

## **APPENDIX A**

**REPORT TO:           PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
                          PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
                          CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meetings:   1<sup>st</sup> November 2018, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2018**

**Title:                   Annual Scrutiny Report 2018**

### **1.     The Scrutiny Work Programme**

Following discussion at the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme meeting in July 2018, the Scrutiny Work Schedule has been amended as follows:-

- a) The Council Tax Support Scheme and the Increase in the Council Tax Empty Premium reports will both be submitted to the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee.
- b) An overview presentation on Exeter City Futures Urbanisation issues will be provided to each of the Scrutiny Committees.
- c) The Annual Health and Safety Report will now appear on all three Scrutiny Committee Agendas since the interest spans across all areas.
- d) The Local Air Quality Action Plan progress report and recommendations will appear on the Scrutiny Bulletin as an update once the report has been considered by the Place Scrutiny Committee.
- e) An overview presentation detailing Exeter's cultural offer will be provided to the Place Scrutiny Committee.

### **2.     Task and Finish Group Priority Topics**

Through the Interim and Annual Scrutiny Work Programme Meetings which took place in November 2017 and July 2018 respectively, Members identified priority topics for Task and Finish Group/Spotlight Review investigation as follows:-

- Accessibility and Inclusion
- Green Travel Plans – IKEA
- Green Travel Plans - Policy
- Impacts upon the City
- The Evening Economy
- Financial Reporting
- Member Development
- Agency Working
- Council Representation on Outside Bodies
- CCTV
- Estimates, fees and charges
- Governance Review
- Housing Tenant Involvement
- PSPO Spotlight Review

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Together with topical presentations:-

### People Scrutiny Committee

- The impact of Universal Credit going live in Exeter;
- Accessibility and Inclusion – a presentation by the Joint Chair of the Devon Learning Disability Partnership Board and Devon County Council's Involvement Officer.

### Place Scrutiny Committee

- Transport/buses/City/Quay

## 3. **Summary of Task and Finish Group/Spotlight Review Work**

### **Concluded Groups:-**

#### **Green Travel Plans (IKEA)**

(Reported to Place Scrutiny Committee: 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018)

Green Travel continues to be high on the list of priorities both locally and nationally.

The work of this Task and Finish Group linked in with the Council's aims and priorities in terms of the Core Strategy Plan, The Air Quality Strategy 2015 – 2020, Exeter City Futures: Congestion Free by 2025, and the National Planning Framework Policy and would continue to contribute to the wider conversation around congestion and transport in Exeter.

The Group consisted of Exeter City Councillors, Devon County Councillors and officers from the respective Authorities, the Travel Devon Business Coordinator and a representative from Exeter City Futures.

Key objectives were settled upon as follows:-

- (i) To review the IKEA Green Travel Plan as a benchmark example.
- (ii) To understand how future Green Travel Plans might be improved at the planning stage.
- (iii) To understand the interconnecting role of Devon County Council in terms of performance monitoring, review and enforcement.
- (iv) To ascertain whether this Green Travel Plan aligns with the aspirations of Exeter City Council and Exeter City Futures.

Members understood the challenges and restrictions faced through planning framework limitations and considered the aspirational targets of the Council and Exeter City Futures in relation to congestion targets.

The Group were keen to hear from IKEA representatives so that they could understand IKEA's plans for the future in terms of developing and improving the existing plan. Intentions were not clear from the existing Green Travel Plan document.

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IKEA's Marketing Manager and Travel Coordinator attended and explained that IKEA's travel plan is still in its infancy in terms of development but that IKEA remain committed and very keen to make it work and continue to engage with Exeter City Council. Performance of the IKEA Green Travel Plan in terms of measured success would not be apparent until 12 months has passed. It would then be easy to identify what the successes are, what the challenges are and what could be improved.

The Group considered that early discussion of larger scheme Green Travel Plans would highlight key issues at a stage that would still allow time for the developer to adapt schemes before they are submitted to Planning Committee. At present Green Travel Plans are dealt with primarily through planning conditions and reliant upon discharge so the Group felt that early discussion with developers would ensure that they are fully aware of expectations and the standard of Green Travel Plan required, in turn creating more robust and aspirational Green Travel Plans going forward and it was agreed that this should be a key consideration of the Task and Finish Group's work.

It was established that consistency of approach, both in terms of Exeter City Council and key partners, is essential to successfully ensuring that more detailed and better quality Green Travel Plans are submitted to the Planning Committee and specific training for Members would provide them with the further knowledge required to review Green Travel Plans put forward by developers and raise the bar on expectations as they would have a better understanding as to what could be achieved with various schemes.

Recommendations were put forward to the Place Scrutiny Committee and subsequently approved as follows:-

- (a) To support a review of the performance of the IKEA Green Travel Plan in 12 months' time.
- (b) To request early discussion of Green Travel Plans for larger schemes at Planning Member Working Group (PMWG) or at Delegated Briefing as appropriate.
- (c) To agree that green travel planning should be incorporated into the yearly Planning Induction Training for Councillors.

As a side issue it was agreed that it might be helpful if Green Travel Plans in respect of future significant schemes were raised at the Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) highlighting key issues for discussion and feedback. A member of the Task and Finish Group was also a member of HATOC and would raise this at their next meeting.

An update on the performance of IKEA's Green Travel Plan appears on the Scrutiny Work Schedule for the Place Scrutiny Committee to consider at their meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

Both Councillors and Officers can request early discussion of Green Travel Plans for larger schemes at PMWG or Delegated Briefing where appropriate on a case by case basis.

In terms of training, the City Development Manager will incorporate an aspect on Green Travel planning within the induction planning training which takes place every year.

### **Green Travel Plans (Policy)**

(Reported to Place Scrutiny Committee: 14<sup>th</sup> June)

As with the Green Travel (IKEA) Task and Finish Group, this piece of work linked in similarly with the Council's aims and priorities surrounding the Core Strategy Plan, The Air

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Quality Strategy 2015 – 2020, Exeter City Futures: Congestion Free by 2025, and the National Planning Framework Policy and the general discussions around reducing congestion and improving transport within Exeter.

Again, the Group membership consisted of Exeter City Councillors and officers, Devon County Council Officers and Exeter City Futures representatives. Members were particularly keen to look at how the City Council's policy currently interacts with planning applications.

The Group decided that the key objectives should be to:-

- (a) help shape and form a short guidance note to accompany the Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document (STP);
- (b) identify how the City Council can encourage City based organisations and communities to work together to meet the City's Green Travel aspirations;
- (c) encourage improvements to existing Green Travel Plans;
- (d) identify ways in which Exeter City Council and Devon County Council can enhance their collaborative working to further improve the quality of Green Travel Plans going into the future.

Overviews were provided by both Exeter City Council's City Development Manager and Devon County Council's Principal Transport Planner to clarify the planning policy background and provide the Group with some understanding of the framework through which it is delivered.

It was accepted that the Sustainable Transport Plan sets out the minimum requirements for businesses to provide and encourage their staff to get to work using sustainable travel but that both the City Council and the County Council could call for stricter adherence to that requirement.

Through subsequent discussions consideration was given to questions such as:-

- How much can the City Council achieve through the traditional planning system?
- How much can the City Council achieve outside the planning process?
- How ambitious does the City Council want to be with regard to travel plans?
- Does the City Council work closely enough with Devon County Council and other key partners?
- Is the policy basis sufficient?
- Can the City Council become more aspirational in negotiations when it comes to green travel plans?
- Are ambitions aligned?
- How do we collectively find solutions?

Engagement with interested organisations and community groups was recognised as essential to gain a different perspective, take on board ideas and comments and to assist in encouraging employers to sign up to the green travel approach. Working with schools and the community to change the culture together with collective ownership of ideas and objectives were seen as key to improving success as was encouraging businesses to engage with each other, raising awareness of positive examples of innovative Green Travel Plans, for instance, Oxygen House.

Guidance analysis as to how much green travel could save businesses and research into what revenue businesses could lose if car parking spaces are lost to workers might encourage businesses to adopt more of a green travel approach with staff. Engagement

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with the BID was seen as key to reaching local City based businesses and encouraging their cooperation, but it was also recognised that the City Council should lead by example, through their own green travel plans.

The Group concluded that Exeter City Council and Devon County Council could further assist developers and applicants in understanding the City Council's Green travel aspirations, ambitions and direction of the policy, whilst continuing to positively promote green travel with key organisations and communities across the City of Exeter, helping to improve future and existing Green Travel Plans. Aligning aspirational targets with key partners, such as Exeter City Futures, Devon County Council and the wider business community were seen as essential to ensure a more effective and robust level of Green Travel Plans moving forward.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018 the Place Scrutiny Committee approved the Task and Finish Group's recommendations.

As a result of the Group's work, officers from Devon County Council, Travel Devon Team, Exeter City Council and Exeter City Futures have met and discussed the content which should be included in the guidance note to accompany the STP and how City based organisation and communities could be encouraged to work together to meet the City's green travel aspirations.

It was established that local case studies would be an essential component of a guidance note and that presentation would also be key. The four main sections will relate to:-

- (a) Planning Policy background
- (b) Devon Toolkit
- (c) Three good examples/case studies
- (d) A "did you know page" covering data statistics on air quality impact on knowledge workers/working days lost, for example.

The Principal Transport Planner, Devon County Council is currently drafting the guidance note in association with Exeter City Council's City Development Manager and the draft note is expected to be available by October 2018, following which it will be submitted to the Place Scrutiny Committee seeking approval for its publication against a re-launch of the Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document.

Exeter City Futures and the Travel Devon team are now collaboratively working on business engagement, research and analysis.

The City Development Manager (ECC) and Principal Transport Planner (DCC) identified the following areas where collaborative working may be improved to achieve more robust Green Travel Plans going forward, which could be implemented immediately through current working practices:-

- Work more closely with key site developers during the determination period, to identify key points to be included in their proposed Green Travel Plans and overall report to the Planning Committee. This will raise the profile of Green Travel and the City's aspirations which will produce better outcomes.
- Making it clear to people what is being proposed very early on in the planning process.
- Improving engagement with various groups who provide very detailed responses to planning applications/green travel plans which are welcomed and essential in order to fully inform the proposed Travel Plan.
- avoid a "disconnect" in trying to deal with areas through discharge of planning conditions in favour of identifying opportunities at an early stage.

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Through the work of this Group Members came to the conclusion that it is important to continue with efforts to ensure public engagement and that if Green Travel Plans were discussed much earlier in the process this would ensure a better result for everyone concerned. They felt strongly that it should be made clear to developers and organisations that once a Green Travel Plan is in place, if the site is expanded in future, it would be possible to re-assess the requirements in conjunction with green travel opportunities available and this point should be highlighted during initial discussions.

### **Financial Reporting**

(Verbal updates provided to each Scrutiny Committee: June 2018)

The intention behind this Group was to focus on the financial reports prior to their submission to the Scrutiny Committees so that Members could identify what aspects they would like to concentrate upon since these may be different from those highlighted by the accountants. This would make the scrutiny of financial reports more effective and ensure that, should Councillors have questions about service areas, Service Managers could be asked to attend to provide further information and answer service related questions. This would streamline the effectiveness and quality of scrutiny.

Members could also consider how financial reports may be improved so that they would be easier to read and understand. This would enable greater challenge of the content of the reports.

Membership of the Group consisted of:-

Cllr Sheldon (Chair of Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee)  
Cllr Wardle (Chair of People Scrutiny Committee)  
Cllr Owen (nominated by the Chair of Place Scrutiny Committee)  
Cllr Henson  
Cllr Mitchell

It was quickly established that not all underspends are necessarily good and not all overspends are bad and it was recognised that different service areas can fluctuate and budgets are set on assumptions and intelligent estimates.

The Group identified areas which Members may wish to particularly consider when reviewing financial reports such as:-

- The impact of underspends on the level of service;
- Areas which are over or under budget;
- Whether budgets previously showing underspends have been amended for future;
- Whether the budget is reasonable;
- The reason for trends and particularly consistent trends;
- If bids to the Capital Programme are accurate;
- Whether expectations as to the level of delivery are realistic when considering available budget;
- Attention to the Investment Strategy and whether the Council continues to reduce the debt;
- Whether overspends are fundamental or ongoing and the reasons for this;
- Identifying areas for savings over the next 2 years.

Various improvements could be made to the financial reports immediately and with relative ease by officers such as:-

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- (i) Future budget monitoring reports to provide both the previous outturn variance forecast and the current outturn forecast on a management unit basis, so that Members can see how forecasts have changed.
- (ii) A brief explanation will appear against each point, accompanying details of overspends and underspends, setting out clearly how the figures have changed in the last three months so that it is easier for Councillors to identify and challenge.
- (iii) Where there is an overspend split between two items, the proportions of that split will appear in brackets by the side of the item.
- (iv) The last quarter figures will be included and highlighted. At present, the standard layout of variances with details of overspend and underspend is 3 months on from the previous report figures and because of this Members cannot see how the figures have changed.

These improvements have now been implemented by the Chief Finance Officer and his team.

This Spotlight Review also acted as a timely reminder that the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees are entitled to attend Executive meetings to set out areas of concern to their Committees and that Executive Members would welcome this, particularly in respect of financial reporting.

Financial training continues to form part of Councillors' induction training each year. As a result of this Group, the training now includes two elements, the first being a training session delivered by the Chief Finance Officer which details an internal overview and a session delivered by an external trainer providing a general overview. The focus of the training is to understand how to effectively scrutinise accounts and ask the right questions.

### **Member Development**

(Verbal up to Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee: 27<sup>th</sup> September 2018)

The purpose of this Spotlight Review Group was to gain feedback from Members as to the current Member Development Programme including the induction plan, training and briefings.

Members were provided with details of the current induction plan, training and briefings for 2017/2018.

In relation to Members' training the Group suggested that:-

- Planning training should be made available to all Councillors and not just those who are selected for Planning Committee;
- More indepth ipad training would be helpful;
- More detail as to the existing skills base of Councillors should be obtained so that training needs can be better assessed;
- The level of training could be structured so that, for example, Level 1 would cater for new Councillors, Level 2 for old and new Councillors (concentrating on updates) and Level 3 for all Councillors mainly concentrating on new information;

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- Understanding the difference between a “duty” and a “power” should be covered within the existing governance training for Councillors;
- The training session on Committees and roles should take place the week before the Annual Council meeting;
- Paper information on training should be made available in the Members’ room and saved on the “S drive” since it is not possible to access the documents on ipads after 6 months;
- The Party Whip should encourage attendance at training sessions.

In relation to the Induction Programme the Group suggested that:-

- Small group visits should be arranged for Councillors to Belle Isle, MRF, RAMM and the recycling and collection rounds (for example). This would give the opportunity for Councillors to integrate with services and staff and gain first hand experience of what the service does and how it operates;
- There should be a tour of developments within the City and an opportunity to meet the planning team and cleansing team given that a lot of issues Councillors deal with relate to these areas;
- The opportunity to attend Planning Committee, Planning Member Working Group and Delegated Briefings should be highlighted to Councillors in case they wish to attend;
- At least two dates should be made available for Councillors to meet Directors and senior managers and the meetings should be reduced time wise;
- Existing Councillors should attend in a group to provide details and “sign up” post Election and new Councillors should be seen at arranged individual appointments.

In relation to Members’ Briefings the Group suggested that the level of attendance may be improved by:-

- Providing more information with the invitation as to the importance of the briefing;
- Sending invitations a week or two before the date of the Briefing instead of sending Councillors a block of invitations to all planned Briefings;
- Sending weekly reminders to Councillors as to what the current week’s Briefing relates to and when it is, asking for confirmation of attendance.
- The Party Whip should encourage attendance at Member Briefings.

Other, more general suggestions related to there being a list of useful officer contacts and the responsibilities of various front line services being made available together with a list of 24 hour services and contact details, for example, to use in reporting noise nuisance during the night time. It was also felt that a general organisational structure chart would be helpful in relation to operational services so that Councillors knew immediately who to contact in the event of a problem and an escalation process regarding particular problems or complaints. It would also be useful to have details of who does what outside the Council, for example, details of organisations and contact numbers in respect of Highways and Schools.

Generally, the Group felt that the offer in respect of Member Development was currently good, but valued the opportunity to look at ways in which it could be further improved.

The Corporate Manager, Democratic and Civic Support, together with the Democratic Service (Committees) Manager are working together to bring the Group’s ideas forward.

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### **Agency Working**

(Update reported in the Scrutiny Bulletin: 4<sup>th</sup> July 2018)

This topic was identified as high priority for Spotlight Review as Councillors wished to review agency usage figures and the reasons behind high usage in certain service areas. There was a concern that not all Councillors may be aware of the current position.

The Group were provided with a table to show the hours & cost per department for the months of October 2017 & April 2018 to give an illustrative idea of any variation, together with a spreadsheet showing "Agency Total Hours FTE" which showed a month by month breakdown of agency workers' hours as well as the pre-VAT cost (records kept since July 2017).

Prior to the meeting, the service areas of Housing, Public Realm, Refuse/MRF, Customer Access and HR were identified as having fairly significant variances and the Service Leads from these areas were invited to attend the meeting to explain the reasons for this.

In conclusion, the Group found a broad theme for variations across these front line services with reasonable explanations such as:-

- Vacant posts due to staff sickness, holiday, retirement or maternity leave;
- Pool staff are used where possible but there is a limited supply;
- Seasonal work creates fluctuation in terms of staffing required;
- Seasonal variations mean that there is a real risk that if posts are covered by recruiting permanent staff, the Department would be overstaffed for a number of weeks in the winter;
- Extra demand at various times (for instance, cleansing and refuse/student term times);
- Whilst there is a supportive and generous absence policy, long term absences can cause a staffing problem and particularly where it is not possible to offer light duties (for example MRF/Refuse);
- Staff positions need to be covered straight away in terms of front facing services (such as the Customer Service Centre for example);
- Difficulty in recruiting;
- Lack of a permanent funding stream (in respect of external funding) which can be used to secure agency staff but not to support a full time and permanent staff position;
- Re-structure resulting in the loss of staff.

It was acknowledged that the Strategic Management Board together with HR continue to monitor agency usage on a monthly basis which provides an accountability check in terms of need and necessity. However, the Group were clear that variations should be assessed on a service by service basis, since the issues affecting each service are individual rather than uniform and that it was important to recognise that the ebb and flow of agency staff usage is not evident in the information provided to the Group.

### **Council Representation on Outside Bodies**

(Reported to Executive: 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018 and Council: 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018)

The Corporate Manager, Democratic and Civic Support put forward the suggestion for this Spotlight Review since he wished Members to have the opportunity to consider:-

- What is achieved through representation?

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- Is there merit, necessity or both in continuing with representation?
- What the Councillor attendance record is like.

Members were reminded that all appointments can be viewed on the City Council website and that the full list of Appointments to Outside Bodies is reported once a year in the first cycle in the Municipal Year.

The Group worked through the list of organisations (52 in total) to determine whether to recommend that the Council withdraw or continue with representation. Special consideration was given to charitable organisations since withdrawal of representation could mean that they would have to change their Articles of Association and make a direct approach to the Charities' Commission. This could have a negative impact on the charities concerned which Councillors wished to avoid.

Findings of the Group and recommendations as to appointments were submitted to the Executive Committee on the 10<sup>th</sup> July and subsequently to Council on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018 and were approved together with a recommendation that the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support should be granted delegated powers, in consultation with Group Leaders to appoint, where necessary, representatives to outside bodies during the course of the Municipal Year. This would facilitate rapid appointment wherever possible and remove the need to report to Executive and Council which could cause unnecessary delay to the appointment process.

### **PSPO Spotlight Review**

(Reported to Place Scrutiny Committee: 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018)

The purpose of this Spotlight Review was to provide the Place Scrutiny Committee with an update following implementation of the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in June 2017 which would detail the operation and effectiveness of the PSPO in reducing problematic anti-social behaviour together with details of any negative or unforeseen impacts that may have developed and provide any recommendations for varying or discharging the Order.

The Neighbourhood Inspector for Exeter and the City Centre Sergeant attended to provide input from a police perspective. They explained that the initiative generally presented an opportunity to work with other organisations such as the City Council together with businesses, communities and agencies to collectively demonstrate that the City will not tolerate certain behaviour and to put in place prevention measures. The power to seize alcohol is used by the police on a daily basis.

In conclusion the Group agreed that:-

- The PSPO is working well with a 16% reduction in anti-social behaviour reported to the Police.
- The power to seize alcohol and disperse groups and individuals is a very effective tool in tackling anti-social behaviour,
- The area currently covered by the PSPO is sufficient.
- The collaborative, multi organisational response is working well in terms of prevention, education and enforcement.
- Communities are being encouraged and supported to tackle low level anti-social behaviour, particularly through the Community Safety Partnership.

Councillor Vizard and Councillor Wright presented a report on behalf of the Group to the Place Scrutiny Committee on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018 where it was agreed that the PSPO is working well and should continue in its current form.

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### Governance Review

(Reported to the Audit and Governance Committee: 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018)

The basis for this cross party Review arose out of the Audit and Governance Committee meeting held on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018. The Committee agreed to the formation of a Governance Review Group to address the roles and responsibilities of the various Committees, to ensure that they continue to meet the Council's priorities, aims and objectives and that the standing orders and procedural rules contained within the Constitution remained fit for purpose.

There were three main aspects to the Review:-

- i. To draw a comparison between Exeter and other similar sized Authorities in terms of the democratic services offer;
- ii. Whether the Constitution and Standing Orders remain fit for purpose;
- iii. To identify ways in which the structure and content of the Council's democratic processes might be streamlined and improved.

In respect of (ii) comparisons were drawn with Norwich, Cambridge, Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane, considering in particular, staffing, committees, number of meetings and available budget for Democratic Services.

Specific aspects were considered such as:-

- The appetite for revision of the work load of the Scrutiny Committees – are they working as effectively as possible in their current form and number?
- Is there merit in introducing the facility for public speaking at all Committees?
- Should there be a restriction on the amount of time Councillors have to speak or restricted to a right to reply or point of clarification?
- Should amended recommendations be projected onto a screen at respective Committee meetings before the vote is taken so that Councillors are absolutely clear as to what they are voting upon?

The Review Group concluded that the Constitution and Council procedures largely remain fit for purpose subject to slight alterations and that, in the main, the Democratic process and structure at Exeter City Council works well with a reasonable comparison drawn with other similar sized Authorities.

The following recommendations were submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018:-

- (i) The amendment of Standing Order 8 (3) (a) to state that questions should be submitted in written form no later than 10 am on the working day before the meeting.
- (ii) The addition to Standing Order 10 (6) of the following: "As long as the effect is not to negate the motion";
- (iii) The publicising, through social media and other means determined by officers, of the Council agenda prior to commencement of the Council meeting;

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- (iv) That Committee Chairs will move the minutes of their respective Committees for noting on block rather than minute by minute (with the exception of any minutes containing recommendations);
- (v) That Executive recommendations will be identified and highlighted more clearly at Council meetings and voted on accordingly;
- (vi) That the current system of three Scrutiny Committees be retained.

The findings of the Governance Review Group were reported by the Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support to the Audit and Governance Committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018 and the recommendations were approved and are being implemented.

### **Accessibility and Inclusion**

(To be reported to the People Scrutiny Committee: 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018)

This topic was raised as high priority topic for Task and Finish Group investigation at the Interim Scrutiny Programme Meeting in November 2017. Inclusivity and accessibility remain high on the agenda both at national and local level, in particular the Council's commitment to providing a well run Council with effective, efficient, person centred services. The Equality Act 2010 sets the legislative background and requirements and the Council's Equality Policy was revised and subsequently approved by Corporate Services Scrutiny on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2018. The adoption of this Policy further cements the Council's commitment to making information about services more widely available and accessible and making contacting the Council easier and more accessible to all customers.

The Policy Officer provided the Group with an overview as to the current position and key objectives were settled upon as follows:-

- (a) To review accessibility of the Council's website in relation to those with wide ranging disabilities;
- (b) To investigate whether the Council obtains feedback with regards to accessibility of services and whether that feedback is obtained in a uniform way across the Council;
- (c) To understand what the departmental offer is in terms of accessibility for those with a wide range of disabilities.

It was essential to focus the work of the Group, given the broad range of the topic and work already underway in relation to accessibility and safeguarding. As a result of this, the Group decided that it would be of benefit to focus on the four specific service areas of Housing Benefit, Housing Advice, Customer Access and Environmental Health. Initially, Service Leads from each were invited to join the Group to provide an overview of their particular service and answer specific questions so that there was a consistent structure from which to draw comparisons. It was clear that there is a lot of ongoing work in terms of services improving accessibility and that staff are going to great lengths to assist customers where they can. It is noticeable that there has been an increase in individuals presenting with mental health issues and low literacy skills.

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The second part of the Group's work was to concentrate upon engaging with service users to gain their views. A questionnaire survey was conducted with focussed questions as to how individuals choose to access Council services and information; how easy they thought this was together with any suggestions they might have for improvement. Assistance was provided by Living Options, the Learning Disability Partnership and a member of Exeter City Council's staff. The aim was to reach people with a wide range of disabilities, sending questionnaires not only via e-mail but also by post using specific formats. Generally the feedback suggests that the Council's overall accessibility rating is good in terms of communication and assistance. What was noticeable is the amount of people who choose to contact the Council by phone, either themselves or with the help of family or support workers, rather than on line.

The Task and Finish Group concluded that there are two prominent messages. Firstly, that the Council needs to better advertise its offer in respect of the support it can provide to access services and secondly, in a time of the ever increasing digital offer to customers, other forms of communication should not be overlooked or viewed as less important.

The Task and Finish Group's report, together with recommendations is due to be considered by the People Scrutiny Committee on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018.

### 4. **Outstanding Task and Finish Group Work**

#### Impacts upon the City

Considering what appears on other Local Authorities' Forward Plans and how that might impact the City. This will provide an opportunity to identify, isolate and prioritise various areas for further investigation, inviting engagement with other Authorities, stakeholders and external organisations, to ensure that the City Council is consulted on proposals which could affect the City. Topics such as Healthcare and Planning could be areas of particular interest.

#### The Evening Economy

Specifically concentrating upon the 5 pm to 7 pm period and use of City Council Parks (maximising use could help to reduce anti-social behaviour). Ideas such as later opening times for cafes, food markets and entertainers could maximise use and may help to reduce anti-social behaviour and should be relatively inexpensive and easy to deliver. It also presents an opportunity to understand if there is something that is preventing progress in certain areas and to identify what can realistically be achieved.

#### CCTV

To consider the service, cost, charges and merit in continuation.

#### Estimates, Fees and Charges

A general review to establish how the City Council deals with these and whether there are other aspects that should be considered.

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### 5. Profile of Scrutiny at Exeter City Council

The profile of Scrutiny at Exeter City Council has been raised at both local and national level as a result of:-

➤ Corporate Challenge Feedback Report (4-7 December 2017)

3.3 Organisational leadership and governance – “The council is making positive steps towards enhancing the scrutiny function. This includes significant success on pre-decision scrutiny – with all papers and decisions for cabinet going to scrutiny first. The People Scrutiny Committee, one of three scrutiny committees in the council conducted a review of Homelessness with Teignbridge District Council, which led to a joint Homeless Strategy and Action Plan”.

➤ The House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee Inquiry into the effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees

The Scrutiny Programme Officer provided a submission to the Inquiry outlining how the City Council view an effective scrutiny process as a vital component of good governance and a key component to the practical and successful delivery of Exeter’s vision. The Inquiry provided the City Council with an opportunity to contribute to the wider picture, sharing what is happening in Exeter and ensuring the continued, positive evolution of scrutiny at both local and national level. The first report of session was published on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

A copy of the submission has previously appeared in the Scrutiny Bulletin and a further copy is available upon request.

➤ The MJ Local Government Achievement Awards

The Scrutiny Programme Officer provided a submission to the MJ Awards category for “Excellence in Scrutiny and Governance” which concentrated upon the work and achievements of the Homelessness Strategy Task and Finish Group - a joint initiative between Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council. The Task and Finish Group involved Councillors and Officers from both Local Authorities. This work provided a prime example of how an effective Scrutiny process can support two politically opposing Councils in achieving a common goal for the benefit of all.

A copy of the submission has previously appeared in the Scrutiny Bulletin and a further copy is available upon request.

➤ Association of Democratic Service Officers (ADSO) Awards 2018 Team of the Year

Exeter City Council’s Democratic Services Team entered the Awards and have been shortlisted alongside Tower Hamlets Council, Brent Council and Sutton Council. The next stage in the process is a conference video interview with the Team which will take place on Thursday 1st November. This will involve a brief presentation to bring to life the submission, followed by questions from the judges before a final decision is made.

ADSO commented that, “The standard of the submissions was particularly high this year and it was a very difficult decision not to shortlist others. Congratulations to all of the authorities listed and many thanks to all of the authorities who participated, it

## APPENDIX A

is appreciated..... it is really important that the quality work our members undertake is recognised. The awards provides us with the ideal opportunity to do that”.

### ➤ Scrutiny Training

Scrutiny training continues to be provided as part of induction training for Councillors each year. This is currently delivered by the Scrutiny Programme Officer, in addition to which external courses are also available to Councillors who wish to attend.

## APPENDIX A

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