

## **EXECUTIVE**

Tuesday 7 November 2023

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

Councillors Wright, Denning, Foale, Morse, Parkhouse, Pearce, Williams, R and Wood

Also present:

Councillor Jobson (as an opposition group Leader);

Councillor Moore (as an opposition group Leader);

Councillor M. Mitchell (as an opposition group Leader); and

Councillor Allcock speaking on item 7 (Minute No. 104 below)

Also present:

Director Corporate Services, Director of Culture, Leisure and Tourism, Director Transformation, Corporate Manager – Executive Support, Collections & Content Manager and Democratic Services Manager

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### **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2023, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

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### **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 19**

No questions from members of the public were received.

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### **DIGITAL CUSTOMER STRATEGY 2023-2025**

The Executive received the report on the draft Digital Customer Strategy 2023-2025, which explained its importance for the Council and provided feedback on the public consultation that took place between July and September 2023. The report also provided insights from independent research on how well the Council understood and met the needs of its customers including those facing digital exclusion.

The Director presented the report and made particular reference to:-

- the Digital Customer Strategy set out the Council's vision in putting the customer first by improving the customer experience and meeting customer needs through the improvement to services;
- the public consultation had received very positive feedback, which included an online survey and supported by proactive work from a range of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE) partners who had engaged with their clients on the themes of the strategy;
- information had also been made available in libraries across the city to attain the views of those who aren't already digitally engaged with the Council;

- work had been commissioned by Red Quadrant, on digital inclusion in the city to identify areas where people were already facing potential digital exclusion; and
- the Council would continue to work proactively with its partners to reduce digital exclusion in the communities identified as the most vulnerable in the city.

Members noted the detailed analysis outlined in the report on the customer experience and the large volume of work that was underway on developing an action plan to address issues raised and implement required improvements. A detailed implementation plan setting out delivery expectations and any additional resources would accompany the action plan in early 2024.

Councillor M. Mitchell, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and suggested lowering the level of jargon to provide a better understanding of the content. He also suggested a briefing for all Members to attend, to provide further understanding on the strategy and address any likely impacts on customers.

Councillor Moore, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and raised the following points:-

- the Strategy showed that areas of digital exclusion were correlated in high deprivation areas and referred to the importance of understanding the extent of digital inequality and the impact on Council services. Should the Council be asking what the impact of inequality on people's lives was, and how the Council could support people in order to reduce demand on its services?
- the digital inclusion work being delivered through the Council's Community Grants Programme was a concern, in respect of the work with Wellbeing Exeter, and given that the Grants Programme had been cancelled and Wellbeing Exeter funding was coming to an end, how would this be delivered?
- on what basis had the Director decided that there was no direct carbon or environmental implications in the recommendations, and could the analysis that led to this conclusion be made available and, did Strata data services run on 100% renewable energy?
- the checking and monitoring of progress was welcomed, but there were no scheduled reporting dates or processes available. Would an indicative budget be made available before it is presented to Council?

The Portfolio Holder for Communities & Homelessness Prevention advised that the statement made about the cancellation of both the Community Grants Programme and Wellbeing Exeter were incorrect and that no decisions had yet been made on these matters.

During the discussion the following points were made:-

- bringing digital systems forward was important. Educating people especially for those who can't use digital at present would provide better services and improve people's ability to connect with the wider community through increased use of digital technologies;
- the report was welcomed and provided an impressive use of data to support the aims and objectives of the Strategy;
- the report was well researched and provided a lot of evidence for 24/7 services and building trust for the use of quality digital services, which meets the needs

of customers and ensuring customers who could be excluded by digital processes were being considered;

- thanks were given to the Director for continuing the digital transformation work that commenced in 2019 and enabled the Council to switch almost overnight to home working with no disruption to services. This next customer focussed phase was a welcome continuation of that work;
- it was good to see that the report recognised the benefit of more customer self-service through digital channels to improve efficiency but also to free up officer time to assist those with more complex needs. The survey showed that 49% of respondents to the consultation had preferred speaking to an officer to resolve their issues, whilst 47% had preferred having a choice of options. It was important, to offer a choice of channels for residents in dealing with the Council;
- digitisation would also improve the customer experience by having all the relevant information about a customer in one place, meaning customers wouldn't have to repeat their details to different departments and resolve issues faster; and
- the feedback from St. Petrock's and the YMCA was welcomed and their offer to hold further focus groups with their clients as the strategy was implemented was very helpful. The Director would also follow this up in due course.

The Leader in responding to points and questions raised, advised that a Members' briefing could be arranged at the appropriate time and that detailed questions would be responded to outside of the meeting.

The Director advised in response to the question on an indicative budget being made available prior to a Council decision on the Strategy that there were too many uncertainties and variables at this time to provide any reliable estimate of costs for the full delivery of the Strategy. She advised that work was underway on business cases for future infrastructure requirements alongside housekeeping work with staff on data storage which would all have an impact on future costs. Reliable cost estimates and business cases would be brought forward as the work developed.

**RECOMMENDED** that Council:-

- (1) approves the adoption of the Digital Customer Strategy 2023-2025 together with the intended outcomes and priority actions proposed; and
- (2) notes that a detailed delivery plan will be produced to enable the Council to monitor progress towards the achievement of the ten goals set out in the Strategy. The implementation plan is likely to require additional resources and would be brought back through the Council's governance process in 2024.

Councillor Allcock, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Board, was in attendance to present the Annual Scrutiny Report which provided an overview of the work and achievements of Scrutiny during the 2022 – 2023 Municipal Year. The report had been presented to the Strategic Scrutiny Committee on 21 September 2023 and to the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee on 5 October 2023 and would be presented to Council on 12 December 2023.

Particular reference was made to the Scrutiny Programme Board, who had been looking at options to enable Members to see all submitted Scrutiny Proposal Forms and their current status to support increased transparency.

Councillor M. Mitchell, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and noted the report was similar to that of other local authorities and future reports should also

capture the success and activity of Members involvement in Scrutiny work during the Municipal Year.

Members welcomed the work of both Scrutiny Committees and welcomed, the opportunity for Portfolio Holders to obtain feedback from Scrutiny Members which helped them in the work they lead on.

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve the Annual Scrutiny Report 2022- 2023.

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**AMENDMENTS TO THE SCHEME OF DELEGATION AND MINOR UPDATES TO THE CONSTITUTION**

The Executive received the report which set out the proposals to amend the Scheme of Delegation to Officers to match operational arrangements of the Council, and ensuring suitable day to day operational decisions could be taken. The report also requested minor updates to the Constitution in respect of the Financial Regulations and Standing Order No. 54. The Scheme of Delegation was reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it was up to date.

Particular reference was made to the reference in Appendix A of the Director Net Zero and City Management in the role of the Duty Holder for the Exeter Port Authority which would be removed. The Director Net Zero and City Management and the Portfolio Holder for Place & City Management would investigate where the responsibility for the Duty Holder resided and report back to the Executive in due course.

Councillor Moore, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and sought clarification on the amendment to Standing Order No. 54 and whether the update was proposing to substitute the regulation to an earlier regulation and wished to ensure that the Council was using the correct regulations.

Councillor Jobson, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and also enquired on the amendment to Standing Order No. 54 and the use of the correct regulations.

Councillor M. Mitchell, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and enquired on the need for a Governance and Standards Sub-Committee to consider constitutional amendments prior to being received by the Executive.

In response to questions and points from Members, the Director Corporate Services advised that the amendment to Standing Order No. 54 was ensuring that the correct legislation was being referenced and that Council was using the correct legislation.

The Leader advised that there was no Governance Sub Committee and matters of updating the Constitution were a matter for the Executive to recommend to Council.

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve the changes to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers, and the minor updates to the Financial Regulations and Standing Order 54 as set out in Appendix A of the report.

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**REQUEST TO REPATRIATE A SACRED BUNDLE - A MOTOKIKS CEREMONIAL HEADDRESS TO THE BLACKFOOT (SIKSIKA), ALBERTA, CANADA**

The Executive received the report on the repatriation of a ceremonial headdress traditionally worn by a holy woman of the Holy Buffalo Woman Society (Motokiks),

sometimes referred to as a sacred ceremonial bundle. The headdress had been confiscated during the colonial period, possibly in relation to Christianizing the native peoples and had been ultimately bequeathed to the RAMM in 1920.

In May 2022, Siksika Elders had visited Exeter in connection with the repatriation of Chief Crowfoot's regalia, and had stressed the sacred significance of the headdress to their community and submitted a formal letter in September 2022, requesting an act of repatriation.

Particular reference was made to Exeter City Council having the legal authority for the de-accession of objects from the RAMM's collections and for returning them to the communities from which they originate. The RAMM, in undertaking due diligence, had approached the Kainai Nation on the basis that it may have held a rival claim to the headdress and had endorsed the Siksika Nation as the rightful recipients of the headdress.

Councillors Jobson, Moore and M. Mitchell, as opposition group leaders, supported the recommendations.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Culture & City Centre Strategy thanked the Collections & Content Manager for a comprehensive report and ensuring the repatriation process had been undertaken correctly and appropriately. She referred to the equality impact assessment which highlighted historic inequalities and the importance of learning from it. The Motokiks sacred ceremonial bundle held an important significance to the Siksika nation and fully supported its repatriation.

Members welcomed the report and fully supported the repatriation of a ceremonial headdress.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (1) the due diligence process carried out by the Council's Museum Officers in establishing whether there were any rival claims to the headdress, be noted;
- (2) the Museums' Manager and the Director of Culture, Leisure and Tourism being satisfied that the headdress was originally the property of the Siksika Nation prior to its acquisition and its ultimate transfer of the ownership to Exeter City Council and its predecessors be also noted; and
- (3) the legal ownership of the headdress be surrendered by Exeter City Council and transferred to the Blackfoot Tribal Council of the Siksika Nation.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.10 pm)

Chair

**The decisions indicated will normally come into force 5 working days after publication of the Statement of Decisions unless called in by a Scrutiny Committee. Where the matter in question is urgent, the decision will come into force immediately. Decisions regarding the policy framework or corporate objectives or otherwise outside the remit of the Executive will be considered by Council on 12 December 2023.**