## REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 1 February 2024

### PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

#### Councillor Foale: Portfolio Holder for Corporate & Democratic Services and Environmental Health

#### 1. Issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities

##### **Democratic Services –**

Continue to support Members through dedicated service to provide training and development opportunities, advice and support to all Members in helping them in their role of ensuring a well-run city.

The Strategic Scrutiny Committee continues to support the work of the Net Zero team and enable scrutiny on the subject with all decisions being to Executive to recommend to Council for approval.

##### **Elections –**

City Council elections were successfully carried out in May 2023.

##### **Legal Services –**

The legal team provides a 'value for money' legal service compared to the cost of instructing external legal firms.

Supporting the Council's strategic priority of 'Leading a well-run council'. The legal team provides legal services to all council teams to enable them to deliver their aims and objectives. For example:

- supporting corporate property by drafting leases and licences in relation to the Council's property portfolio;
- Drafting contracts and providing legal advice on entering into contracts;
- Providing litigation support to council departments. A significant part of this is providing advice and support to the Council's housing team including dealing with all the right to buy applications.
- Providing legal support to licensing and planning committees
- Proving legal support to City Development to assist with the delivery of the Exeter Plan and drafting section 106 agreements and assisting in securing the provision of community infrastructure to support development in the City.

Supporting the Council's strategic priority of 'supported and developed staff and members'. Legal Services provides training and professional development for Council officers:

- There is a focus on professional development of legal officers. The team's first apprentice solicitor qualified as a solicitor in December 2023. There are a further two apprentice solicitors who are undergoing training.;
- Our Planning solicitor is undertaking the Law Society's highly respected post-graduate diploma in Local Government Law and Practice.
- The Team Lead for housing and Litigation provides regular training to the housing team.

### **Environmental Health and Licensing –**

Tackling congestion and accessibility - Active Streets Trial

Promoting active and healthy lifestyles - Active Streets Trial  
Enforcement

Building great neighbourhoods - Active Streets Trial  
Enforcement

## **2. Update or commentary on any major ongoing programmes of work**

### **Democratic Services –**

Work on rolling out Windows 365 for Councillor iPads is being undertaken to ensure Councillors continue to have full access to systems to support them in their role.

2024 induction plan following the election is being developed and finalised ready for May 2024.

Work on assessing how the Democratic Services team operates, in regard to volume of minutes, agenda and reporting management processes are underway to ensure best use of available staff and resources.

### **Human Resources –**

Completion / implementation of revised Organisational Values & Behaviours Framework.

Completion / implementation of revised Employee Performance and Development Review process and documentation. Management training underway (30+ managers already completed)

Successful instigation of HR Apprenticeship Scheme.

Successful progress on the roll out of Employee Self Service provision (iTRENT).

### **Elections –**

The first part of the Elections Act 2022 (Voter ID) was successfully implemented. That includes complying with the new Voter ID legislation.

### **Legal Services-**

Notable matters over the last year include:

- Recovery of long outstanding Community Infrastructure Levy payments from a developer totalling £909,772.52

- Close working with the Housing compliance team in relation to gas servicing and access injunctions to the Council's housing stock. Legal Services issued over 200 legal compliance letters and obtained 29 injunctions through Exeter County Court
- Successfully defending appeals in the Magistrates' Court against revocation of taxi licences;
- Successfully defending appeal in the Magistrates' Court against premises licensing appeals,
- Close working with the Council's Environmental Health Team on Community Trigger cases and cross agency working through ASBAT (Anti-social behaviour action team).

### **Environmental Health and Licensing –**

Questions on air quality and specifically the effect on the community of the Heavitree and Whipton Active Streets Trial have been a major challenge to the council.

The intention was to provide the installation of:

- Physical modal filters, i.e., planters or bollards, which prevent the passage of all motor vehicles; and
- Bus gates, which use signage to prohibit vehicular traffic (except for buses, emergency vehicles and certain other exempt classes of vehicle)

In order to reduce traffic on residential streets and support local people who want to walk, wheel, scoot or cycle. All properties within the area were to remain accessible by car, but residents were warned they may need to use different routes for some journeys.

Despite this being a County Council decision, the backlash from residents claiming a lack of transparency and consultation has often left the City Council in the firing line of public frustration. As portfolio holder for Environmental Health I have needed to respond to a range of questions from the public in both Executive committee meetings and Full Council. I would like to thank Dave Bartram and Simon Lane for their expert advice which I was able to relay, despite being barracked by members of the public. Cllr. Williams has also been a great help in liaising with County Cllr. Barnes and feeding back as part of her portfolio.

The irony is that we are tackling congestion and accessibility across the city with the best air quality in years except for this area.

In terms of promoting active, healthy lifestyles and building great neighbourhoods, I have been working closely with Dave Bartram and our Deputy Leader to introduce the concept of City Centre Ambassadors. Following years of a build-up in anti-social behaviour in the city centre, problems with drug taking and dealing, on-street drinking and resulting ASB, prolific shoplifting and occasional violent crime, key stakeholders in the city are currently considering ways of taking positive action alongside a request for an uplift to police officer numbers.

<b>3. Issues that may impact : services delivery/financial performance/future budget requirements</b>
<p><b>Democratic Services –</b> Windows 365 could have likely issues for accessing the intranet for Councillors and alternative solutions are being investigated and tested to ensure Councillors maintain access to key documents and information.</p>
<p><b>Elections –</b> The additional parts of the Elections Act will be implemented (postal vote applications online, extension of overseas voter franchise and new regulations regarding the electoral status of EU citizens).</p> <p>The volume and complexity of this is still uncertain and may place some temporary pressure on staffing and budgetary resources. Grants may be available, but the level is currently unknown.</p>
<p><b>Environmental Health and Licensing-</b> The adoption of City Centre Ambassadors would require the redistribution of some of our resources / redeployment of existing staff to complement the input from the police, In Exeter and possibly the University.</p>

<b>4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered</b>
<p><b>Democratic Services –</b> No changes to service, but a new team Member has joined the team to support resource capacity.</p>
<p><b>Elections –</b> None at present</p>
<p><b>Legal Services –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of an additional legal officer to support the recovery of Council debt.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Environmental Health and Licensing-</b> Together with the Councillor Development Steering Group, I have focused on the amount and quality of councillor training. As well as on line feedback, we received written comments from 20 of our 39 councillors. While it was pleasing to note both the increased attendance at training sessions and the overall satisfaction at their good standard, we concentrated on the areas identified as being in need of improvement. It was agreed to monitor future training in licensing and planning, while considering ways in which sessions could be more interactive. Other areas included concerns over the timing of sessions, the level of intensity for newly elected members and the need for specific training for more experienced councillors.</p> <p>Following our training session with Bethan Jones on Procedures and Rules of Debate, I have worked with Baan in considering changes to our constitution which could give more opportunities to back benchers to contribute to meetings, including full council.</p>

I have also met with senior officers to consider the effectiveness of our staff appraisal process and how together with the input of HR this impacts on the management development programme, competencies and the well being of staff.

## **5. Other matters the Portfolio Holder wishes to raise with the Scrutiny Committee**

### **Democratic Services –**

Members are encouraged to continue to attend training sessions provided and to use the Scrutiny request forms for matters they wish to be taken through a future scrutiny committee.

### **Environmental Health and Licensing -**

1. Review of the Street Trading Policy – a working group of the Licensing Committee which has involved members of the committee and officers have been working on a revision of the Council's Street Trading Policy. This has involved gathering information from various stakeholders, looking at what other authorities are doing and responding to the Council's own Corporate Priorities. Areas that have been considered are tighter checks on applicants and staff, more comprehensive health and safety requirements, higher emissions standards for vehicles and equipment, tighter controls to prevent trading around schools and educational establishments, requirements around packaging and a policy that seeks to give preference for plant-based food and a diverse offering. The final draft is currently being prepared so that it can be presented to the Licensing Committee in March with a recommendation that a formal consultation is then launched. The consultation results will then be presented to the Licensing Committee in July for consideration.

2. Review of the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Policy – a working group of the Licensing Committee which has involved members of the committee and officers is currently working on revising this policy in light of revised statutory guidance that has been issued by the government. Officers are currently in the process of producing an initial draft for the working group to review which will seek to look at vehicle emissions, the introduction of CCTV in private hire vehicles and introducing the use of NCAP safety ratings to assess the safety and suitability of vehicles being presented for licensing.

3. Introduction of a Points Based Disciplinary System for Licensing Drivers – following extensive work from a licensing committee working group, the Council has adopted a points based disciplinary system that is now being used by Licensing Sub Committees and Officers for various disciplinary matters. Minor offences are dealt with under delegation by officers with more serious matters being referred to the Licensing Sub Committee for determination. The trade were welcoming of the new system and the system has mainly been used by the Licensing Sub Committees to as part of clear and transparent determinations in cases.

4. Business Regulation – the team continue to inspect businesses for food and health and safety as outlined in the comprehensive plan that went before Council in October. The city continues to see high levels of compliance with food hygiene law, which at the time of writing this report was at 99% of premises broadly compliant with food hygiene law.

5. Noise Nuisance – the service is experiencing high levels of noise nuisance complaints from across all 13 political wards in the city. At the time of writing this report, the service has received 941 complaints which looks as if it could exceed the 1130 complaints that it dealt with in the 2022/23 financial year. The majority of noise complaint that we deal with are as a result of an individual or household being inconsiderate to their neighbours. In most cases following our engagement and education, matters are resolved informally. In more serious cases officers will use legislative tools in the form of community protection warnings and notices or serving a noise abatement notice where a statutory nuisance is evidenced.

6. Corporate Health and Safety – the small team who deal with the Council's own health and safety work closely with all services across the Council to ensure that services are being delivered safely. This includes investigating accidents and incidents, providing advice on risk and COSHH assessments and conducting health and safety audits of work areas. The team is just in the process of revising the Council's Health and Safety Policy which will be presented to Council in April.

7. Safeguarding – a report seeking approval for the revision of the Council's Safeguarding Policy is currently making it way through the Committee process. The revised policy introduces a protocol for dealing with extremist speakers, inclusion of the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities and a new section setting out how the Council will respond to requests from the Local Authority Designated Officer.

8. Unacceptable Behaviour – sadly the Council like many other public sector bodies has seen an increase in unacceptable behaviour being directed towards its staff. Whilst the Council has had a clear policy in place for a number of years, a report seeking to revise the current policy is currently making its way through the committee process. Changes include linking to the Council's social media policy, body worn camera policy and linking the policy to the established Council Complaints procedure.

9. Recruitment continues to be difficult for specialists in Environmental Health. As part of succession planning, the service has converted 2 roles into Apprenticeship roles so that in conjunction with our education partner Weston College we can develop in house the next generation of Environmental Health Officer. This has been fully embraced by the staff within the service, who have been collectively enthused by being able to share their knowledge and experience in helping the apprentices through their degree and practical evidence that they need as part of their coursework.

10. As part of my portfolio I have, amongst other things, also needed to consider aspects of democratic & electoral services, legal services, operational IT.

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## REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 01/02/24

Report Author: Cat Chambers, Public and Green Spaces Service Manager

Title: Street Cleansing Litter Bin Review

### Is this a Key Decision?

Scrutiny is a non decision making committee

### Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

#### 1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 In September 2023 the Public and Green Space street cleansing teams rationalised the councils litter bin stock, with a view to reducing the number of litter bins and with it the resource strain associated with poorly placed provision.
- 1.2 The service carried out a stock audit and utilised real time use data, provided by the operational drivers directly responsible for emptying the litter bins, to assess the cost-efficacy of the provision. The programme initially reviewed litter bin provision specifically however, during the assessment it became apparent that a very small number of dog bins also provided limited value, and these were added to the rationalisation programme prior to removal.
- 1.3 The cost-efficacy assessment identified litter or dog bins emptied twice a week or less with no resulting overflow, or that suffered significant ongoing fly tipping. These were earmarked for removal. In total the programme saw the removal of 162 litter bins and 19 dog bins, leaving a total of 572 litter and dog bins city wide. Council litter bins are all mixed use taking both litter and dog foul. The remaining dog bins total 76 but dog walkers continue to have access to approximately 500 bins total city wide, suitable for the disposal of dog waste. These are all of the bins that are not sited in play areas.
- 1.4 Litter bins do provide an opportunity to reduce litter at source and continue to be an important tool to manage litter as a result. However, litter continues to be a significant service demand across the city irrespective of the levels of bin provision. The rationalisation supports a service designed to control litter as the primary function, where resources and tools are allocated appropriately to manage litter levels.
- 1.5 The removal of litter and dog bins does have benefits, it means less driving to service them, which frees up additional resources to focus on litter picking and general cleansing duties. Where drivers have been occupied full time on the emptying of litterbins, they are limited in their ability to collect litter in between those bins.
- 1.6 This report outlines the progress of the removal programme to date, the results of the impact assessment and monitoring carried out post removal and advises on the ongoing development of litter bin and street cleansing management within the city.

## 2. Recommendations:

That the Scrutiny Committee note the content of this report.

## 3. Reasons for the recommendation:

The purpose of this report is to outline the progress of the removal programme to date, the results of the impact assessment and monitoring carried out post removal and advises on the ongoing development of litter bin and street cleansing management within the city.

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

- 4.1 On going budget constraints required street cleansing services to achieve a budget reduction of £203,700 across 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years respectively. To achieve the saving requirement street cleansing pay budgets needed to be significantly reduced. These reductions resulted in the removal of five vacant posts, and a significant amount of the non-contractual overtime budget utilised for absence cover. In addition, the litter bin replacement budget was also reduced.

Street cleansing budget reductions

Street Cleaning Services reduction	2023/24	2024/25	Total
Pay and non-contractual overtime	-99,930	-93,890	-193,820
Litter Bins replacement budget	-1,920	-7,960	-9,880
Total	-101,850	-101,850	-203,700

## 5. What are the legal aspects?

This report concerns operational matters and, as such, does not raise any legal issues.

## 6. Report details:

### City wide street cleansing standards pre and post reductions:

- 6.1 Defra's Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse requires Street cleaning authorities to benchmark cleansing standards using a visual assessment framework. This assessment framework applies an A-D standard of cleaning, where A is litter free, and D is a location heavily affected by litter with significant accumulation.
- 6.2 The council's street cleansing service applies this visual framework to benchmark city litter levels as follows:



**Grade A** - No litter or refuse.



**Grade B** - Predominately free of litter apart from some small, scattered items.



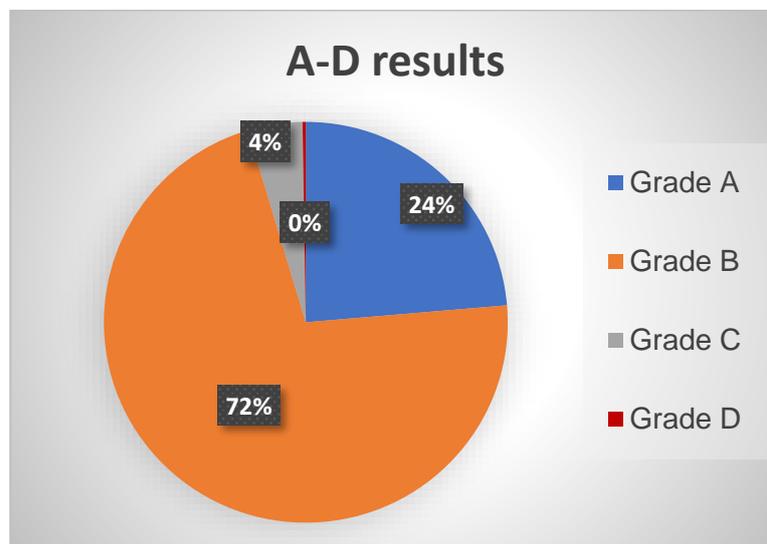
**Grade C** - Widespread distribution of litter with minor accumulations.



**Grade D** – Heavily affected by litter with Significant accumulation.

6.2 Between April and September 2023 the Public and Green Spaces street cleansing service carried out 644 general litter assessments across the city. The baseline cleansing standards leading into the bin removal programme were assessed at 95.03% B standard or higher. 612 of the 644 were A/B assessments. Post bin removal between October and December a further 134 general litter assessments were carried out, these returned a 97% B rating or higher. The litter bin removal was expected to support resource levels in light of labour reductions, as a result it was not anticipated that there would be any decline in litter and that the service would continue to meet a 95% minimum A and B level. Initial city-wide assessments support that outcome and indicate no decline in litter standards to date.

A-D results April 2023 – December 2023:



Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade D
184	558	34	2

#### Customer initiated litter impact assessments:

6.3 After the litter bin removal programme, operational teams received 96 service requests from residents asking for bins to be replaced or concerned about litter or dog fouling levels. These requests related to only 49 sites specifically. The remainder were either duplicates for the same location or related to cleansing levels city wide. The best indicator for city wide litter levels remains the A-D code of practice assessments which remain ongoing, however, to address site specific concerns the service carried out individual impact assessments at each site.

Service requests per ward:

Ward	Total no. of service requests	No. of sites
Alphington	6	4
Duryard	1	1
Exwick	2	2
St Davids	1	1
St James	2	2
St Leonards	2	2
St Loyes	27	8
St Thomas	33	17
Pennsylvania	1	1
Pinhoe	2	1
Polsloe	4	4
Topsham	13	4
Whipton	2	2
Total	96	49

6.3 In response to the site-specific service requests, three bins were replaced after the immediate impact assessment indicated an ongoing demand. These were at Grandisson

Court, Dunsford road, and Millennium wood. The remaining locations were subject to ongoing visual impact assessments, carried out by supervisors, with a photo assessment and an A-D rating for cleansing standards taken prior to cleansing being carried out. The service has carried out 209 visual site inspections in total, monitoring the 49 sites of ongoing concern.

The results of the 209 inspections were as follows:

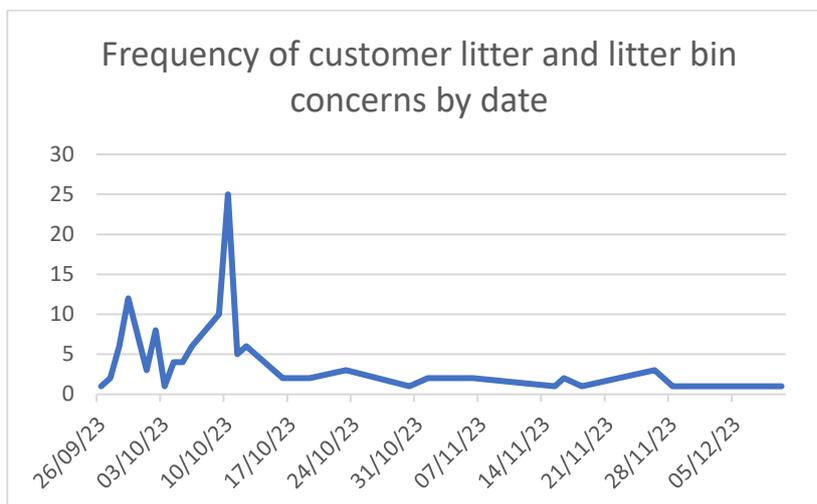
Grade	No. of visual assessment returned
A	64
B	142
C	3
Total	209

- 6.4 Inspections indicated that there were only three grade C assessments\* post bin removal (locations in which there was widespread litter with minor accumulations). These were found in Merrivale road, Hatherleigh Road, and at Polsloe bridge. In all three cases the inspections were carried out the day or two days post refuse collection. To review if the impact related to the litter bin removal or was an isolated occurrence, further assessments were carried out. Each road received a further four site assessments on different days and times. These all returned B grades. This suggests the adverse findings were isolated occurrences and not indicative of the litter bin removals. Moving forward sites will now be monitored by drivers and through the existing performance framework.

\*Grade C and D litter finding are addressed as soon as possible usually within a couple of hours, but at the latest within 24 hours. Those streets are then picked up as a follow-on inspection the next month. The service has never had two back-to-back substandard findings.

- 6.3 All litter bins were removed by the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2023. The initial publication of the removal programme and subsequent operation led to an increase in customer enquiries through the Public and Greenspaces team. Customer enquiries peaked in the second week of October, however by the end of October, correspondence had reduced to standard operational levels. This trend was mirrored through the council's online litter reporting system, this saw a spike in reports in October that reduced in November/ December to average levels. The lack of ongoing engagement, considered alongside city wide litter assessments, suggests that residents relayed their concerns initially, however with time the impact has not been significant enough to warrant further litter reporting on their behalf.

Customer enquiry levels by date:



**Condition of the litter bin asset stock:**

- 6.4 The rationalisation programme included an assessment of the condition the councils' bins. Initially 122 litter bins were identified for replacement as either in poor or very poor condition. To date 110 of these have been replaced with new or better conditioned stock. The remaining bins will be replaced in the next financial year. Where litter bins require replacement in the future this will be carried out within the existing replacement programme.
- 6.5 The service will continue to audit bin stocks twice a year. These audits currently look at the condition and location of the litter bins only, this has led to an excess of poorly placed bins. In the future, these audits will include levels of use, enabling a full cost-efficacy assessment to be carried out at the point of audit. Where litter bins are reassessed as part of the audit process as having poor cost-efficacy, they may be removed. This will improve the efficiency of resources and support a replacement programme on reduced budget and resource.

**The ongoing need for additional bins to meet demand:**

- 6.6 Residents can continue to request litter bins where they believe there is a need. Where the operational impact assessment indicates there is a demand for a litter or dog bin, one will be fitted. Over 2024, the service hope to enable an online litter bin request system. The timeline for the delivery of this will be dependent on the capacity of councils IT support services.

**Improving street cleansing efficiency**

- 6.7 To manage resource reductions efficiently, the council commissioned route balancing across its 12 street cleansing vans, and four deep clean teams. Balancing schedules optimises the allocation of work across street cleansing crews and provides each crew a consistent workload. By preventing the over or under loading of schedules the service can achieve a consistent level of cleansing city wide based on levels of litter demand. The design phase of the work was completed on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December. The revised schedules, adjusted to accommodate for bin reductions, will go out to trial from the week commencing the 8<sup>th</sup> of January. The schedules will be under continuous review after

implementation and adjusted as necessary to best reflect litter requirements and retain a 95% or higher A-B standard city wide. Individual street frequencies may change over time, but only as and where necessary to ensure city wide resource needs are met and standards achieved.

## **7. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?**

7.1 The optimisation of the street cleansing services supports the delivery of a well-run council by:

- Offering a sustainable route to support a balanced budget, protecting the delivery of the council's statutory street cleansing functions whilst contributing to meet the councils £6.6m budget reduction target.
- Optimising the delivery of frontline services, rationalising and prioritising resource allocation to make the best use of available resources for the minimum obtainable budget.
- Efficiently managing the councils litter bin assets based on cost-efficacy and providing better value for money. The reduced stock supports a planned asset replacement programme that will improve overall asset condition.

## **8. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?**

8.1 The Highways Authority withdrawal of weed control has led to increased weeds city wide. The weeds trap litter and detritus but hinder the ability of the council's mechanical sweepers and litter picking teams to control accumulations. To manage litter and detritus as far as practicable in light of constraints, the council has implemented a deep clean schedule which will see all arterial roads and primary and secondary bus routes deep cleaned between 2 – 3 times a year.

8.2 Recruitment of absence cover continues to be difficult resulting in resource shortages. The redesign supports the backfilling of street cleansing functions from within the existing establishment. However, were this occurs there is an impact on other service areas. Where absence can't be filled internally the service remains reliant on the recruitment of temporary staff if available.

## **9. Equality Act 210 (The Act)**

9.1 No potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because the report is for noting only.

## **10. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

10.1 There is no direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

## **11. Are there any other options?**

11.1 No alternative options have been identified that would support cleansing standards in light of resource reductions.

Director: David Bartram

Report Author: Cat Chambers

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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Democratic Services (Committees)  
Room 4.36  
01392 265 486

## REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 01/02/24

Report Author: Cat Chambers, Public and Green Spaces Service Manager

Title: Allotment Service Review

### Is this a Key Decision?

Scrutiny is a non decision making committee

### Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

#### 1. What is the report about?

The report is to update on the 'business as usual' management of the allotments service.

#### 2. Recommendations:

That the Scrutiny Committee note the content of this report.

#### 3. Reasons for the recommendation:

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the 'business as usual' management of the allotments service.

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

4.1 2023-24 financial year saw forecasted budget costs of:

Budget Area	Budget	Budget detail
Pay	£42,328	1.5 full time equivalents
Supplies and Services	£26,649	Waste management, utilities, water, pest control, and others.
Rental Income	(£53,559)	Total income forecasted

4.2 Allotment subsidy for 2023-24 currently stands at £15,418. As a result of universal cost increases subsidy levels are anticipated to increase above £25,000 in 2024-25 financial year. An investigation to identify opportunities to reduce the cost of the service or increase income to manage subsidy levels remains ongoing.

#### 5. What are the legal aspects?

This report concerns operational matters and, as such, does not raise any legal issues.

#### 6. Report details:

6.1 ECC has 24 allotment sites. Across these sites ECC manages all operational works including waste disposal, plot clearances, legionella inspections, and waiting lists. ECC are also responsible for managing disputes and tenancy breaches. However, all sites

are supported by volunteers that run 'let and check' operations, carry out plot inspections for leasing and compliance, and meet with prospective tenants to confirm leases.

6.2 There are four allotment associations that coordinate volunteers for 'let and check' activities across their 14 associated sites. Volunteers across the remaining 10 non-association sites, are coordinated by the ECC allotments team. All volunteers or associations receive £11.35 one off admin fees for leasing and inspection duties. This is paid at the commencement of a new tenancy.

6.3 Currently there are 1533 occupants holding allotment leases.

6.4 Waiting lists have just been reviewed, with potential applicants asked to confirm their continued interest in leasing. Post review, the allotment waiting list currently has been confirmed as 686 individuals.

6.5 There have been 219 tenancies surrendered over 2023. 150 of these were surrendered, and 69 were evictions as a result of allotment rule violations and the application of eviction procedures. To ensure robust and evidenced decision making, evictions are only undertaken after the application of a 4-stage procedure. This protracts the eviction process. Whilst rigid enforcement of the rules and a reduced eviction procedure would reduce waiting lists, without a justifiable and evidenced process for eviction, decisions remain open to challenge.

6.6 The eviction procedure is currently:

Stage 1: The allotment associations/ volunteers, carry out provisional onsite inspections as per their 'let and check' duties, identifying significant rule breaches. As part of these inspections' volunteers evidence assessments with extensive photographs. These are sent to allotment management team for review.

Stage 2: Triggered by association/ volunteer assessments, ECC's allotment manager makes an initial decision as to whether rules are being breached. If so, they issue a non-cultivation improvement notice, giving allotment holders 28 days to rectify the issue prior to further inspections being carried out.

Stage 3: After 28 days the site is then re-inspected by the ECC allotment manager (or delegated officer). At this inspection the allotment manager may also include their line manager depending on the complexity of the site.

Stage 4: Having conducted onsite visual inspections, the allotment manager makes a final decision confirming whether there are sufficient grounds to issue a notice of intended re-entry terminating the allotment lease.

There remains ongoing dialogue between lease holder and allotment teams throughout the process, and site visits with tenants are carried out on request.

6.7 To support the allotment management team, and in consultation with current allotment holders, the allotment rules are being amended with a view to addressing the ambiguity present in the cultivation regulations. Currently cultivation rules require managers to interpret compliance in view of tenants planting practices. This makes

enforcement complex, resource and time heavy, and less transparent for tenants. Redefining the regulations to reduce the need for interpretation will improve transparency for tenants and improve enforcement procedures.

- 6.8 There are currently 64 plots vacant. These are pending growth clearance to enable re-letting or are pending the commencement of volunteer 'let and check' procedures. With 219 tenancies surrendered and 157 new leases signed, the current service turnover rate is 72%. To expedite the turnover process the service currently instructs tenants to clear their allotment during their period of notice. Where tenants fail to comply, operational teams are required to clear growth prior to re-letting. Operational teams have limited capacity available to carry out this work and this impacts turnover times. To address this the service is investigating cost-effective measures to improve turnover rates, including site compliance inspections during the notice period, and /or charging when tenants don't comply. Where the turnover rate can be improved waiting list numbers will reduce.
- 6.9 In recognition of the need for additional allotment provision to reduce waiting lists, a review of the housing and economic development land (HELAA) was carried out. The review identified no ECC land suitable to support an increase in the number of allotments. To extend provision ECC would need to purchase land at market rates. Current borrowing rates and land costs are not offset by allotment income potential, meaning there is no business case to support land purchase at this time.
- 6.10 To provide routes to increased provision through future developments, the need for additional allotments has been added to the Liveable Exeter emerging infrastructure development plan, and is rationalised in the local plan consultation under Health and Wellbeing Policy 13.9. "*Development should encourage healthy neighbourhoods by: Providing allotments where demand exists*".
- 6.11 The service recently reviewed fees and charges across the country. The Association for Public Sector Excellence (APSE) assessed fees across 300 authorities. In 2023, 45.65% of authorities charge over £70 a year for a 10-rod allotment. The market report did not specify the top end figures for an exact comparison; however, further research indicated that fees nationally vary from as low as £17 per annum up to £382 per annum for 10 rods dependent on the context and service offer of the authority in question.
- 6.12 A direct cost comparison across Devon was also carried out to provide local context to fees and charges. This found that no district authorities offered statutory allotments, with local provision falling to parish councils to offer and manage. East Devon are the only district to provide access to allotments but as a non-statutory offer. Parish/ Town Councils are not directly comparable to district services because they are administered by volunteer elected officials often with a single paid clerk in the case of Town Councils. Unlike ECC they operate with no overhead costs and with precept budget arrangements. This ensure they are able to operate sites at a lower fee than ECC can sustain.
- 6.13 The charging review also found that charging structures varied considerably between authorities, with some charging a fixed charge per lease regardless of allotment size, and others charging per rod, or per full or half allotment. This variation makes a direct

comparison across allotment providers extremely difficult. In light of the charging review, whilst the service will continue to monitor fees across Devon authorities, ECC allotment charges cannot be directly comparable or competitive with other allotment providers.

#### 6.14 Direct cost comparison across Devon:

District & Parish/Town Council Comparison	Lease Fee (per rod)	Lowest Lease (per annum)	Highest Lease (per annum)	Additional Comments
<b>Exeter City Council</b>	<b>£8.35</b>	<b>£41.47</b>	<b>£83.50 (10 rods)</b>	10 rod lease fees, no longer actively offered
East Devon	£9.25 - £9.53	N/A	N/A	Additional Variable charge for water between £6.30 and £22 per annum (service is non-statutory)
Teignbridge District	No allotments – Parish or Town Council operated			
Mid-Devon District				
North Devon District				
West Devon District				
South Hams District				
Torridge District				
Dawlish Town	N/A	£27.50	£55	No dedicated staff, only 38 plots total.
Newton Abbot Town	N/A	£36	Above half plot size pro rata	No dedicated staff
Tiverton Town	Varies	£8.50	£32	Increases by 50p per year, only 6 plots total (No dedicated staff)
Cullompton Town	N/A	£17.50	£36	Under Review may increase. ECC plots are bigger (No dedicated staff)
Newton St Cyres Parish	N/A	£20	£55 (with £35 additional Fees)	The Council reserves the right to charge an additional £35.00 per year maintenance fee if expenditure is not covered by rental income (No dedicated staff).
Willand Parish	N/A	£29.50	Full plot £40	(No dedicated staff)
Crediton	£0.27 per sq. meter rent, and £0.029 for association membership			

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

7.1 Healthy and inclusive – its well understood that allotments can contribute to healthier lifestyles through high-value low-impact physical activity, stress-relief, social and community engagement, and through positive interactions with nature. It can also provide access to low-cost, and healthy, produce directly contributing to the physical health and well-being of tenants.

7.2 Liveable and connected – allotments provide tenants with the opportunity for self-development and provide a sense of personal achievement through success, this

means they directly contribute to tenants leading fulfilled lives. They also provide access to high-value natural space in urban settings, enhancing the city land scape.

- 7.3 A leading sustainable city – allotments provide carbon sequestration through planting and canopy provision, habitat for wildlife, they support improved flood attenuation, and they provide local sustainable food production. They are a valuable urban asset contributing to the city's climate control aspirations.

## **8. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?**

- 8.1 The risk remains that without additional allotment space waiting lists will continue to grow. To reduce this risk the opportunity to increase provision must be identified through future development. By adding allotments to the Liveable Exeter infrastructure development plan, and by ensuring a place in planning policy, future provision can be rationalised and prioritised where appropriate.

## **9. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)**

- 9.1 Currently the council provides access to allotments for disabled tenants across three sites. The council has fully paved access at Ashwood Road site and raised beds at Marypole and Butts Park.
- 9.2 Enhancing sites to improve accessibility will not reduce non-disabled provision but will increase accessible options. As a result, it is a cost-effective option with or without evidenced demand.
- 9.3 Ongoing budget constraints prevent internal investment to enhance sites, requiring external funding to be sourced and secured to extend existing provision.
- 9.4 To increase accessible provision, as disabled tenants take up tenancies, the service will look to support them in accessing community and disability specific grants to enhance the accessibility of their allotment plot where practicable. There will remain some sites at which wheelchair specific provision is not achievable, because of the onsite constraints presented by the main infrastructure. However, where practicable, as wheelchair applicants get to the top of the waiting list they will be guided into tenancies on sites with suitable infrastructure.

## **10. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

- 10.1 Allotments are considered academically as biodiversity hotspots for native species within urban green infrastructure. They provide ecosystem services within an urban area, and so allotments, by their very nature support habitat provision and nutrient cycling, and regulate ecosystem services (climate and water regulation).
- 10.2 Allotments offer tenants the opportunity to practice to sustainable permaculture design principles. Permaculture promotes the use of cover crops for soil health and carbon sequestration and encourages land use using marginal and vertical space to grow food. It promotes maximum land productivity by cultivating as much space as possible.
- 10.3 The current rules allow tenants to practice carbon sequestration, habitat creation, and sustainable water practices, all through allotment design, allotment management, and appropriate plant choices.

## **11. Are there any other options?**

Director David Bartram

Report Author: Cat Chambers

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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**WORK PLAN FOR SCRUTINY ITEMS 2023/2024**

*Working Draft January 2024*

<b>Strategic Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Director/</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	<b>Origin of Business</b>	<b>Status</b>
25 January 2024	Portfolio Holders Report Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)			Yearly report	
<b>Combined Strategic Scrutiny and Customer Focus</b> 7 February 2024	Budget	Director Finance (DH)		Yearly report	
14 March 2024	Portfolio Holders Report Portfolio Holder for City Development (Cllr Morse) and Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Culture and City Centre Strategy (TBC)			Yearly report	
14 March 2024	Working Towards Net Zero - Exeter City Council's Corporate Carbon Footprint Report and Carbon Reduction Action Plan	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB) Service Lead Net Zero & Business (VH)	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 29 September 2022 half yearly report	
14 March 2024	Progress Report Shared Prosperity Fund - Update	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB)Service Lead Net Zero & Business (VH)	(Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 29 September 2022 half yearly report	

<b>Strategic Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Director/</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	<b>Origin of Business</b>	<b>Status</b>
14 March 2024	Exeter Plan Consultation Outcomes (New)	Director City Development (IC)	Portfolio Holder for City Development (Cllr Morse)		
14 March 2024	Ethical and Low Carbon Advertising Policy (Moved from Jan 24)	Director Culture, Leisure and Tourism (JP)	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)	Notice of Motion by Councillor Sparling Council 18 April 2023 (report to Strategic Scrutiny Committee 22 June 2023)
14 March 2024	Commercial Property Portfolio (Proposed Date)	Director Finance	(Leader) Cllr Biaylk	Scrutiny proposal Cllr M Mitchell	
6 June 2024	Presentation on the Role of Scrutiny	Director Corporate Services (BAK)		Timetabled report	
6 June 2024	Live and Move Programme Update	Director Culture, Leisure and Tourism (JP)	Portfolio Holder Leisure & Physical Activity (Cllr Wood)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 6 March 2023 half yearly	
12 September 2024	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
12 September 2024	Working Towards Net Zero - Exeter City Council's Corporate Carbon Footprint Report and Carbon Reduction Action Plan	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB) Service Lead Net Zero & Business (VH)	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 29 September 2022 half yearly report	
12 September 2024	Progress Report Shared Prosperity Fund - Update	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 29 September 2022 half yearly report	

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Strategic Scrutiny Committee	Item	Director/	Portfolio Holder	Origin of Business	Status
		(DB)Service Lead Net Zero & Business (VH)			
12 September 2024	Scrutiny Programme Annual Report	Director Corporate Services (BAK)		Yearly report	
12 September 2024	Air Quality performance	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB)	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)	Scrutiny Proposal - Cllr Moore NB Yearly report to Executive	
14 November 2024	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
14 November 2024	Live and Move Programme Update	Director Culture, Leisure and Tourism (JP)	Portfolio Holder Leisure & Physical Activity (Cllr Wood)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 16 March 2023 half yearly	
23 January 2025	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
<b>Combined Strategic Scrutiny and Customer Focus</b> February 2025 Date TBC	Budget	Director Finance (DH)		Yearly report	
13 March 2025	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
13 March 2025	Working Towards Net Zero - Exeter City Council's Corporate Carbon Footprint	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 29 September 2022 half yearly report	

Strategic Scrutiny Committee	Item	Director/	Portfolio Holder	Origin of Business	Status
	Report and Carbon Reduction Action Plan Progress Report	(DB) Service Lead Net Zero & Business (VH)			
13 March 2025	Progress Report Shared Prosperity Fund - Update	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB) Service Lead Net Zero & Business (VH)	Portfolio Holder Climate & Ecological Crisis (Cllr Parkhouse)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 29 September 2022 half yearly report	
5 June 2025	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
5 June 2025	Presentation on the Role of Scrutiny	Director Corporate Services (BAK)		Timetabled report	
5 June 2025	Live and Move Programme Update	Director Culture, Leisure and Tourism (JP)	Portfolio Holder Leisure & Physical Activity (Cllr Wood)	Report from Strategic Scrutiny Committee 16 March 2023 half yearly	

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Items to be timetabled

*Review findings of the Car Parks Strategy report - Report to be progressed following further work Date TBC*

*Workstream to tackle social and affordable housing crisis – (Scrutiny proposal Cllr Atkinson) Report to be incorporated into future Local Plan work/reports Date TBC*

*Budget Preparation Scrutiny (scrutiny proposal Cllr M Mitchell)*

<b>Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	<b>Origin of Business</b>	<b>Status</b>
1 February 2024	Portfolio Holders Report Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Democratic Services & Environmental Health (Cllr Foale)			Yearly report	
1 February 2024	Presentation on Waste, Recycling and Fleet	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB)	Portfolio Holder Place and City Management (Cllr Williams)	Yearly report	
1 February 2024	Litter Bin Review <i>TBC</i>	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB)	Portfolio Holder Place and City Management (Cllr Williams)	Cllr Atkinson scrutiny proposal	
1 February 2024	Allotment Service Review	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB)	Portfolio Holder Place and City Management (Cllr Williams)	Cllr Harvey scrutiny proposal	
<b>Combined Strategic Scrutiny and Customer Focus 7 February 2024</b>	Budget	Director Finance (DH)		Yearly report	
28 March 2024	Portfolio Holders Report Portfolio Holder for Communities & Homelessness Prevention (Cllr Pearce)				
28 March 2024	Six monthly update on Homelessness Strategy	Director City Development (IC)	Portfolio Holder Communities & Homelessness	Proposed by Councillor Denning – half yearly report	September 2021 Homelessness Strategy approved Executive 7

			Prevention (Cllr Pearce)		February 2023 and Council 21 February 2023
28 March 2024	Report on tackling violence against women and girls (support) (TBC)	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB)	Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Support Services (Cllr Denning)/ Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Culture and City Centre Strategy (Cllr Wright)	Scrutiny proposal - Cllr Atkinson	
28 March 2024	Update on Street Cleansing/Bin Collection	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB)	Portfolio Holder Place and City Management (Cllr Williams)	Yearly report	
27 June 2024	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
27 June 2024	Review of consultation policy TBC	Director (JY)	(Leader) Cllr Biaylk	Scrutiny proposal - Cllr Atkinson	
3 October 2024	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
3 October 2024	Update on Street Cleansing and Bin Collection – Recycling and Food Waste Collection TBC	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB)	Portfolio Holder Place and City Management (Cllr Williams)	Yearly report	
3 October 2024	Six monthly update on Homelessness Strategy	Director City Development (IC)	Portfolio Holder Communities & Homelessness Prevention ~ (Cllr Pearce)	Proposed by Councillor Denning – half yearly report	September 2021 Homelessness Strategy approved Executive 7 February 2023 and Council 21 February 2023

3 October 2024	Scrutiny Programme Annual Report	Director Corporate Services (BAK)			
27 November 2024	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
27 November 2024	Tenants Energy Review of our Passivhaus C/Homes – (Date TBC)	Director City Development (IC)	Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Support Services (Cllr Denning)/	Scrutiny proposal Cllr Atkinson	
30 January 2025	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
<b>Combined Strategic Scrutiny and Customer Focus February 2025?</b>	Budget	Director Finance (DH)		Yearly report	
27 March 2025	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				
27 March 2025	Update on Street Cleansing and Bin Collection – Recycling and Food Waste Collection	Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management (DB)	Portfolio Holder Place and City Management (Cllr Williams)	Yearly report	
27 March 2025	Six monthly update on Homelessness Strategy	Director City Development (IC)	Portfolio Holder Communities & Homelessness Prevention ~ (Cllr Pearce)	Proposed by Councillor Denning – half yearly report	September 2021 Homelessness Strategy approved Executive 7 February 2023 and Council 21 February 2023
26 June 2025	Portfolio Holders Report (Cllr TBC)				

Items to be timetabled

MRF /glass collection to include in report to CFSC February (Scrutiny proposal Cllr Atkinson)

*Local Government Devolution (scrutiny proposal Cllr Atkinson)*

*Review of grass cutting regime –to be discussed with Portfolio Holder - Place and City Management (Cllr Williams)*

*Budget Preparation Scrutiny (scrutiny proposal Cllr M Mitchell)*

DRAFT