

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2015/2016

APPENDIX

The Scrutiny Work Programme 2015/2016

The Annual Scrutiny Work Programme Meeting which took place on 9th June 2015 allowed Members to establish whether they were satisfied with the substance and direction of the proposed Scrutiny Work Programme for 2015/2016. All Members were invited to put forward their suggestions for Task and Finish Group topics prior to the meeting and those topics were prioritised taking into account the Council's current aims and objectives.

Topics identified which resulted in Member Briefings included:-

- Transport
- Rough Sleepers
- Universal Credit
- Integrated Care Exeter

Task and Finish Group Priority Topics

Were established as:-

- Homelessness
- The University and its impact on the City.
- Equality and Diversity
- Empty Commercial Properties
- Growth and Marketing Exeter
- Water Ingress in Council Properties
- Parking Review

Follow up on previous Task and Finish Group recommendations

It is essential that progress of approved recommendations is tracked and that the parent Scrutiny Committee receives periodic updates. During the 2015/2016 term, updates were provided in respect of:-

- Social Media
- Income Generating Measures
- Cost of Living Forum
- Future of Exeter Quay
- Financial Reporting
- Council's Role in the Community and Tackling Isolation

Summary of Task and Finish Group work 2015/2016

Homelessness (People Scrutiny Committee)

A combination of Members and Officers from both Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council formed the membership of this Group since the joint Homelessness Strategy 2016 to 2021 would set out how the two councils and their combined partners would work together to tackle homelessness over the next five years. Cllr Harvey was elected as Chair of the Group and both Councils maintained their own responsibility for reporting lines back to their respective Committees.

Group Objectives:-

- To help shape and form the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.
- To identify and establish a list of other service providers within Exeter – who does what?
- To obtain views from key service providers which may help the Council to shape the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.
- To establish what funds are available.

Group Recommendations:-

The Group submitted an interim report to Exeter City Council's Scrutiny Community Committee on the 10th November (Minute 53) with interim recommendations simplified under two separate headings:-

The proposed structure of the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan:-

- (i) To agree that the Homelessness Strategy should be developed across the Exeter and Teignbridge area to increase opportunities for local residents and reduce administrative burden on the services of developing two separate strategies for a combined service.
- (ii) To agree that the Homelessness Strategy should primarily adopt the four key common themes of:-
 - Health and Protection;
 - Money Matters and Money and Employment;
 - Access to Services;
 - Accommodation Options and Private Rented Accommodation
- (iii) That the Strategy should consider, amongst other responsibilities, how the Council should address homelessness in respect of ex-servicemen and women.

Proposed Action Plan:-

- Regular review of the Action Plan and review meetings with agencies for the purposes of monitoring the Plan and altering where necessary to reflect any new challenges.
- A cross boundary list of available resources including properties spanning both Exeter and Teignbridge areas should be prepared and circulated.

- Access to information on cross boundary areas to be made available by each Authority.
- Identifying larger empty properties and working towards bringing these properties back into use in the context of tackling homelessness.
- Better signposting when enquiries are received - one information registration form to be used by both Exeter and Teignbridge so that the individual only has to give details once and they are passed to the relevant Authority for action immediately.
- Mapping of services and agencies on an ongoing basis to avoid duplication of work and avoid wasting resources.
- Mapping out different pathways to help people with different needs so that they are assisted quickly and effectively.
- Staff training with particular emphasis on “soft assessment” skills. For example, specialist training in how best to speak with and to obtain relevant information from ex-servicemen and women generally and to evaluate what type of properties would or would not be suitable.
- Monitor the impact of welfare reform on homelessness to allow for schemes to be developed to prevent homelessness or respond quickly when households have been impacted.
- Create a credit card size contact information card which can be placed with various agencies (letting agents and hospitals for instance) which individuals can easily keep and refer to.
- Better website information which is easily accessible for individuals in relation to where and how they can access help.

A further interim report was submitted to Exeter City Council’s Scrutiny Community Committee on the 19th January 2016 by the Assistant Director, Customer Access and introduced by the Joint Housing Needs Lead Officer (Minute 3). The report put forward a draft Homelessness Strategy for Committee Members’ comments prior to the Consultation process with recommendations which were approved as follows:-

- To agree the content and aims of the draft Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2021 as a draft for Consultation.
- To undertake a public consultation to gain feedback from stakeholders and other interested parties.

A further meeting of the Group was held on the 7th April 2016, specifically to consider the outcome of the Consultation. The Group’s comments will accompany a further report to the People Scrutiny Committee on the 2nd June 2016, Executive on the 14th June 2016 and Council on the 26th July 2016, asking for the revised final draft Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan to be approved for immediate implementation.

The University (Place Scrutiny and People Scrutiny Committees)

Cllr Brimble was elected Chair of this Group which met on several occasions between October 2015 and January 2016.

Group Objective:-

- To continue to develop and improve the positive relationship between the City and the University, for the good of both and the residents of Exeter, working towards promoting further growth within the City.

Given the broad remit of this subject, the Group settled upon focussed investigations concentrating upon the following areas:-

- a) Retaining graduates within the City.
- b) Anti-social behaviour and noise issues.
- c) Waste, recycling and littering.
- d) Parking (and the sustainability of the University's travel plan).
- e) Planning and Student Accommodation.
- f) Encouraging students to volunteer in the communities across the City.

Each topic was dealt with by way of a separate meeting to ensure dedicated discussion. Council officers with the relevant expertise were invited to attend together with a wide range of external guests such as the:-

- Employment Liaison Officer, Exeter University
- Innovation Centre Director
- Assistant Director, Marchmont Observatory, Exeter University
- Community Liaison Officer, Exeter University
- Student Opportunities Manager, Students' Guild
- Director of Estate Development, Exeter University
- Director of Membership Services and People Development, Exeter University
- Representative from the Exeter St James Forum
- Travel Plan Co-ordinator, Exeter University

Group Recommendations:-

At the time of drafting this report, the Group is due to submit its report to the People Scrutiny Committee on the 2nd June for comment and to the Place Scrutiny Committee on the 9th June setting out the following recommendations for consideration and approval:-

Topic 1: Retention of Graduates

The Council:-

- 1) Facilitates a meeting between the Federation of Small Businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, Exeter University and the Council's Economy Department to encourage a joint approach to retaining graduates in the City.

- 2) Shares the list of companies (particularly technology companies) with Exeter University to develop the aim mentioned in Recommendation 1.
- 3) Facilitates a networking event to encourage and support a good relationship between key organisations, businesses and Exeter University and Colleges.
- 4) Explores the opportunities available to support the Innovation Centre in increasing the number of start up weekends held and developing them into a regional network that involves Exeter residents.

Topic 2: Anti-social behaviour

The Council:-

- 5) Encourages the Students' Guild to expand the "big street party" event to cover different areas across the City.

Topic 3: Waste, recycling and littering

The Council:-

- 6) Explores the opportunities for sponsorship and provision of cardboard bottle carriers to student households which also advertise where recycling facilities are located.
- 7) Explores the possibility of a pilot scheme where temporary recycling facilities are situated in highly populated student areas at the end of term.
- 8) Enquire whether student wardens are able to support the educational work of the Council's Recycling Team in visiting student houses identified as a priority.
- 9) Encourage the students, with the support of the Students' Guild, to make a promotional, educational video on effective waste and recycling which other students can easily access on line.

Topic 4: Volunteering

The Council:-

- 10) Sponsors a student volunteering award to be presented at the Guildhall and publicised via the Exeter Citizen and Exepose publications.
- 11) Liaise with the Student Opportunities Manager (Students' Guild) to explore buddying community groups with student volunteers.
- 12) Encourages key organisations to highlight and publicise the good work that student volunteers already do for their organisations across Exeter.

Topic 5: Planning and Student Accommodation

The Council:-

- 13) Encourages and supports the Students' Guild to explore the possibility of Co-operative Housing.
- 14) Reviews the level of developers' contributions to infrastructure in respect of student accommodation, should an overall review of the Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule be undertaken in future.
- 15) Positively highlight, through a timely press release, the management requirements that accompany planning approvals on Purpose Built Student Accommodation blocks (PBSA's); the Central Government funding that PBSA's bring to the City and the effect of students moving from Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) to PBSA's.
- 16) Arrange for a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to investigate the possibility of an HMO/landlord accreditation scheme, engaging with key partners to explore the possibilities and how the Council could support work which may already be underway.

Topic 6: Parking

The Council:-

- 17) Supports the University in developing their updated Sustainable Transport Strategy, ensuring, in so far as is possible, the involvement of both Exeter City Councillors and Officers.

Ancillary Work Arising from Group investigations:-

- Enquiries for comparative statistical information concerning graduate retention between Exeter and other similar cities resulted in an invitation from the Higher Education Statistics Agency to participate in the testing of their new University statistics system.
- The Group identified that the Students Guild were no longer receiving the weekly planning list. The Guild are now signed up to the Gov.delivery system which also includes other information relating to bins, waste and recycling; council tax and benefits; planning; community news and events; elections and the latest Council news.
- The Community Volunteering Co-ordinator, Students' Guild will provide a list of the different projects (including discipline linked) taking place by postcode to the Council's Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer so that Councillors can see what projects are taking place in their wards. The Guild will also liaise with the Council to write a short piece for the Exeter Citizen about student volunteering in the City and how charities can register as providers.
- Relevant officers from key organisations such as the Council and the University are due to meet to discuss communications and other issues particularly relating to waste, recycling and littering. It is hoped that a student focus group will be involved in any work which may be taken forward in future together with the University, the Guild, managing agents and resident associations using social media as a conduit.

Equality and Diversity (Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee)

The Council continues to place great emphasis on setting out its vision for Equality and Diversity and to reflect the values inspired by Exeter's communities.

Cllr George was elected as Chair of this Group and an initial overview of the current position was provided by the Policy Officer and the Human Resources Business Partner.

Group Objectives:-

- To help shape and form the new Equality and Diversity Policy and Action Plan.
- To obtain views from key organisations which may help the Council to shape the new Equality and Diversity Policy and Action Plan.

The Group had the benefit of reviewing three consecutive drafts of the Policy commenting that:-

- The policy should be about engagement of the Council externally and not just in relation to the workforce – a communities focussed policy.
- The policy needs to contain a vision statement (in the Council's capacity as an employer and deliverer of services) right at the beginning explaining:-
 - ✚ What the context of the policy is and why we are doing it.
 - ✚ That our aim is to represent, serve and provide services and employ people as equals with values inspired by our communities.
 - ✚ That no matter who you are or what your background is you will be treated equally.
 - ✚ Setting out the beliefs and values of the Council.
 - ✚ That the policy is about eliminating discrimination in Communities and also within the Council whilst advancing equalities and equal opportunities.
 - ✚ That values will provide a foundation for cohesive communities, strong communities and in order to achieve this we must make sure that any barriers are removed to opportunities and narrow the gap between communities.

It was acknowledged that in the future, Council policies and action plans which may be linked with the Equality and Diversity Policy will need reviewing and updating.

The work of this Group is ongoing and will abridge the Election period. The next steps will be to:-

- (a) Conduct a consultation during June 2016 to seek a wide range of views, comments and suggestions on the draft policy.
- (b) Share feedback with the Task and Finish Group and amend the draft policy if appropriate.
- (c) Submit a copy of the final draft policy for Committee approval.

Empty Commercial Properties (Place Scrutiny Committee)

Housing remains a key priority for the City and the focus of Objective 3 of the Council's Core Strategy is to provide decent homes for all. Under occupation of larger houses and vacant properties continues to present an ongoing challenge for the Council as well as the City overall in terms of maximising use of existing properties thereby creating more housing within the City.

The Group elected Cllr Raybould as Chair.

Group objectives:-

- To identify suitable empty commercial properties within the City which could be capable of conversion to residential premises.
- To encourage the owners of such properties to consider converting them into residential premises.
- To provide information to the owners as to outside organisations from which they could seek advice as to how to go about converting their properties to residential.
- To investigate whether our systems can be updated to generate a regular report identifying suitable properties so that regular enquiries can be made.

With assistance from the Economy Department, Business Rates, Housing Development, Property and the Planning Department, the Group were able to draw together a list of empty commercial properties which were likely to have the potential for residential use. In addition, all Members were asked to highlight any properties that they were aware of and a press release appealed to members of the public to do the same, so that the Group could consider responses in the overall context of a final list.

Growth and Marketing Exeter (Place Scrutiny Committee)

Cllr Lyons was elected as Chair of this Group, which abridged the Election 2015 period so that external guests could attend and contribute to the discussions before the Group finally settled on proposed recommendations. The Managing Director of a South African Company (which had recently re-located to Exeter) attended to speak about why his company chose Exeter. Members were able to ask questions and discover the positives, ie, what the Council was doing well to encourage businesses to re-locate to Exeter, as well as what the Council could be doing better.

A Reminder of the Group Objectives:-

- To identify the opportunities within the City which are not being progressed or not being progressed in the way they should be.
- To find out who our competitors are – what are they doing marketing wise and who are their partners?
- Draw comparisons with areas which have strong inward investment and marketing campaigns. What are other cities doing that Exeter is not?
- Identify ways in which the Council can persuade our neighbours, big stakeholders and businesses to contribute.

The Chair of the Group submitted a report to the Scrutiny Economy Committee on the 21st January 2016 whereupon the following recommendations were approved (Minute 10).

Group Recommendations:-

- (i) A review of the current staffing levels and budget available for the Economy and Tourism Department is undertaken by Senior Management in conjunction with the Economy and Tourism Team.
- (ii) A business case in respect of (i) is to be submitted to the Scrutiny Economy Committee for consideration.
- (iii) The sharing of Economic Development expertise between neighbouring local authorities across the wider areas of East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge is formalised by way of an agreement.
- (iv) An Economic Development conference is held, led by Exeter City Council's Economic Development Team, also involving East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council, Exeter University and Exeter College to include combined presentations aimed specifically at new businesses.

Senior Management and the Economy and Tourism Team are due to report back to the Place Scrutiny Committee and Executive at the earliest opportunity in accordance with the approved recommendations.

Water Ingress in Council Properties
(People Scrutiny Committee)

This review followed on (independently) from the report of the Assistant Director, Housing which was submitted to Scrutiny Community Committee on the 9th September 2014 (Minute 44) and Executive (Minute 91) on the 16th September 2014. This report set out the impact that the extreme weather conditions over the winter of 2013/2014 had on some Council homes. The report also advised Members as to what work was required to tenanted and leasehold properties to make good the damage caused and identified how the work could be funded and the likely scale of resources required.

The Group were keen to review how the Council had handled this situation and whether any lessons could be learnt for the future. The Assistant Director, Housing and the Service Lead, Housing Customers were able to provide Members with an overview and answer questions.

The Group's findings were reported to the Scrutiny Community Committee on the 8th September 2015 (Minute 42).

The Group were particularly interested in answers to two issues:-

1. How many properties were affected and how many were dealt with under emergency provisions?
2. Was the process too drawn out?
3. It was established that the main factors for the time frame were:-
 - a significant spend was required which required Committee approval, hence the Water Ingress to Council Housing Stock report which had been submitted to the Scrutiny Community Committee on 9th September and Executive on 16th September 2014;
 - the process had to go out to tender because of the potential value of the contracts. This ensured compliance with the Law, Financial Regulations and the City Council policy;
 - the work had to be carried out at the best time so success and speed were both weather dependant; and
 - there was great demand for contractors and scaffolding at the time because others were also having the same problem.

In total 330 properties were affected and 49 were dealt with under the emergency provisions with the anticipated completion date for the work remaining on target for Autumn 2015.

The Group agreed that the Council and its officers had been reliable with the cost figures and the projected time frame; the work was well within the authorised spend and the advice and action taken by Officers was commended as the best. The Group were satisfied that the Council had not under delivered.

The Group reported their findings to the Scrutiny Community Committee on the 8th September 2015 (Minute 42).

Parking Review Spotlight Review (Place Scrutiny Committee)

This Group continues to monitor and review the work in progress having provided feedback this year on the consultant's report and the draft Strategy, contributing towards the final draft of the Parking Strategy, working closely with the Assistant Director, Public Realm and the Service Manager, Public Realm.

The Group met on the 15th July 2015, 29th September 2015 and the 1st February 2016, following which the Assistant Director, Public Realm introduced a report to the Scrutiny Economy Committee on the 3rd March 2016 which sought approval for the adoption of the new Parking Strategy for the period 2016 – 2026. The Strategy encompasses a new strategic approach to the parking services provided by the Council.

The Scrutiny Economy Committee (Minute 23) supported Executive endorsement of the Parking Strategy 2016 – 2026 welcoming a new strategic approach to the parking services provided by the Council, with a focus on four key objectives of economic growth, parking capacity, congestion and parking income.

This Group will continue post Election and their role will evolve to provide feedback as to the implementation of the various strands of the Strategy and to track progress, reporting directly to the Place Scrutiny Committee at regular intervals.

Training and Profile

- Scrutiny Induction Training for Members was carried out on the 9th June 2015. Feedback from those who attended as to the structure and content of training will be used to shape the training offered in 2016.
- Gloucester City Council Members have expressed an interest in visiting Exeter City Council to understand more about how our Scrutiny process works based on our positive reputation.
- Exeter City Council led and hosted a joint Authority Scrutiny Event which took place on the 16th July 2015 involving both Teignbridge District Council and East Devon District Council.

In addition to this Exeter City Council also hosted:-

- The Westminster Overview and Scrutiny Seminar on the 4th September 2015 from which it was interesting to discover that Westminster and Exeter approach scrutiny in a similar way operating a comparative process.
- The South West Council's Scrutiny Event on the 6th October 2015.
- The Association of Democratic Service Officers' Scrutiny Event in October 2015.

- Local Democracy Week – hosting a students’ debate session covering the topics:-
 - ✚ *Should Great Britain remain in the EU?*
 - ✚ *Should Exeter be one of the dispersal zones for refugees in the South West of England? If so, should there be a criteria to distinguish between economic migrants and those fleeing persecution or war or should assistance be given to all regardless of the reason?*
 - ✚ *Electoral Reform – Do you agree that the “first past the post” system is “bad for voters, bad for government and bad for democracy?”*
 - ✚ *E-voting –v- traditional voting – which is best and why?*
 - ✚ *Do we need the House of Lords? If so, in what format and in what capacity should they act?*

In 2016, it is intended that an entry for the Centre for Public Scrutiny “Good Scrutiny Awards” will be submitted reflecting the work of our Task and Finish Groups. The Awards are designed to recognise and celebrate the good scrutiny work which happens in public service across the country demonstrating transparency, accountability and inclusiveness in the public arena. This will provide a further opportunity for Exeter City Council to nationally show case our scrutiny work, demonstrating how an effective scrutiny process adds real value, attains tangible results and provides ongoing improvements and achievements in the level and quality of service we provide for the Citizens of Exeter.

Current Improvements

On the 9th February 2016 a report was submitted to the Executive (Minute 31) by the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support, which set out the recent work and recommendations of the Review of the Constitution Working Group for consideration.

In direct relation to the scrutiny function and process, Executive supported the following proposed changes which Council approved on the 23rd February (Minute 10):-

- Three Scrutiny Committees to continue albeit with different responsibilities which are better aligned to the responsibilities of the Portfolio Holders;
- Each of the Scrutiny Committees to comprise of 10 members, with their meetings held on the first, second and fourth Thursdays of every other month;
- New Terms of Reference for each of these Scrutiny Committees which respectively will now be known as People Scrutiny Committee, Place Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee;
- Revised call in arrangements where any seven Scrutiny members (irrespective of the Scrutiny Committee on which they serve) can trigger a call-in of an Executive decision (this is a change from the previous arrangement of any 5 members of a specific Scrutiny Committee being the trigger-factor);

- Executive to meet every second Tuesday of the month (bank holidays allowing) and to continue to comprise of 8 members. This will allow for a more regular and evenly spread cycle of Executive meetings, thereby minimising delays in decision making.

These improvements will ensure that the Council continues to work as efficiently as possible.

Future Improvements

Encouraging members of the public to become involved in the scrutiny process at Exeter City Council can only serve to diversify and improve the effectiveness of our scrutiny function.

At the Council meeting on the 23rd February 2016 (Minute 13), the Corporate Manager Demoratic and Civic Support was asked to draw together a report as to the practicalities of implementing the proposals set out below – the report to be brought to Executive at the earliest opportunity.

- Council Committee meetings and Full Council meetings to be held out of the Civic Centre and Guildhall on a rolling basis, giving a greater opportunity for Exeter residents to engage with the Council's decision-making processes;
- Web broadcasts of Full Council and all Council Committee meetings (where such meetings are held in The Guildhall and Civic Centre) be provided;
- Question Time to the Council Leader at the commencement of Full Council Meetings. This may or may not include questions written in advance.

Timetable for forthcoming municipal year:-

17/05/16	:	Annual Council meeting (Membership of Scrutiny Committees to be decided)
01/06/16	:	Scrutiny Induction training for Exeter Members
02/06/16	:	First People Scrutiny Committee Meeting
09/06/16	:	First Place Scrutiny Committee Meeting
22/06/16	:	First Audit and Governance Committee Meeting
29/06/16	:	First Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting
13/07/16	:	Annual Scrutiny Work Programme Meeting
26/07/16	:	Council meeting and confirmation of Task and Finish Group membership nominations
01/08/16	:	Commence with first tranche of Task and Finish Groups

Conclusion

This has been yet another busy year for scrutiny at Exeter City Council. We continue to promote pro-active scrutiny, encouraging more Members to become involved in issues and decisions at an early stage. Task and Finish Groups maintain a vital role in this respect providing Members with the opportunity to target and conduct more specific and tailored investigations into priority topics. Recommendations are made which focus on ways of improving the day to day workings of the Council, its policies and finding solutions to local issues. The approach taken is key to securing successful, tangible outcomes. Lateral thinking and retaining an objective perspective are essential components to good scrutiny, together with combining such elements as a multi organisational approach, utilising internal and external knowledge and expertise and engaging with individuals and agencies to gain a broad range of views.

At the conclusion of this municipal year, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members, Officers and guest speakers who have given up their time to participate specifically with Task and Finish Group investigations.