



CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Thursday 8 October 2020

Time: 5.30 pm

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

Members are invited to attend the above meeting.

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

During the Corona Virus outbreak, meetings will be held by virtual means. The live stream can be viewed here: <https://www.facebook.com/exetercitycouncil/live/%E2%80%99> at the meeting start time.

Membership -

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

Agenda

1 Apologies

2 Minutes

(Pages 3 -
12)

To approve and sign the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 16 July 2020.

3 Declarations of Interest

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

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

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

It is considered that the Committee would be unlikely to exclude the press and public during the consideration of any of the items on this agenda but, if it should wish to do so, then the following resolution should be passed:-

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

5 Questions from the Public under Standing Order 19

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

Questions must be submitted by 10am three working days before the meeting.
For example, if the meeting is being held on a Thursday, questions must be submitted by 10am on the Monday before the meeting, in this case Monday 5 October 2020.

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

(Pages 13 - 22)

Portfolio Holder briefing notes attached.

Portfolio Holder for Supporting People – Councillor Williams
Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Services – Councillor Wright

Details of questions from Members relating to the two Portfolios above on Covid-19 recovery issues only should be notified to the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support by 10.00am the Monday before the meeting – Monday 5 October 2020.

Date of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee will be held on **Thursday 3 December 2020** at 5.30 pm.

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Agenda Item 2

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 July 2020

Present:

Councillor Matthew Vizard (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Foggin, Mrs Henson, Mitchell, K, Oliver, Pattison, Martin, Quance, Sheldon, Sparkes, Wardle and Warwick

Apologies:

Councillor Begley

Also present:

Director (DB), Director (JY), Democratic Services Officer (MD) and Democratic Services Officer (MD)

In attendance:

Councillor Amal Ghusain

- Portfolio Holder for Equalities, Diversities and Communities

Councillor David Harvey

- Portfolio Holder for Environment and City Management

Councillor Diana Moore

17 Apologies

This was received from Councillor Begley.

18 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 25 June 2020 were taken as read, approved as correct, for signing by the Chair at the earliest possible convenience.

19 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

20 Questions from the Public Under Standing Order No 19

No questions from Members of the public were received.

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

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

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

Portfolio Holder for Environment and City Management - Councillor Harvey - in presenting his briefing note highlighted the following:-

- The Parks and Opens Spaces team had continued business as usual with a number re-trained in case of a rise in sickness levels. Additional staff were trained as excavator operatives to keep the burial service running and green space operatives were trained as refuse loaders.
- Advantage had been taken of the quiet period to undertake deep cleaning of the City Centre and to complete maintenance and repair of our play parks; and
- With an ease of the Lockdown restrictions, toilets and car parks had re-opened with social distancing measures and enhanced cleaning regimes applications for new garden waste collections were being processed again.

Questions from Members of the Committee

- 1 **Councillor Oliver - To follow Government safety guidelines, what work needs to be done so playparks can re-open safely?**

All of our 75 play parks need a detailed Covid-19 risk assessment. The risk assessment will highlight what frequent cleansing regime is appropriate for the equipment. Additional resources including staff and chemicals have been identified to complete the cleansing regime. Appropriate signs which comply with the guidance also need to be designed, manufactured and erected. Progress is going well, the risk assessments have been completed, resources identified and signs ordered. We are currently waiting for a delivery and installation date and then all the measures will be in place to open our play parks safely. It is hoped that all play parks will re-open by 24 July 2020.

Supplementary question and answer.

With Valley Parks once more accessible and of such value to the elderly can more park benches be provided?

Other than the potential for identifying external funding sources, the City Council itself, because of the huge financial pressure it is under as identified in the Emergency Budget, will not have the resources at this point to provide additional benches.

- 2 **Councillor K. Mitchell – Can the Portfolio Holder confirm the plans for the introduction of a doorstep food and glass collection service have not been affected by the pandemic and when are they scheduled to be introduced?**

The effect of Covid-19 on the proposed changes to our waste and recycling collection is currently being assessed by officers. There are a range of companies which are critical to the introduction of the new service and all have been impacted by the epidemic in different ways but the extent of the impact on these companies is unknown at present.

Supplementary question and answer.

Can an assurance be given that a report will be brought back to update Members on the collection service at the earliest opportunity?

Yes.

- 3 **Councillor M. Mitchell - Does the Council intend to alter any element of its current charging regime regarding car parking prior to any normal review?**

The annual parking tariff proposals were agreed by Executive in February. However, the implementation process has been put on hold due to the initial Covid-19 lock-down period and subsequent economic recovery stage. Income and usage figures are being analysed on a weekly basis against the revised emergency budget expectations (that only 50% of expected parking income will be achieved during 2020/21) to gauge when/if the outstanding proposals will be actioned. Because of Covid-19 it has not been possible to implement the legal requirement to consult.

Link to Committee Report (Item 35):- <http://s-civ-wap10.civic.local:9071/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=112&MId=6199>

Supplementary question and answer.

Is it the intention to review car park sites for re-purposing given the economic downturn?

This Scrutiny Committee is not in a position to review this matter.

- 4 **Councillor M. Mitchell - Does the Council have any plans to encourage a greater uptake of its excellent Homecall service prior to any possible second wave of the virus infection or a flu epidemic this autumn?**

The small advertising budget available for Homecall has been spent as usual. Feedback from new customers suggests that the majority of them selected us as a provider due to 'word of mouth' recommendation from existing clients. The telecare industry is now a crowded market place and our chief advantages are being a trusted brand with local knowledge.

Supplementary question and answer

Is there a target within the business plan to increase this service by the Autumn?

No.

- 5 **Councillor M. Mitchell - Within what timescale does the Council envisage it will complete the production of a Business Recovery Plan for its commercial tenants?**

The Council will not be producing a Business Recovery Plan for its commercial tenants, that's not our role. Each commercial business will, if necessary, produce their own business recovery plan for their own individual business and circumstances. In Section 2 of the Portfolio Holder report - 'Recovery Phase' - the report mentions that activities for Environment and City Management staff during this phase include 'continuing to liaise with our business tenants to help them with their recovery plans'. As discussed in Section 1.11 of the report this may include discussions on rent deferrals or consideration of measures such as pavement licences for the hospitality sector which would enable trading with adequate social distancing.

Questions from another Council Member.

1 Councillor D. Moore – Is the Exeter Business Support Recovery Group:-

1. working with the Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and the BID; and

2. how is this group engaging small business, including social enterprises and hospitality businesses?

Yes, the group has representatives from Exeter Chamber (it is chaired by the Chair of the Exeter Chamber, Matt Roach, Exeter International Airport) and FSB, and is linked to the BID through the City Centre Recovery Group. The group is engaging small businesses through all of the business representatives that are taking an active role in the group, also through the range of partners that have existing relationships with small businesses through their work – such as Exeter College. The Social Enterprise sector is championed through Fiona Carden of Co-Lab who is part of the group. We are specifically supporting hospitality businesses by working collaboratively with the Visit Exeter team – sharing the appropriate guidance in relation to re-opening, and using them as a conduit for the range of business support measures in place – such as the Discretionary Grant Scheme.

Supplementary question and answer.

Will the needs of the self-employed and micro-businesses also be addressed within the Recovery Plan?

This will be passed on to the team working on the Recovery Plan.

Portfolio Holder for Equalities, Diversities and Communities – Councillor Ghusain – in presented her briefing note highlighted the following:-

- in addition to its normal statutory work, the Environmental Health and Community Safety Team was required to respond to the Covid-19 crisis by advising businesses and the wider community on how to adapt and respect the new requirements brought about by the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020. This was particularly complex given the rapidly changing regulatory environment;
- the Council was in a strong position to respond to the crisis through the long term investment in Wellbeing Exeter and its approach to community development through its Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) policy established in 2019. It had reviewed and introduced a new community grant fund which was adapted for the purposes of responding to Covid-19. All are predicated on supporting and facilitating communities to come together to help themselves; and
- the four main strands of support to communities provided were through:-
 - Wellbeing Exeter and Exeter Community Wellbeing;
 - Exeter Connect;
 - Citizens Advice Exeter; and
 - The Covid-19 Community Grants Fund.

Questions from Members of the Committee

- 1 **Councillor Oliver - At the beginning of Lockdown, Exeter individuals and groups rallied round to collect and deliver essential food and medication for people shielding or self-isolating, now we hear of more and more people having to claim universal credit with a five week wait for regular payments. How have needs changed over the last months and how is Exeter City Council managing these needs?**

The City Council has responded by working very closely with Wellbeing Exeter partners to listen carefully to Community Builders and others about the type of information and support that is needed to encourage neighbourhood action at a hyper local level. This is how Exeter Community Wellbeing came about and evolved over time. Daily conversations took place across the network with officers listening to the issues from grass roots groups and individuals and then putting in place advice, guidance or communications in direct response to the needs identified.

The Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach that underpins Wellbeing Exeter requires the Council to tread a very fine line in ensuring that our role is supportive and responsive and not in any way controlling or dictatorial. I am very proud of the work that officers and partners have done, and continue to do in this respect.

Officers also worked closely with Devon County Council to ensure that the right help and support was available to individuals on the NHS Shielded list. This was a very fast paced project and not always a smooth process. Officers right across the Council worked tirelessly to ensure that help and support got to where it was needed which, as set out in the report, included setting up and staffing an emergency food distribution centre at the Matford Centre and organising the delivery of essential supplies to those in greatest need.

Supplementary questions and answers.

How will the Council respond to the Government's re-introduction of sanctions for those unable to continue to meet benefit payments?

Working with Devon County Council and its partner agencies, the Council is committed to maintaining its support to the most vulnerable in society. Work through the Exeter Community Wellbeing hub has helped identify many who require continued support and, consequently, letters have been sent to over a 1,000 individuals to advise them of the opportunity for continued assistance. In addition, Customer First staff are constantly alert to the needs of those who present themselves for support and are able to refer on to the appropriate support agency/department. This work is now core to their role.

How much longer will support for the Shielded continue especially as many of the volunteers will be returning to their jobs?

Government support for the shielded ends on 31 July 2020 but many areas of work will continue such as the availability of food parcels. In addition to the staff who continue to work in the Customer Contact Centre and the training of other staff whilst delivering the Exeter Community Wellbeing hub the overall capacity of the Council to respond in a holistic way to people with a variety of needs, including the most vulnerable in society, has been widened. The Exeter Community Wellbeing hotline continues through the Customer Contact

Centre and all calls are tracked and analysed to identify any trends where additional support can be focussed. The Exeter Community Wellbeing hub functioned effectively because of the valuable support from community and volunteer groups, and this network remains should a resurgence of the pandemic occurs. One example of new ways of working was the ability of Council staff to refer individuals direct to the Wellbeing Exeter Community Connectors, whereas previously, this could only be done through GP's.

- 2 **Councillor K. Mitchell** - *The report states a 163% increase in private sector housing work. Can the Portfolio Holder outline the reasons for this increase and the actions taken by the Council to resolve these concerns?*

Technically Private Sector Housing is under the Supporting People Portfolio held by Cllr Morse however I can respond:

There are three main changes:

1. Improvements in working practices that have increased productivity, e.g. we now systematically assess large blocks of self-contained flats rather than take each flat as an individual unit as we did in the past.
2. More proactive work with private landlords, agents and tenants resulting in an increase in enquiries from landlords acting proactively to improve property conditions; and in some cases, contacting us for advice following complaints from their tenants.
3. Covid-19 impact: more people spending more time at home as a result of lockdown has resulted in tenants becoming more aware of issues resulting in an increase in complaints.

Due to the new working practices the service is dealing with this increase in demand and complaints are being investigated and action taken, where appropriate to resolve them.

- 3 **Councillor K. Mitchell** - *The report states a 194% increase in Neighbourhood complaints, mainly noise complaints. Can the Portfolio Holder outline the reasons for the increase in complaints and the actions taken by the Council to resolve these issues?*

We think the increase is directly linked to lockdown with people spending more time in close contact with neighbours. This increases awareness of others; may heighten intolerance and may exacerbate behaviours in such a way that they become annoying to others e.g. playing music for longer periods of time.

All complaints are being investigated in line with existing policy and the increase in demand is being met by staff being drawn in from other areas of the service. However, there is no corresponding increase in enforcement activity following these investigations, which suggests that many of the complaints do not pass the threshold of being a statutory nuisance.

Supplementary question and answer.

Were complaints evenly spread across the city or were hotspots evident?

Although there were three or four hotspots identified initially, over the whole period the level of complaints is balanced across all wards in the city.

- 4 **Councillor K. Mitchell - Can the Portfolio Holder outline when the Council will revert back to the old grants system i.e. ward grants and explain how it will function?**

Ward grants that were suspended because of the emergency fund at the outset of the outbreak have now been reviewed and some, where it was relevant to do so in a Covid-19 context have now been processed. The Covid-19 grants programme is being reviewed again at the end of July. When the Councillor Ward grants programme re-opens it will function using the digital process set up in 2019 so it will function in exactly the same way as before Covid-19.

Supplementary question and answer.

Are security checks undertaken in respect of grant claims and is there a list available of those supported?

All applications are rigorously examined against set criteria and grant recipients must report back as a condition of the grant. There have been 74 grants made in the last four months from a total of 97 applications. Regular briefings, including a listing of the grants made, are sent to Members and details are also to be placed on the Council website.

- 5 **Councillor K. Mitchell - Can the Portfolio Holder give more details on the Council's track and trace service?**

This is an internal, digital process set up so that the Strategic Management Board can keep track of staff presenting with Covid-19 symptoms to ensure that any potential early signs of an Exeter City Council workplace outbreak are identified at the earliest opportunity and remedial action is taken to limit the impact on staff, customers and the wider community.

Supplementary question and answer.

How would the Council respond in respect of the long term health implications of any individual who contracted Covid-19?

The response will be the same as that already in existence for staff through established policies. The health and wellbeing of staff is a major priority and staff are fully consulted on the necessary precautions arising from this crisis within current practices and policies, with track and trace a part of this process. During the pandemic staff sickness levels have been the lowest level ever recorded and continue to be monitored on a daily basis.

- 6 **Councillor M. Mitchell - Can Members be provided with a report of the activities of Citizens Advice since the lockdown in March 2020 and can any data also be produced on a ward basis and circulated to ward members**

Yes - these reports that relate to the Council contract are already available on the Council website. The contract requires quarterly reports so those we currently have on the website are for Quarter 1: January to March 2020. Quarter 2 reports are due shortly and will be published on the website as soon as we receive it. Further information about the wider activity on Citizens Advice should be sought directly from them.

Supplementary question and answer.

Is localised data and information available from any other non-statutory body to help deal with the Covid-19 pandemic?

There is a vast array of data available from a multitude of bodies which we review when necessary.

Questions from other Council Members.

1 **Councillor D. Moore**

Environmental Health and Community 3. Health and Safety Licensing

For the following areas with of illegal levels of air pollution:

Alphington Street, Cowick Street (outbound), Livery Dole, Rowancroft, Fore Street Heavitree inbound and East Wonford Hill), Salutary Mount and Honiton Road),

and areas of concern near the illegal level:

Cowick Street / Cowick Lane junction, Red Cow Village, York Road, the junction of Blackboy Road and Pinhoe Road, Barrack Road at Livery Dole, Sidmouth Road and Topsham Road near Tollards Road.

please can the Portfolio Holder:

1. Provide the initial data readings for the sites for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) readings, during April, May and June this year.

The nitrogen dioxide diffusion tube data set is not released until the complete data set for the year has been validated, adjusted and presented in a form which can be compared to the objective level. This is the responsibility of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). There are 71 stations across the city.

2. During April - June this year did any monitoring site, in any location in the city, breach legal levels of air pollution?

There are two objectives for nitrogen dioxide. One is an annual average of below 40 micrograms per cubic metre. Because this is an average level for a whole year it is not possible to say whether or not it is exceeded for any individual month until the whole year's data has been validated.

The other objective is for the hourly average, which should not be above 200 micrograms per cubic metre on more than 18 occasions during the year.

Again, it is not possible to identify compliance with this until the whole year is complete.

3. Publish the PM 10 and PM 2.5 readings for the sites where these are measured, for April to June this year?

The PM10 and PM2.5 data set has not been ratified and is not available for publication at this time. However, we can report that the continuous analyser at RAMM has not measured any concentrations of over 200 micrograms per cubic metre during the whole of 2020 to date. This site is our only automatic air quality monitoring station directly providing (unratified) data to the Automatic Urban and Rural Network

Supplementary question and answer.

Due to the interest in the air pollution during the Lockdown, what immediate and specific actions can be taken by the City Council over the next month or two to ensure Devon County Council acts to reduce traffic as a major source of air pollution?

Significant strategic and operational work continues with input into a number of fora although, ultimately, transport is a County Council responsibility. A number of authorities are similarly frustrated at the long time periods for Defra to release its data and the City Council seeks to widely share this information when available.

- 2 **Councillor D. Moore - Community Grants and Community Development.** *The mutual aid groups across the city are putting together a report of their experiences providing emergency community support. How will the Council take on board this learning and work with mutual aid groups and other community and voluntary organisations on the ground to inform, develop and publish community emergency plan(s) so that communities can be prepared for any second COVID-19 wave, any flu outbreaks and the impact of Brexit over the winter.*

I will be delighted to receive the feedback report and I will ensure that officers feed this into our city-wide Wellbeing Exeter programme which has proved itself as a vital network for enabling community resilience. I will also ensure that officers share this report with Exeter Connect, the new Voluntary and Community sector infrastructure support service commissioned by the Council. I am sure this will be very helpful report that can inform how these programmes and services develop going forward.

Given the City Council's ABCD approach to community development it is not the intention to produce emergency plans at an area level. Lessons will be learned from other parts of the country on their response to recent spikes in the Covid-19 rates as well as the Council's response to the outbreak to date through Exeter Community Wellbeing.

Supplementary question and answer.

The Devon Community Resilience Forum holds two forum events per year with a focus on community emergency planning and there is therefore an opportunity for a Council top down meeting community bottom up to develop local emergency plans. It would be helpful therefore, if the City Council published its Emergency Plan and worked with support groups and community groups locally to consider how they might develop community plans, particularly as much of the recent response was organised on a local or mainly ward basis with these bodies thinking about what happened and how to respond better next time. It would not be the Council introducing a top down approach to community planning.

Strong and adaptable networks are already in existence as evidenced by the resilient and co-operative approach of local communities to the crisis with support from the City Council through its ABCD approach to community development. Because of the approach which has seen a long term investment in Wellbeing Exeter, the Council was in a better position to respond to the crisis than some other authorities.

There is much evidence to indicate that this approach is effective and the Council continues to engage and collaborate rather than seeking a more prescriptive relationship with communities.

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

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.11 pm

Chair

DRAFT

Agenda Item 6

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 OCTOBER 2020

CLLR RUTH WILLIAMS – PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR SUPPORTING PEOPLE

CUSTOMER ACCESS – UPDATE ON PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRIORITIES

Revenues (Council Tax & Business Rates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1,963 grants have been awarded through the Small Business Grant Fund and Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant Fund, totalling £26.5m• 228 Discretionary Business Grants have been awarded, totalling £1.3m• Although the grant schemes closed at the end of August, the team are still involved in reconciliation and post award fraud and compliance checking activity• Senior staff in the team continue to submit the weekly returns to government on the council's spend of Covid 19-related work.
Benefits & Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In August, 5,544 council tax hardship awards were made to working age customers already in receipt of council tax support, reducing their Council Tax by a total of £820k• Daily, as new claims for working age Council Tax Support are received, more awards are made from the Hardship Fund.• This means that there are no working age council tax support customers with council tax arrears in the current year. Work is underway to identify those with previous year's arrears, so that staff can make contact and offer support to help those customers clear their arrears.
Payments & Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All formal recovery processes and enforcement action has been suspended since lockdown. Courts have been closed for revenues collection activity and all enforcement activity and visits have been suspended by regulation.• Instead, for all council debt areas, staff have been calling customers whose accounts have been falling into arrears and either taking payments or agreeing alternative payment plans.• The team have now started to send 'soft reminders' to prompt payment or a response. Although no formal recovery action is being taken currently, these are statutory charges and it is important to start progressing action in order to prompt payment and to continue to encourage engagement with those that are financially struggling so that support can be offered. We want to avoid our residents and businesses increasing their levels of indebtedness as this will become more difficult to resolve.• Currently senior staff are analysing data which will help inform when and how to reintroduce formal recovery procedures.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite staff being heavily involved in bringing in the new Housing Management system, data extracted on 24 August, and compared to a similar period last year, shows less of an impact on rent collection than expected: 				
Tenure	% Arrears against net collectable rent	Arrears value £	2019/20 %	2019/20 £	
HRA (standard ECC stock)	3.61%	£714,654	3.32%	£659,676	
HRA Former tenancy arrears	-	£39,434	-	£71,913	
Short Term Accommodation (B&B)	4.16%	£23,944	1.96%	£17,740	
Short Term Accommodation (B&B) former tenancy arrears	-	£42,607	-	£47,101	
Extralet & Private Sector Lease (PSL)	9.73%	£23,166	*10.83%	*£24,554	
Extralet & Private Sector Lease (PSL) Former tenancy arrears	-	£21,612	-	*£31,832	
	<p>The support given to the homeless has substantially impacted the cost of short term accommodation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The net collectable debit for council tax has increased by just under £2m. Council Tax Collection is approximately 1% under target. 				
Customer Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Exeter Wellbeing Hub has been incorporated into the work of the Customer Support Team and to date 135 customers have received support through the Exeter Wellbeing Support Fund. £38,000 of the fund has been spent so far. The Customer Service Centre continues to offer a face to face service, limited to those with emergency housing needs. 				
Housing & Homelessness Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since 26th March “Everybody In” the final total of people rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping accommodated on special emergency Covid grounds (i.e. over and above normal duties) was 102. Face to face demand (where no immediately available alternative methods of engagement) continue to be met by the frontline housing duty service (1 caseworker plus 1 team leader/manager) operating from the customer service centre at the Civic. Demand averages 20 presentations weekly and is predominantly from rough sleepers especially those new to the area, people fleeing domestic violence or abuse, and persons made “homeless tonight” usually through family / relationship breakdown. The majority of homelessness applications continue to be diverted to interviews and assessments by phone plus some online. Demand has remained consistent throughout the last 6 months from mid-March to mid-September averaging 45 new approaches weekly. Numbers accepted into temporary accommodation has remained consistent during the same period (excluding rough 				

	<p>sleepers accommodated under “Everybody In”) averaging 24 households per month. However September is indicating a potential spike with 17 accommodated within the first 2 weeks of the month.</p>
Rough Sleeping	<p>Of the 102 persons accommodated under “Everybody In” which entails rough sleepers and those most at risk of rough sleeping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38 have moved on successfully through other housing options via friends/family, private rented, social housing and supported housing • 22 have lost or abandoned emergency accommodation • 42 remain in emergency Covid-accommodation principally at the Great Western Hotel. <p>Currently there are 28 individuals verified as rough sleeping on the street and services are working with each to deliver offers of housing and / or reconnection back to their local area. 11 of these individuals have been referred for accommodation at a repurposed city centre 11-bed hostel at 62 Howell Road, currently closed for refurbishment and due to re-open for rough sleepers in mid-October. On-site support and supervision at the project is being increased to 24/7 which includes overnight security / concierge and double staff cover during the core daytime hours. A management plan is in place and the premises already has long-running hostel status.</p>
Recovery Plans	<p>Work is continuing with a review of the supported housing pathway and in particular move-on functions and capacity. The Council is leading a review with partner agencies to re-set targets and build further capacity in the private rented sector through financial support packages to landlords and clients. This also involves an assessment of property available in the market for lease purposes via new landlords and property management services expressing an interest to work with the Council in providing accommodation move-on.</p> <p>The government funded Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) has determined bids for revenue for local authorities across England providing emergency accommodation and support for rough sleepers. Exeter has been awarded £440k for the 6 months up to end March 2021 and these funds will enable the ongoing commitment to operate services at the Great Western Hotel and other temporary placements. We are awaiting the announcement at the end of September of the capital round of the bid which, if successful will support the Council to deliver up to 36 new units of accommodation with support.</p>

	Discussions with partner services are continuing with regard to tracking any new housing need for people fleeing domestic abuse and violence for which support services have been experiencing significant demand growth (> 50% increase) but housing has not experienced to date.
Winter emergency provision	<p>As winter approaches we anticipate an increase in demand for emergency housing as a result of the impending cessation of the evictions moratorium (Sept 21st) whereby landlords are due to be able to take proceedings against tenants with ASB and significant rent arrears. The situation is being monitored and options are being assessed for financial support to help reduce rent arrears and therefore any additional burden on temporary accommodation.</p> <p>In addition there are anticipated spikes in demand during inclement weather for which we are currently in discussions with Public Health and MHCLG in order to determine plans for making accommodation available that is not based on shared sleeping space (e.g. night shelter and communal floorspaces) currently deemed not feasible on health and safety (covid-19) grounds.</p>

8 OCTOBER 2020

CLLR LAURA WRIGHT – PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COUNCIL HOUSING
DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICES
HOUSING - UPDATE ON PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRIORITIES

Housing Assets - Asset Management Team

Stock Condition Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inspections of blocks still continue and have been undertaken with no interaction with residents• Mail-outs for inspections of individual properties have started and appointments are being booked for these to be carried out with Covid precautions being taken• Data cleansing, rationalisation, updating and general housekeeping of the stock condition database continues• A huge amount of stock condition data and expertise has been fed into the Carbon Reduction project.
Development Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work continues to identify and bring forward opportunities to meet the 500 home delivery target for the HRA• The Laings development site re-mobilised in early July and work is progressing well, with the first completions expected in October• The Extra Care scheme is progressing well, but the Covid restrictions and social distances have caused a slow down on site with completion not expected until around April 2021• The acquisition of 3 houses in Anthony Road and the completion of the 9 houses at Thornpark Rise is set for early October 2020• The Bovemoors Lane development has continued and good progress has been made with only a minor slip in the programme• The procurement of an operator and care provider for the Extra Care scheme has restarted in earnest with input from both DCC and ECC• Procurement and mobilisation continues on the Vaughan Road and Hamlin Gardens schemes

Housing Assets - Health, Safety & Compliance

Gas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although the regulator did not relax safety inspection (LGSR) requirements, better government guidance was published which helped our access approach with tenants.• We assisted our gas contractor with their unexpected additional PPE costs agreeing to pay £3,000.• The KPIs reflect the lockdown and relaxation: Feb 99.76%, Mar 99.55%, Apr 99.24%, May 98.68%, Jun 99.48%, Jul 99.50% and Aug 99.59%.• Our own teams continue to support the contractor by providing additional reassurance calls to tenants and nuanced letters.• Gas boiler installation program continues to be delivered• Gas Repairs – This service remains unaffected.• All properties with gas appliances now have carbon monoxide detectors installed. This marks the successful conclusion of a two year program. All CO detectors are checked annually when the LGSR is completed.
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Electrical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic 5-yearly inspections – Unlike the LGSRs, this works stopped and recommenced in July. Pre-lockdown KPIs stood at 96.36%, were 87.97% at their worst but have since partially recovered to 90.68% in August. Electrical Repairs – Remain unaffected. Communal 5-yearly inspections – Although these did not involve electricians entering tenant properties, the risk from the coronavirus and difficulty obtaining PPE meant that the inspections were suspended. Pre-lockdown KPIs stood at 100%, were 82.77% at their worst but since recovered to 92.92% in August. Emergency lighting upgrades – this extensive program was also suspended but in line with the other electrical work has resumed. We are now transitioning from installing emergency lighting where none existed before - they relied on borrowed lighting (street lights) – to replacing and improving emergency lighting where it already exists so that all blocks of flats will comply with current, modern standards.
Asbestos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communal re-inspections – This service was largely uninterrupted and good compliance was maintained so that they have resumed 100% compliance. Voids and surveys – this area of work ceased during the lockdown but has since resumed.
Legionella	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk assessments – Performance dipped to 97.37% but have returned to 100% compliance. Testing and inspections – The service was suspended during lock-down but has since resumed.
Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fire risk assessments (blocks of flats) were suspended, in agreement with the fire service, until September. However, we were able to recommence in July and plan to finish in November (not October as previously reported). We are planning for the forthcoming Fire Safety Act and will shortly be procuring a contract to assess the compartmentation (fire stopping) in all blocks of flats.
Lifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communal lifts – 6-monthly inspections and maintenance largely unaffected Domestic stairlifts – emergency repair continues but maintenance and safety inspections were suspended. These resumed in July. KPIs were 45.70% at their worst and have reached 67.87% in August.
Footpaths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-inspections – this has been a considerable project. All footpaths have now been risk assessed to a single standard and we are now in the re-inspection phase being 97.11% compliant in August.
Housing Assets - Reactive Repairs	
Reactive Repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reactive repairs moved to emergency and essential repairs only, following the introduction of restrictions Non-urgent repairs have been logged and prioritised

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist contractors (damp proof, roofing) were put on hold and are now resuming We are planning for an anticipated surge in demand on the service Sept- we have now reached the point where we are carrying out all the repairs that we would normally, and we are working our way through a significant backlog of jobs. Our Day to Day Contractors (Mears) now have staff back from furlough. We have approx. 1,300 jobs to catch up on with 200 inspections to also carry out (these will certainly add jobs to that list) Mears are looking at measures to increase productivity such as overtime and incentive schemes. We are now back at normal incoming call levels for service requests. This is at approximately 700 calls/ week with busy days usually Mondays as high as 180 calls / day. In addition emails and requests for service are being logged from our self-serve web site link. Typically these calls result in more than one job raised as the tenants and leaseholders have been 'saving them up'
Voids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We reviewed existing void properties to establish whether they should be mothballed or used for temporary accommodation The void process has now commenced Re-let times (therefore rental income) have been temporarily negatively affected, but the service has withstood the challenge of COVID Sept- our void contractors (Mears) are now fully back at work after a proportion of them were furloughed. This has meant that works have been prioritised for the 'mothballed' voids on a housing needs basis with the lettings department as well as working with Mears to create the right mix of types of void to compliment the workforce. So we are mixing in voids without the need for a new kitchen in with maximising the voids for the kitchen fitting teams to spread the work. We have 23 Major voids currently that are being looked at in order to fast track completion by attempting to get more resources in place from Mears The backlog will take 2-3 months to catch up on as of course each week new voids (approximately 5 / week) are added to the list.
Assisted Gardening Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Assisted Gardening Scheme was temporarily suspended with the exception of health and safety works. This service has now recommenced. w/c 7th Sept Following discussions with Glendale our service provider we have now got adequate risk assessments and procedures for travelling through properties with operative and equipment, in place to allow full service to resume for this valued service, there will be a period of catching up to do and we will endeavour to prioritise the most needed areas as well as respond to individuals request for service on a risk based approach, for example, dealing with overhanging brambles will be prioritised over cutting back, long grass.
Housing Assets - Planned Repairs	

Planned Repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All works undertaken by the Planned Works Team have now recommenced on sites taking into consideration COVID 19 precautions for all tradesmen and residents etc. • We have revised our programmes of work to accommodate the delays, including the new precautions • Kitchen and Bathroom contract to commence imminently • Work continuing to align the net zero retrofit programme with all wider planned works activity
Tenancy Services - Estates	
Housing Officer Team Lettings & Leasehold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk top tenancy reviews and flexible tenancy reviews still being carried out via phone contact • Home Visits only being carried out in exceptional circumstances and in accordance with Risk Assessment • Requests for joint visits with other agencies/colleagues where concerns have been highlighted are going ahead in accordance with Risk Assessment guidance • Escape Route Inspections have now resumed on a regular basis and clearing a backlog of built up debris and rubbish which accumulated over lockdown • Housing Management IT system is embedding well and old system is due to be decommissioned at the end of September • Additional cleaning of Older Persons Accommodation communal areas ongoing • Reviewing and assessing feasibility of re-opening Common Rooms on OP sites in light of recent 'Rule of Six' changes • Keeping tenants updated on Housing Services via social media • Use of 'decant' properties for Housing Options to provide safe accommodation for Rough Sleepers has now ended • Dealing with complaints, MP enquiries and reports of anti-social behaviour as normal although some restrictions around being able to conduct face-to-face interviews which would previously have taken place at the Civic Centre. Alternatives are being explored • Properties being re-let as usual with Risk Assessment and Social Distancing measures in place • Not currently carrying out Pre-Void inspections as the nature of the visit requires prolonged and close physical proximity to the tenant making social distancing measures difficult to achieve • Mutual Exchange processing has recommenced • Right to Buy applications continue as normal • Leasehold Service charges to be published as normal at the end of September • OPPSO Service operating as normal within Risk Assessment guidance
Performance, Strategy & Resident Involvement	

Performance, Strategy & Resident Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devised a three stage recovery program, to resume normal services and communicated same to tenants and leaseholders in a timely manner • We have contributed to the corporate Business Continuity Plan from a Housing point of view • We have updated our risk register to help mitigate the negative effects of Covid-19 • All furloughed staff have returned to work • We provided information and answered customer queries through our social media accounts • Our performance has held up despite all the current difficulties e.g.: stable staff levels; rent arrears at the median level according to Housemark; whilst reports of ASB have increased by 58% from March, Housemark have reported a 60% increase within the sector • Provided performance and operational delivery data to a number of agencies (NROSH, Housing Ombudsman and Housemark) in addition to normal requirements • Provided a link between housing and the Exeter Wellbeing Hub for tenants and leaseholders of the Council • Held an online Focus Group meeting with involved tenants via Zoom • Increased the number of followers of the Housing Services Facebook page which is continually updated • Successfully decanted tenants from the Laings properties and the Vaughan Road bungalows • Recruited and appointed a new Housing Decants Officer Participated in the Comms. Team Meetings so that there is a consistent message across all platforms of the Council
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No. of complaints / enquiries received	MP enquiries	Cllr enquiries	Service Level Complaints	Corporate Complaints	TOTAL
June	3	0	6	2	11
July	5	4	8	3	20
August	2	2	9	7	20
					51

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