

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30 June 2022

Present:

Councillor Matthew Vizard (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Bennett, Ellis-Jones, Foale, Harvey, Holland, Newby, Oliver, Snow and Sutton

Apologies:

Councillors Sparling, Wardle and Warwick

Also present:

Director of City Development, Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support, Assistant Service Lead – Local Plan and Democratic Services Officer (HB)

In attendance:

Councillor Bialyk	Leader
Councillor Denning	Portfolio Holder Council Housing Development and Support Services
Councillor Ghusain	Portfolio Holder City Management and Environment Services
Councillor Morse	Portfolio Holder City Development
Councillor Pearce	Portfolio Holder Communities and Homelessness Prevention
Councillor Williams	Portfolio Holder Recycling and Waterways

10 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 31 March 2022 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

11 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

12 **Presentation on the role of Scrutiny**

The Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support spoke on the role of scrutiny and its importance within the Council's democratic process in acting as a critical friend for the Authority. He set out the following three distinct aspects of the scrutiny process:-

- holding Executive to account by analysing and reviewing their decisions such as through the Call-In process, provided this met one of the four criteria set out in the Council's Constitution. This process was not applicable when the Executive made recommendations to Council as, at that stage, the whole Council was effectively the ultimate scrutinising authority. Members could also question Portfolio Holders on their areas of responsibility and how they were meeting the objectives and priorities of the Council. The Scrutiny Programme Board had agreed a new proforma for this purpose and this process would commence in the September/October cycle of Scrutiny Committees;

- a more proactive approach with the opportunity to contribute to the policies and procedures of the Council through its Forward Plan, which is published monthly, providing advance notification of matters to be brought forward and which can be considered first by a Scrutiny Committee prior to report to Executive; and
- a second proactive approach involved the examination of specific matters in greater detail through Task and Finish Groups, a good example being the recent meeting of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group. Such a group typically comprised five to six Members and was able to call witnesses, both internal and external, to assist with its review. An alternative was a Spotlight Review which could comprise a similar number of Members and which, typically, was likely to meet on one occasion only.

The Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support also made the following points:-

- the Scrutiny Programme Board considered requests for further examination and scrutiny of issues with regard to Council priorities and objectives. Members of the Scrutiny Programme Board had developed a proforma for Members seeking to suggest a topic to set out the detail. This proforma was shared with the Strategic Management Board for comment before being presented to the Scrutiny Programme Board for determination and timetabling to ensure both an equal spread of business between the two Scrutiny Committees and to achieve the best use of the resources available;
- the creation of a portal on the Council's intranet which included guidance on scrutiny procedures and tips on how to make scrutiny work. It also included relevant forms to bring forward matters for scrutiny as well as links to the Local Government Association, Local Government Information Unit and Centre for Public Scrutiny sites;
- two recent examples of in depth scrutiny were the detailed questioning of the progress report from Exeter City Futures and the City of Exeter Greenhouse Gas Inventory at the Strategic Scrutiny Committee and the meetings of the Joint Strategic Scrutiny and Customer Focus Scrutiny Committees examining the Exeter City Development Fund;
- the opportunity, through Standing Order 18, for Members to request a matter being placed on a Scrutiny Committee agenda;
- a meeting of the Governance Review Board was to be held to further examine the Council's Governance arrangements. This could lead to recommendations to Council to make any necessary changes. Previous examples of changes had been the introduction of the opportunity for the public to put questions to Committees and Council and a fine tuning of the petitions scheme; and
- because of resource implications, the decision making meetings of Council, the Executive and Planning Committee were recorded but not Scrutiny Committee meetings. This would be re-visited by the Governance Review Board who would be asked to look at any plans to broadcast meetings of Scrutiny.

Responding to a Member's query, the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support confirmed that a further role of Scrutiny was to scrutinise issues that impacted on the city as a whole and were not necessarily functions of the Council itself.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support for his presentation and emphasised the importance of scrutiny being a critical friend of the Council. He also referred to the membership of the Scrutiny Programme Board as the Chairs and Deputies of both Scrutiny Committees, with the Board chaired by Councillor Packham, a non-Executive Member. It was an open and transparent process and he encouraged Members to come forward with topics for discussion.

Members noted the report.

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

No questions from members of the public were received.

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

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions had been submitted by Councillors Bennett, Harvey, M. Mitchell and Sparling and had been circulated in advance to Members of the Committee. The responses of the Portfolio Holders are set out in italics.

Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Recycling and Waterways - Councillor Williams

Councillor Bennett

Please could the Portfolio Holder provide information on the performance of the glass collection service and if the service is expected to run without further interruptions this year?

Response

The team are working incredibly hard to rectify the performance but there are some issues outside their direct control. The vehicle used is a bespoke collection vehicle. It is over 11 years old with ageing parts that are difficult to source. Due to the nature of the vehicle we are unable to hire one to cover the vehicle while it is fixed. In addition, there is the issue of not being able to successfully recruit for LGV drivers and having to take the driver from this vehicle to bolster the statutory waste and recycling collections. Of course, measures are being explored to re-think the glass collections within the city, but the underpinning issue is that the Government is unclear when glass will be collected from the kerbside. That really isn't helping the people of Exeter. I can assure you that everything we can control is in place to clear the glass side waste should the vehicle fail.

Supplementary question and answer.

Will action be progressed to address issues around kerbside collections or will the Government review be awaited first?

Answer

It is necessary to wait for clarity from the Government as it would be irresponsible to make major decisions and incur unnecessary costs prior to the results of the review being known.

Councillor Harvey

What arrangements are planned to solve the following problems with the food recycling collection:-

Response

I am pleased to offer reassurance as the current Portfolio Holder that I have been addressing matters since I started. We are unfortunately playing catch-up on many of these things but I can assure Councillor Harvey that I am the right person to undertake this challenging job.

- 1) Lack of appropriately qualified drivers.
Advertising roles on a rolling advert to recruit LGV drivers, looking at upskilling current employed staff to the appropriate level for the vehicles.
- 2) Lack of appropriate vehicles.
We have one full time food vehicle delivery plus a spare. A 1 x 7.5 tonne food vehicle was delivered at the end of June 2022 and another 7.5 tonne food vehicle will be delivered at the end of September this year.
- 3) Collection arrangements with the collecting authority.
The other half of the existing round is being rolled out on Thursday 7 July 2022 (the other half of Alphington).
- 4) Licensing arrangements with the appropriate authorities regarding the storage and transfer of food waste.
Capacity on site is limited to 15 tonnes per day. The food waste bay on site is a priority for the site re-development.
- 5) When do you envisage food waste collection being rolled out to further areas of the City?
In the next six months, subject to recruiting enough Drivers/Loaders. Areas are still to be determined.

Supplementary question and answer.

What amendments, if any, have been made to change staff terms and conditions and what progress has been made?

Answer

Changes are being considered, but it would not be appropriate to reveal these at present.

Councillor M. Mitchell

Please can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the trial food waste recycling service and give an indication of the next stage of the rollout of the service and where this will be?

Response

I refer Councillor M. Mitchell to the previous answer.

Supplementary question and answer.

Is the Portfolio Holder confident that, in two years' time, Exeter will have improved its current position in the 2021 national recycling league table where it came 313th out of

338 District Councils, in comparison to East Devon, for example, which was ranked 9th.

Answer

The statistics do not take into account the actual amount of waste collected. In Exeter this is 300kg per person per year compared with the Devon target of 413 kg. Moreover, the nature of waste collected in the city differs to that of rural areas where there is a greater amount of green waste. Once the collection of food waste is rolled out, Exeter's position in the table will significantly improve.

Questions to the Portfolio Holder for City Management and Environmental Services - Councillor Ghusain

Councillor Harvey

What plans are in place to re-wild or develop in any other way the old Northbrook golf course and what budget has been allocated for this purpose.

Response

Executive approved in principle the concept of a wild arboretum for the Northbrook site in 2021. Since the approval, the Devon Wildlife Trust and Exeter City Council have continued to work together to develop a second stage proposal for Executive, under the Valley Park Committee Memorandum of Understanding. This will outline the scope, delivery programme, and funding streams for the arboretum in full. Devon Wildlife Trust/Exeter City Council principles around biodiversity and ecology enhancement will apply within the space, and that will include a scaled back grass cutting regime. In regards to budget, it is anticipated that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will contribute to some of the budget requirements. Members will be updated about this at the appropriate time.

Councillor Sparling

Please can the Portfolio Holder provide a location map of the new CCTV cameras installed as a result of the Safer Central Exeter funding, confirm by when these will be installed and also if there has been, or will be, a further bid made by the Council and/or its partners for community safety in Central Exeter?

Response

The Procurement exercise is up and running and it is anticipated that the new cameras will be installed by September.

Supplementary question and answer.

Councillor M. Mitchell asked the following supplementary question on behalf of Councillor Sparling.

In the event of a further bid in respect of Central Exeter, will the Portfolio Holder undertake to consult with local communities to obtain their input and feedback on the location of any further CCTV cameras?

Answer

The location of new cameras has already been decided and the request for consulting communities on any further installations will be considered.

Question to the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homelessness Prevention – Councillor Pearce

Councillor Sparling

In December 2020, the Council passed a motion on addressing food poverty. Please can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on this work?

The Chair read out the following Notice of Motion passed unanimously at the meeting of Council on 15 December 2020.

The Council resolves:

1. *That the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Culture supported by the Member Champion for Equality and Diversity take responsibility to:*
 - a) *develop a city-wide food action plan.*
 - b) *set up a working group to research and map the extent of food poverty in the city;*
2. *To commit to setting up a food partnership with Devon County Council, city-based partners and stakeholders to develop and implement the Exeter Food Action Plan;*
3. *To campaign, in association with Exeter MPs, for Government to:*
 - a) *legislate the existing commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals to end hunger by 2030;*
 - b) *commit funding in the next spending review to increase access to nutritious food, whilst awaiting development of the National Food Strategy;*
 - c) *support local food production and suppliers, so that food supplies are sustained throughout the pandemic and as a result of exiting the EU, to protect workers' jobs, and to contribute to Exeter's commitment to Net Carbon Zero 2030; and*
 - d) *increase Universal Credit to help people suffering food poverty, with an equivalent uplift to those on legacy benefits.*

Response

As you know, the City Council has no statutory obligation on the Food Action front. That said, Councillor Ghusain and Councillor Oliver were instrumental in connecting Free Food Providers in Exeter by facilitating the creation of a platform and a framework (the first meeting of the Exeter Free Food Network was held in February 2020). After several meetings, the group was renamed Exeter Community Food Network (ECFN), with representatives from Exeter Food Bank, local faith and

community groups, and other organisations involved in the provision and distribution of free food. Exeter Connect/ECl is now hosting these bimonthly meetings. I will be attending these meetings going forward and ensure that progress is continued.

15 **Homelessness Task and Finish Working Group**

The Deputy Chair and Chair of the Homelessness Task and Finish Working Group briefed Members on the first meeting of the Group held on 27 June 2022. He explained that the suggestion for a working group had been triggered by the cuts in Universal Credit and the feared impact this would have on existing homeless numbers.

The Chair explained the two stages of the review. Stage I would examine causation and prevention and gather evidence regarding the pattern and causes of homelessness in Exeter, including the impact of issues relating to the Pandemic, cost of living rises and recent Government policy changes and consider early intervention and prevention strategies. Stage II would involve the handling of the process of homelessness, examining how Exeter City Council and other statutory bodies handled homeless cases and the resource implications.

It was the intention to ask evidence providers for information and views (statements) in advance, for the Group to determine the questioning approach in order to avoid lengthy presentations and to concentrate on scrutinising the responses and issues. It was also the intention of the Group for its work to be promoted on the City Council website inviting bodies or individuals to submit evidence in person or in writing.

The Chair stated that he hoped that the above framework would become a transferable model for use by future working groups.

The Chair undertook for the Group to consider a request from a Member for the impact of the banding system to be included in the assessment of causation.

The following membership of the Group was noted:-

Councillor M. Mitchell (Chair) Councillors Jobson, J. Moore, Oliver, Rees, Sutton and Wardle.

16 **The Exeter (Local) Plan - Community Engagement**

The Assistant Service Lead Local Plan presented the report explaining the community engagement process for preparing the Exeter Plan (the Local Plan). He stated that the process for preparing the Exeter Plan was managed through legislation (the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Regulations 2012) which sets the need for consultation at an early stage in the process to define the scope of the Plan and then once the Plan has reached a final draft stage called publication.

The Council was committed to going beyond this requirement and was organising three formal consultations on the preparation of the Plan. In addition to the 'Issues' consultation which had been held between September and November 2021,

consultations would be held on a draft plan and a final publication draft thereafter. If, at the Examination of the Plan, the Inspector required modifications, further consultation would also be held. The next formal consultation on the Exeter Plan would take place in September of this year.

The way in which the Council would consult on the Exeter Plan was set out formally in the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and that, although not a requirement, the Council had held a consultation on the draft SCI in 2021. New ways of engaging innovatively and interactively were currently being investigated for the next round of the Exeter Plan consultation to be held in the autumn. In addition to the SCI, the engagement activities planned for the Exeter Plan would also accord with the Council's Consultation Charter.

Further informal engagement would be undertaken on specific issues considered by the Exeter Plan. This would enable the Council to make the most of opportunities to explore linkages between projects and also make best use of resources. A key part would be through joint working with Liveable Exeter. The Council was currently working in partnership with the RAMM and Exeter Culture to stage workshops on the 'Future of the High Street' while a summer-long exhibition in the RAMM was being held to explain more about Liveable Exeter. These activities would be using Lego models - the Brick by Brick Exhibition - and other interactive activities to engage in a different way. Also in July, the Council was launching a city-wide consultation on the 'Future Place' of Exeter, which would be asking local people about a vision for their future neighbourhoods and districts. This work would all feed into the Exeter Plan.

The Director City Development and Assistant Service Lead Local Plan responded to Members' queries:-

- a key consideration of the consultative process was to take on board the views of the public. The SCI sets out how public responses would be used to inform the Plan and the responses received to the 'Issues' consultation held between September and November 2021 had been reported through the Committee system;
- the Exeter Plan would be a strategic land use development document with a range of policies and would cover all aspects of how the city would grow to 2040. It would be important to explain the role of Liveable Exeter as a delivery initiative which would help underpin the Plan. The Exeter Plan, for example, identified the overall strategy for brownfield sites and Liveable Exeter set out the principles for delivering in these sites. Consultation on the Plan would include an on-line facility which would allow navigation through the various policies;
- consultation on Liveable Exeter (feeding into the Exeter Plan) would include wider engagement with schools, Exeter College and the University of Exeter. Exeter College students had undertaken an exercise envisaging future development of Exeter St David's Station and the basis of the Lego Exhibition had been to involve local schools and the younger generation;
- the University was one of the city's key anchor institutions and its continued growth and success, both nationally and internationally, was guided by its Master Plan. With an end date of 2026, the Master Plan was under review in liaison with the City Council and work on this would dovetail with the development of the Exeter Plan; and
- the engagement of community associations would also be a key element of the consultative process, the Assistant Service Lead Local Plan having recently addressed the St Leonard's Neighbourhood Association.

The Chair read out three questions submitted in advance by a Committee Member who was unable to attend, the answers to which are set out below:-

- in respect of the request from the Member for communities to be able to influence planning policy through seminars or workshops, for example on the development of a Neighbourhood Plan this, together with any specific requests from a community body, would be considered within the context of available staff resources. Advice could also be made available on how to navigate on line the large amount of free information on Neighbourhood Plans;
- in respect of the request from a Member for locally based neighbourhood consultation to inform the Plan, in particular around Liveable Exeter sites, the report detailed the intention to go well beyond the statutory minimum required for consultation, for example the 'Future of the High Street' exhibition and the launch of the 'Future Place' of Exeter consultation. The goal was to involve as wide a cross section of residents and businesses, as well as visitors, as possible. Further reports would be submitted to Members on the progress of the consultations and the ideas raised; and
- in respect of the Member's request for a second round of consultation, this was already timetabled for an eight week period from the end of September. There would also be informal consultations, with details again to be reported to Members.

The Portfolio Holder City Development confirmed that Members would be kept fully informed of the consultative process which would be as open and transparent as possible. In addition to the current reporting of the various stages to the Planning Member Working Group regular reports on the Exeter Plan would be made to the Strategic Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that Scrutiny Committee note the report.

17 **Forward Plan of Business**

Members noted the Forward Plan.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.57 pm

Chair