



## Exeter City Council

A meeting of **EXETER CITY COUNCIL** will be held at the **GUILDHALL, HIGH STREET, EXETER** on **TUESDAY 15 APRIL 2025**, at 6.00 pm, at which you are hereby summoned to attend.

If you have an enquiry regarding any items on this agenda, please contact Mark Devin, Democratic Services Manager on 01392 265477.

The following business is proposed to be transacted:-

		Pages
1	Minutes	
	To approve and sign the minutes of the meetings held on 18 February 2025 and 25 February 2025 and the Extraordinary meeting held on 20 March 2025.	3 - 42
2	Official Communications	
3	Public Questions	

Details of questions should be notified to Democratic Services at least three working days prior to the meeting - by 10am on Thursday 10 April 2025.

Details about speaking at Council to be found here: [Public Speaking at Meetings](#).

To receive minutes of the following Committees and to determine thereon:-

4	Planning Committee - 17 February 2025	43 - 48
5	Audit and Governance Committee - 12 February 2025	49 - 52
6	Audit and Governance Committee - 19 March 2025	53 - 60
7	Exeter Harbour Board - 17 March 2025	61 - 66
8	Strata - Joint Scrutiny Committee - 17 February 2025	67 - 70
9	Executive Committee - 4 March 2025	71 - 74
10	Executive Committee - 1 April 2025	75 - 102
11	Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order No. 8  To receive questions from Members on any matter for which the Council has powers, duties or affects the City.	

A plan of seating in the Guildhall is attached as an annex

Date: Monday 7 April 2025

**Bindu Arjoon**  
**Chief Executive**

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# Agenda Item 1

## COUNCIL

Tuesday 18 February 2025

### Present:

Councillors Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Begley, Bialyk, Darling, Foale, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Jobson, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Parkhouse, Patrick, Pole, Read, Rolstone, Sheridan, Snow, Vizard, Wetenhall, Williams, M, Wood and Wright

### Also Present:

Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services Manager, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

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## MINUTES

The minutes of the Ordinary meeting of the Council held on 17 December 2024 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as correct.

The minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of the Council held on 9 January 2025 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as correct.

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## OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Lord Mayor advised that he had attended the following:

- Filipino Community Association Christmas Party;
- Grandisson Service at the Cathedral
- was involved with the Kings Award for Enterprise Presentation;
- Butler Service at @34 Restaurant in aid of Force;
- Councillor Richard Branston's Aldermanship Ceremony;
- Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January;
- CoLab to meet HM the Queen Camilla; and
- Year of the Snake Hongkonger Celebrations along with the Chief Executive.

The Lord Mayor conveyed sad news of the death of former Councillor John Landers and sent condolences from the Council to Councillor Wardle on the recent death of his mother.

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## PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Lord Mayor reported the receipt of one question from a member of the public.

### Question from NP to Councillor Vizard

**“Please could Exeter Council follow the lead of 34 towns and cities worldwide, including Edinburgh, Belfast, Norwich, Exmouth, Haywards Heath, Lambeth by endorsing the Plant Based Treaty and developing a plant-based food strategy to help to normalise and expand access to plant-based foods.”**

## **Response – Councillor Vizard**

“In December 2022 this Council passed a motion committing to have plant-based food at internal meetings and this is due for review. Many thanks for bringing the Plant Based Treaty to our attention, it looks an interesting initiative, and we will look into this further with our partners across Exeter.”

In a supplementary question the member of the public asked if the Portfolio Holder would meet with the Plant-Based Community Team to which he agreed.

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## **PLANNING COMMITTEE - 16 DECEMBER 2024**

The minutes of the Planning Committee 16 December 2024 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott and taken as read.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Planning Committee of 16 December 2024 be received.

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## **PLANNING COMMITTEE - 13 JANUARY 2025**

The minutes of the Planning Committee of 13 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 2 Planning application no. 24/0911/mdo - the Harlequin Centre, Paul Street, Exeter EX4 3TT**, Councillor Read asked what the £2 million upfront for affordable housing would be invested in and Councillor Palmer asked what specific effort the Council was making to provide social and affordable housing in the city centre. Councillor Knott responded stating that these were not Planning issues but rather matters for the Executive to consider.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Planning Committee of 13 January 2025 be received.

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## **PLANNING COMMITTEE - 27 JANUARY 2025**

The minutes of the Planning Committee 27 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 9 Planning Application no. 23/1007/out - Water Lane (South), Exeter, EX2 8BZ**, Councillor Moore asked how the Planning Committee considered the lack of affordable housing in the Water Lane application. Councillor Knott responded stating that the Planning Committee had come to a unanimous decision having seen and heard the presentation and hearing from the developer that further detail would be brought forward in the future.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Planning Committee 27 January 2025 be received.

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## **AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 27 NOVEMBER 2024**

The minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee 27 November 2024 were presented by the Deputy Chair, Councillor Jobson and taken as read.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held 27 November 2024 be received.

## CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 28 NOVEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 28 November 2024 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Parkhouse, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 42 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order No. 20**, Councillor Read asked for clarity about the direction of travel regarding moving away from fossil fuel powered vehicles. The Leader responded stating that there were a number of decisions to be taken and divesting out of fossil fuels would be the preferred option but procurement processes must be followed.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 28 November 2024 be received.

## CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 30 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 30 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Parkhouse, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 49 Update on Exeter Community Lottery first year of operation**, Councillor Moore asked if the issue raised of 52p not 60p in the pound going to good causes would be investigated as a matter of urgency. Councillor Vizard as Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the Community Lottery advised that officers, , were reviewing the issue as a matter of urgency and would report back to scrutiny.

In respect of **Minute No. 47 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order No. 20**, Councillor Wetenhall asked if electric vehicles would be purchased as the budget meeting suggested not. The Leader stated that he would endeavour to get an answer outside the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 30 January 2025 be received.

## STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 5 DECEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee of 5 December 2024 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Pole, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 49 City Wide Net Zero programme of work and update on delivery**, Councillor Harding asked if the Portfolio Holder could confirm if there was a deadline for the item on active travel for those with a disability to be heard by the Transport Working Group. Councillor Vizard committed to check the schedule for Transport Member Working Group and respond outside the meeting.

In respect of **Minute No. 49 City Wide Net Zero programme of work and update on delivery**, Councillor Moore asked if it was sufficient to wait for the grid to decarbonise. Councillor Vizard responded stating that there were many actions and challenges but that the university was top in the world for this type of work and that the Council would prioritise securing a net zero budget for the years ahead and look to increase its outward-looking approach.

**RESOLVED** that this minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee of 5 December 2024 be received.

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 23 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee of 23 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Pole, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 58 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order No. 20**, Councillor Moore asked how the energy plant would contribute to net zero ambitions given that it would be reliant on fossil fuels. Councillor Vizard responded stating that a presentation had been given last week and the potential of the energy plant would be huge and without it the same could not be achieved. This would remain a low carbon project and organisations would otherwise have to invest hugely themselves.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee held on 23 January 2025 be received.

EXETER HARBOUR BOARD - 12 DECEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Exeter harbour Board of 12 December 2024 were presented by Councillor Rolstone, in the absence of the Chair, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 103 Exeter Port User Group Update** Councillor Read asked what more the Council might need to do given that Dawlish Warren was in danger and what had been learnt from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and Teignbridge as the Harbour Master had met with them.

In respect of **Minute No. 106 Harbour Master's Report** Councillor Read asked what had happened following advice from the fire service that best practice would be to leave the ferry which had been alight to burnt out in situ.

Councillor Rolstone responded stating that these issues could be addressed at the next committee.

In respect of **Minute No. 103 Exeter Port User Group Update**, Councillor Banyard asked if the Portfolio Holder would obtain detailed information from the Environment Agency on their plan for Dawlish Warren and if that could be made public. The Leader responded stating that it would not be for the Portfolio Holder to contact the Environment Agency but rather the reverse but that the message regarding there being a plan would be shared with the Portfolio Holder.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Exeter Harbour Board held on 12 December 2024 be received.

LICENSING COMMITTEE - 28 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Licensing Committee of 28 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Snow and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 7 Licensing Fees and Charges for 2025/26**, Councillor Mitchell asked if the Licensing Committee would consider making a recommendation to Government regarding the upper limit for Gambling licenses given that this had been reached a number of years ago. The Leader responded stating that he would discuss this with Directors.

Councillor Snow moved and Councillor Begley seconded the recommendation and following a vote, the recommendation was carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Licensing Committee held on 28 January 2025 be received.

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#### **STRATA - JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 28 JANUARY 2025**

The minutes of the Strata – Joint Executive of 28 January 2025 were presented by the Leader and taken as read.

The Leader drew attention to **Minute No. Strata Business Plan 2025/2026** which contained a recommendation to adopt the Strata Business Plan 2025/26.

In respect of **Minute No. Strata Business Plan 2025/2026**, Councillor Mitchell asked if there would be an opportunity for early review of the Plan given local government re-organisation. The Leader responded that business as usual must continue despite any uncertainty.

In respect of **Minute No. 6 Strata Budget and Performance October 2025/26**, Councillor Wood asked if there would be savings as a unitary authority. The Leader responded stating that savings were targeted all the time and that the 2019 decision to set up Strata had been a good one as in the main the service was good.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendation of the Strata Business Plan 2025/26 as set out in the report and following a unanimous vote was **CARRIED**.

**RESOLVED** that the Strata Business Plan 2025-2026 be approved.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Strata – Joint Executive held on 28 January 2025 be received.

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#### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 14 JANUARY 2025**

The minutes of the Executive Committee of 14 January 2025 were presented by the Leader and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 4 Matter referred by Scrutiny Committees**, Councillor Moore asked if commercial use of public assets could be included in the scope of the review and whether the Council could identify meanwhile uses for community groups where box-shifting was concerned. The Leader responded that he would not be prescriptive on the use of public assets and he would mention this to the team when appropriate and the Council would be open to looking at options for meanwhile uses but must be mindful of maintenance and leases.

In respect of **Minute No. 6 2025/26 Budget Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a vote were **CARRIED**.

In respect of **Minute No. 9 Review and Update of Exeter City Council's Companies, Alternative Delivery Models and Charities**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations.

Councillor Moore moved and was seconded by Councillor Mitchell an amendment to the recommendations in the following terms:

Exeter Business Centre Limited

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve:

(2) The initiation of a review of Exeter Business Centre to consider how it may best meet the objectives set for it when originally established, options for its future and the role of Council as Shareholder.

In presenting the amendment Councillor Moore stated that this would ensure that a review looked at all options.

Councillor Mitchell spoke in support of the amendment.

Councillor Patrick spoke against the amendment stating that the substantive recommendation did not exclude the possibility of closing the premises if it was not viable.

The Leader as mover of the substantive recommendation spoke against the amendment making the following points:

- he did not believe the recommendation would narrow the options for the review;
- there had been and would continue to be engagement with the Business Centre; and
- he would wait to see what the officer's report contained.

The Leader did not accept the amendment and following a vote was NOT CARRIED.

Councillor Banyard asked if the £1.5million raised through Science Park buying of land being converted to shares rather than cash would reduce the percentage Exeter City Council held which stood at 20%. The Leader committed to giving a detailed response outside the meeting.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Executive Committee held on 14 January 2025 be received.

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#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 4 FEBRUARY 2025

The Lord Mayor stated that the recommendations seen at Minute Numbers 18 to 21 inclusive, would be considered and voted on as part of the budget setting meeting of the Council on 25 February 2025.

The minutes of the Executive Committee of 4 February 2025 were presented by the Leader and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 14 Amendment to the Procurement Contract Procedure Rules**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

In respect of **Minute No. 15 Annual Pay Policy Statement 2025/26**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

In respect of **Minute No. 16 Gender Pay Gap Report**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

In respect of **Minute No. 17 Updated Local Development Scheme 2025**, the Leader presented the report. Councillor Moore asked when there would be an SPD regarding co-living and the Leader agreed to respond outside the meeting.

In respect of **Minute No. 22 Local Council Tax Support Scheme**, Councillor Harding asked what could be done to identify more households eligible for Pension Credit. Councillor Asvachin, as Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services responded stating that the team had undertaken work in January to make contact with residents, which had an 80% contact rate, and there would be further follow-up.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendation which following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

In respect of **Minute No. 23 Household Support Fund Scheme 7**, the Leader presented the report and during debate Councillor Moore stated that she supported the fund but asked how support could be provided given that many residents were living in poverty, rather than the crisis management provided by this fund. Councillor Vizard, as Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities responded highlighting the work of Wellbeing Exeter in tackling social and health issues and also the community grants scheme.

Councillor Wright agreed with Councillor Moore in regard to their shock at the areas of deprivation within the city but stated that targeting support where possible could be seen and committed to consider a briefing on the areas where this work could be seen.

In summing up the Leader stated that there had been discussion when this was debated at the Executive Committee and he wished to reassure opposition leaders that this was not specific to Exeter but rather a nationwide theme which had been raised in meetings with Ministers.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendation which following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Executive Committee held 4 February 2025 be received.

17      **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 8**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 8, the following question was put by Councillor Wetenhall to the Leader:

**“The Council's Charter says we will publish results detailing the responses received and explaining how we have taken these into account in arriving at a decision. This does not appear to be happening in a reasonable timescale. What does the Leader believe is a reasonable timescale for the publication of consultation results, after the consultation closes?”**

The Leader responded stating that the timing of publishing responses to public consultation would vary according to the nature of each consultation activity and he was guided by officers on this. He would expect consultation responses to be published on our website around the time any related decision was likely to be taken. For example, the results of both the Budget consultation and the new

Corporate Plan Priorities consultation which closed in mid-January 2025 were both published on the Council Website on 4th February 2025 to align with the budget setting process.

Consistency in the approach to publishing consultation feedback reports was a priority for the Strategic Director for People and Communities now responsible for ensuring the spirit of the consultation Charter was met. To ensure there are sufficient resources to enable this, the Director had redesigned resources to create a new post of Consultation and Engagement Manager reporting to the Head of Service Customer and Communities and Ben Langston had started in this new role on 10th February 2025. The Director had assured the Leader that a priority for the new role would be to ensure that consultation feedback reports were uploaded on the Council website in a timely and consistent manner.

In a supplementary question Councillor Wetenhall asked how the failure identified by internal audit was taken into account and would this be part of the remit of the new Consultation and Engagement Manager. The Leader responded stating that he was satisfied that the Council would carry out what was in the Charter and that responses would be taken into account in the making of decisions.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 8 the following question was put by Councillor Banyard to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services:

**According to the minutes of the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group for South Street and Cathedral Green, a representative from St Petrock's stated that Exeter has 20-30 rough sleepers on any given night, yet the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) only provides 8 additional beds. When temperatures drop to freezing, how does the council ensure no one is left without shelter in severe weather?**

Councillor Asvachin responded stating that the estimates of actual numbers of clients rough sleeping in Exeter on any given night could vary and the figure quoted may include clients who used St Petrock's services for showers, food etc. and may not be rough sleeping, albeit in precarious accommodation situations. The monthly data the Council return to the MHCLG, the intelligence from our commissioned Outreach services of Julian House and our annual count figure continues to confirm numbers were in the low teens.

SWEP was limited by the amount of accommodation the Council and partners had to offer. Some clients would regularly refuse an offer to come in and some clients with accommodation still chose to sleep rough. If a client wanted to come in during cold weather of course the team would do all they could to try to find them a bed.

In a supplementary question Councillor Banyard asked if there were any plans to increase SWEP beds and Councillor Asvachin responded that the team were hoping to work with St Petrock's and other partners to see what could be done to ensure no-one was left without accommodation.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.26 pm)

Chair

## COUNCIL

Tuesday 25 February 2025

### Present:-

Councillors Allcock, Asvachin, Banyard, Begley, Bennett, Bialyk, Ellis-Jones, Foale, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Jobson, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Parkhouse, Patrick, Pole, Read, Rees, Rolstone, Snow, Vizard, Wetenhall, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

### Also Present

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Strategic Director for Place, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

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### PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Lord Mayor reported that there had been no questions received from members of the public.

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### TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE COMBINED STRATEGIC SCRUTINY AND CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 5 FEBRUARY 2025

The Lord Mayor asked that the minutes of the Combined Strategic Scrutiny and Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 5 February 2025, be noted.

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### TO RECEIVE MINUTE 7 OF THE EXECUTIVE OF 14 JANUARY 2025

The Lord Mayor drew attention to **Minute No. 7 Council Taxbase and NNDR 1 2025/26** of the Executive Committee of 14 January 2025 and asked that comments be included in the ensuing debate on the 2025/26 Budget at the next item.

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### BUDGET 2025/26

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded, the resolution as set out in the agenda and circulated papers in respect of the Council Tax and the budget for Exeter for 2025/26.

The Leader, in presenting his Budget speech, appended to this set of minutes, covered the following themes:

- the challenge to maintain needed statutory services and the desired discretionary services;
- the unanimous decision to prepare for a unitary bid;
- the many successes of the Council;
- extensive consultation which had been taken into account;
- senior leadership restructure had been completed;
- the customer being at the heart of everything; and
- transparency and openness.

The Leader talked Members through the details of the Budget proposal making the following points:

- it had been framed by consultations;
- the proposed annual pay award would be reduced by 1%;
- Northbrook pool had low usage and showed little improvement and would be subject to full consultation and impact assessment;
- the Council would work with partners with regard to the Arena;
- work had been undertaken to reset the working relationship with Citizens Advice (CA) Exeter;
- car parking charges had not been increased during the last 2 years and would now increase by 32p;
- a meanwhile use of the old bus station site as a temporary car park would see revenue go directly to net zero given that there was no budget identified beyond 2026; and
- that the s151 Officer's advice had been taken in preparing the budget.

The alternative budget amendments submitted by the Progressive Group as published and circulated were proposed by Councillor Moore and seconded by Councillor Mitchell.

In presenting the alternative budget amendments Councillor Moore made the following points:

- in the area of good governance much work had been done to improve scrutiny but more could be done with additional officer support;
- the principle for managing the budget would be to appoint less external consultants;
- a review of all CIL and s106 funds would be undertaken;
- spending for local government reorganisation would come from the transformation reserve;
- community needs would be met, supporting those living precariously by granting transitional support to CA;
- support the climate change team with renewed effort and earmarking funds to support a biodiversity strategy;
- would maintain frontline services including introducing doorstep glass collection which would generate funds to invest in street cleansing;
- a review of leisure services would be undertaken; and
- reduce general fund surplus to £3.2 million.

Members speaking in favour of the alternative budget amendments made the following points:

- three types of licensing within the housing sector could be different with the Council setting their own pricing structures;
- income from licensing could pay for other much-needed resources and improve the health and wellbeing of residents;
- welcomed a £50,000 grant to support CA Exeter which recognised the financial benefits the service brought to the Council and city;
- with climate change crisis a priority selling carbon literacy training was a positive way forward;
- developers would pay if they could see the biodiversity net gain; and
- maintaining public toilets would create less Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).

Councillor Mitchell as seconder spoke in support of the alternative budget amendments making the following points:

- there was much common ground;
- reaching a consensus would be better;
- the issue of CA Exeter had been addressed by scrutiny and a recommendation made to the Executive but this was the only Council which had ceased funding to their local CA; and
- the scrutiny function had improved but a scrutiny officer would be a driver to improve performance and hold those in power to account.

Councillor Moore, in summing up on the alternative budget amendments reminded Members of what they had heard from those in support of the resolution making the following points:

- HMO licensing would be mandatory;
- CA Exeter was important;
- further efforts were needed with regards to climate action;
- toilets were valued by communities; and
- working together would be key in creating community facilities from CIL.

Councillor Bialyk, speaking as Leader and mover of the substantive motion and speaking against the alternative budget amendments said that many of the issues raised would be responded to.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 27 a named vote was requested by Councillor Mitchell and received adequate support.

The alternative budget amendments of the Progressive Group were put to a named vote and responses were recorded as follows:

Voting for:

Councillors Banyard, Bennett, Fullam, Haigh, Ketchin, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Read, Rees and Wetenhall. (11 Members)

Voting Against:

Councillors Allcock, Asvachin, Begley, Bialyk, Ellis-Jones, Foale, Harding, Jobson, Knott, Miller-Boam, Parkhouse, Patrick, Pole, Rolstone, Snow, Vizard, Williams, R, Wood and Wright. (19 Members)

Abstaining:

Lord Mayor, Councillor Mitchell, K. (1 Member)

Absent:

Councillors Atkinson, Darling, Holland, Hughes, Hussain, Sheridan, Wardle, Williams, M.  
(8 Members)

The resolution was NOT CARRIED.

The alternative budget amendments submitted by the Conservative Group as published and circulated were proposed by Councillor Jobson and seconded by Councillor Mitchell.

In presenting the Conservative Group alternative budget amendments Councillor Jobson made the following points:

- a grant of £15,000 and an additional £50,000 would be made to CA Exeter;
- the proposed budget was balanced and all savings were funded;

- leisure would contribute to debt repayment, which would require an additional £30,000 to be raised;
- carbon literacy training would be sold which would raise £20,000;
- PBSA commercial waste charges would be investigated;
- serious consideration would be given to the closing of Northbrook Pool;
- commercial use of car parks would be considered in order to raise £50,000 per annum;
- a reduced car park charge of £2.50 for 4 hours would be introduced to encourage use on the quietest day;
- a modest reduction in grant to The Phoenix would reflect their increased commercial activities; and
- CIL charging would increase in quarter 2 with necessary consultation being undertaken prior to this.

Councillor Mitchell as seconder spoke in support of the amendments making the following points:

- he was in support of CA Exeter;
- there was a need for a full review of leisure in order to ascertain what was needed;
- Capital funding would be allocated to the service which received the money;
- investigation was needed into incidences of businesses who do not contribute to the city through rates; and
- clarity could be sought from Government regarding council tax exemption properties and what compensation there might be.

Speaking against the alternative budget amendments Members' made the following points:

- cutting the grant to the Phoenix could impact young people and those who received mental health support and the building was Council-owned therefore ideas could be discussed with organisations who used it;
- more car driving could not be supported; and
- Northbrook Pool had St. James School as a key stakeholder with a weekly elective held there which enabled students who might not otherwise go swimming to access this facility.

In summing up Councillor Jobson commended the alternative budget amendments to the Council.

The Leader as mover of the substantive motion stated that many of the points raised would be drawn out in the full debate.

The alternative budget amendments of the Conservative Group were put to the vote and LOST.

During debate on the substantive motion Member's in support of the proposed Budget made the following points:

- holding reserves was very sensible;
- the commitment to net zero was welcomed;
- the achievements made through grant funding must be remembered, ward grants and the community lottery;
- transition arrangements with CA Exeter showed support for their valuable work;

- there was a need to replace the principal officer responsible for biodiversity;
- Exeter had one of the lowest council tax rates in the country;
- the budget was ambitious with commitments to the museum, leisure for getting active as well as green spaces;
- there had been greater scrutiny of the budget setting;
- the Council's priorities were aligned with those of residents;
- a scrutiny recommendation had been made to Executive without a dedicated officer;
- there was a leisure centre open on either side of the river;
- playing fields all had toilets which would remain open;
- doorstep glass collection would increase glass recycled by 1% but as glass resale value was low this would be unlikely to make additional money;
- the Council had a duty to collect from PBSA properties in the same way as other properties; and
- the Portfolio Holder was proud to maintain in-house leisure and work such as in partnership with NHS, supplemented and support by Live & Move funded by Sport England and bringing harder to reach residents from inactivity into activity when the wider leisure industry was struggling.

Speaking as Leader of the Progressive Group, Councillor Moore made the following points:

- she was concerned that discretionary services would be cut;
- investment must be made in public services and would rise with the received Government grant had been reduced;
- consultation needed to be open and transparent and the Council being clear with communities over what was genuine consultation;
- she was concerned that the number on the housing waiting list had hugely increased in the last few years;
- the Exeter Let programme had been shut down but the SWEP was not enough to meet needs;
- there was a hostel on Magdalen Road Car Park which was empty but the Council were paying the lease; and
- an environmental tax to continue to invest in the net zero team would be a better investment than car parking.

A Member speaking against the proposed Budget stated that there was a community toilet scheme in Bristol which Exeter could look to introduce and another Member expressed that they were horrified that a temporary car park would be set up to fund net zero as poor air quality played a part in low health outcomes.

Councillor Wright, in seconding the proposal made the following points:

- there had been an enhanced and improved process for setting the budget this year which had included a briefing and scrutiny;
- the success of CCTV and launch of the new Community Safety Team had demonstrated great partnership working with InExeter and OPCC both of which would continue for another year; and
- there were many points of agreement and she looked forward to trying to work together.

In conclusion, the Leader summed up making the following points:

- that realistic reserves had been set following advice from the LGA and S151 officer;
- car parks would be discussed at the next Leader's meeting;

- there would be 30 spaces closed at the Triangle car park so there may not be extra car cars;
- Sunday's had been part of the previous consultation;
- consultation would be in regard to cashless car parks rather than St. Sidwell's Point;
- no one wanted to close Northbrook and it would be fantastic if it became a community asset;
- food waste was not fully rolled out as £8 million must be reinvested in the Materials Reclamation Facility to ensure the ability to deal with the waste;
- in relation to housing projects were being brought forward;
- no toilets had been closed and the Council were not withdrawing from the National portfolio or the RAMM; and
- he would speak at the Leader's meeting about how this process could be handled in future and look for an agreed way forward.

The Leader commended the Budget to Council.

In accordance with Standing Order 30, a named vote on the resolution, as set out in the agenda papers, was recorded, as follows:

Voting for:

Councillors Allcock, Asvachin, Begley, Bialyk, Ellis-Jones, Foale, Haigh, Harding, Knott, Miller-Boam, Parkhouse, Patrick, Pole, Rolstone, Snow, Vizard, Williams, R, Wood and Wright. (19 Members)

Voting against:

Councillors Banyard, Bennett, Fullam, Jobson, Ketchin, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Read and Wetenhall. (10 Members)

Abstaining:

Councillors Rees and Mitchell, K. (2 Members)

Absent:

Councillors Atkinson, Darling, Holland, Hughes, Hussain, Sheridan, Wardle, Williams, M.  
(8 Members)

The Resolution was CARRIED:

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the following, as submitted, be approved:
  - (a) the Revenue estimates for 2025-2026;
  - (b) the Capital programme for 2025-2026;
  - (c) the Fees & Charges for 2025-2026;
  - (d) the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025-2026;
  - (e) the Prudential indicators for 2025-2026 (incorporating the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement); and
  - (f) the Capital Strategy for 2025-2026
- 2) that it be noted that, at the meeting of the Executive on the 14 January 2025, the Council calculated the figure of 39,852, as its council tax base for the year 2025-2026 in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;

3) that the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2025-2026 in accordance with Sections 31A of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992:-

(a) £125,161,660 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2)(a) to (f) of the Act;

(b) £117,758,752 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3)(a) to (d) of the Act;

(c) £7,402,908 being the amount by which the aggregate at (3)(a) above exceeds the aggregate at (3)(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its council tax requirement for the year;

(d) £185.76 being the amount at (3)(c) above divided by the amount at 2 above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year;

(e) Valuation Bands

A	B	C	D
£123.84	£144.48	£165.12	£185.76
E	F	G	H
£227.04	£268.32	£309.60	£371.52

Being the amount given by multiplying the amount at (3)(d) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

(4) That it will be noted that, for the year 2025-2026, Devon County Council, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall and the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority have stated the following amounts on precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 83 of the Local Government Act 2003, for each of the categories of the dwellings shown below:-

Devon County Council

A	B	C	D
£1,200.84	£1,400.98	£1,601.12	£1,801.26
E	F	G	H
£2,201.54	£2,601.82	£3,002.10	£3,602.52

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall

A	B	C	D
£192.13	£224.16	£256.18	£288.20
E	F	G	H
£352.24	£416.29	£480.33	£576.40

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority

A £69.79	B £81.42	C £93.05	D £104.68
E £127.94	F £151.20	G £174.47	H £209.36

(5) That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at (3)(e) and (4) above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby set the following amounts as the amounts of council tax for the year 2025-2026 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

Valuation Bands

A £1,586.60	B £1,851.04	C £2,115.47	D £2,379.90
E £2,908.76	F £3,437.63	G £3,966.50	H £4,759.80

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**OVERVIEW OF THE GENERAL FUND BUDGET Q3**

The Leader presented the report on the Overview of the General Fund Budget Q3 and invited the S151 officer to present.

The S151 officer presented the report making the following points:

- this was the first time the quarter 3 report had been considered during the financial year which was more timely;
- the financial position could be seen and there were still challenges around Planning and car parking income;
- commercial property was back on track but temporary accommodation remained a challenge;
- the financial position had improved since quarter 2 but supplementary budgets would be requested for a number of projects covering more than one year; and
- 2 supplementary budgets of note were income/expenditure for the RAMM café which was cost neutral, and local government reorganisation where it would be intended to repurpose an earmarked reserve.

In summing up the Leader drew attention to the senior leadership reduction on page 160 of the agenda and thanked those who had made this work.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a vote were CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** that the Council notes and approves (where applicable):

- (1) the General Fund forecast financial position for the 2024 financial year;
- (2) the supplementary budgets, transfer of reserve and budget transfers as detailed in paragraph 8.10 and Appendix 3;
- (3) the outstanding Sundry Debt position as at December 2024;
- (4) the creditors payments performance; and
- (5) the One Exeter programme update.

### **GENERAL FUND CAPITAL MONITORING Q3**

The Leader presented the report on the General Fund Capital Monitoring and invited the S151 officer to speak on the item.

The S151 officer presented the report making the following points:

- that delivery was challenging, 18.5% spend to date with £15.3 million deferred to next year; and
- there had been one request for additional funding to stabilise the RAMM building and ensure its long-term future.

Cllr Mitchell asked when the Council would hear if they had been successful in the bid for PSDS funding. The Leader responded that £900,000 remained in the budget for Riverside and RAMM and the S151 Officer added that the bid had gone in and he expected to hear imminently.

Cllr Moore asked the Portfolio Holder how delivery could be improved given the underspend regarding commercial assets. The Leader responded stating that the team had been under-resourced but that he had now met the new Head of Service and there was much work to do. The Leader committed to meet with the Head of Service and relevant Director.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** that Council approve:

- (1) The overall financial position for the 2024/25 annual capital programme.
- (2) The further funding requests to the Council's annual capital programme for 2024/25.

### **HRA BUDGET MONITORING REPORT Q3**

The Leader presented the HRA Budget Monitoring Report Q3 and invited the S151 Officer to speak on the item and respond to questions.

The S151 Officer presented the report stating that the expenditure stabilised and that the Capital Programme for HRA was being delivered well showing 75% spent in the first three quarters.

Cllr Mitchell asked if it was a function of the team to monitor those areas which were red. The S151 Officer confirmed that this was the case.

Cllr Moore described a resident's issue with a front door which wouldn't close properly and reported that visits from surveyors and Mears had taken place with the resident reportedly being informed that there was not enough money to replace the door. However, the resident reported receiving a letter shortly afterwards stating that broken doors must be replaced due to them being fire doors and therefore a priority for funding.

Councillor Moore asked that the Council ensured that essentials were fixed.

The Leader responded stating that Councillor Asvachin as Portfolio Holder would address this serious issue but that the report showed how many repairs were made and the feedback he had heard was that a good service was provided. Once the facts had been established the Portfolio Holder would report back to the Leader and look to prevent it happening again.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** that Council note and approve (where applicable):

- The HRA forecast financial position for 2024/25 financial year.
- The revision of the HRA Capital Programme to reflect the reported variations detailed in Appendix 4.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 9.19 pm)

Chair

## Leader's Budget Speech 2025

Lord Mayor, in setting this budget, it has been a challenge to maintain those statutory services we are obliged to deliver and those discretionary services that we wish to provide here in Exeter.

Of course, we would like to do more, but we have to be sensible with the resident's money and this means we have to take some difficult and tough decisions, to maintain our services.

Our Medium-Term Financial Plan identified the need to address a £3.5 million budget shortfall.

Extensive consultation has taken place to ensure that our identified priorities match those of our residents and communities as well as those who visit or work in Exeter.

We have listened and taken account of what residents told us was important to them.

This balanced budget has been achieved by focusing on priorities, service efficiencies and sustainable income streams.

It is being delivered against the backdrop of the government's White Paper on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

Councillors of all parties voted unanimously to prepare a case for a unitary authority which will include the city of Exeter.

This Council and its partners have an important role to play in improving the lives and wellbeing of everyone in Exeter.

While local government reorganisation offers a huge opportunity for the city, we remain fully focused on the day job of delivering the best public services for residents, business, and visitors.

We have had to look very carefully at all the services we provide. Where we have identified the need for savings, impact assessments and full consultation will take place.

Lord Mayor, before I get into the details of the budget, I want to take a moment to thank our officers at the Council who continue to deliver for the residents who rely on them, and I want to briefly highlight some of our successes over the last 12 months.

We are continuing our construction programme to build new social housing in Exeter.

Officers successfully relocated 61 households from Rennes House in preparation for the redevelopment of the area.

All tenants moved to properties by agreement and were fully supported by our housing teams.

Some will move back to Whipton once we have completed the first block of Whipton Gardens later this year.

In October the first residents moved into Brook House, a development of 21 new Passivhaus flats constructed on the site of a former car park located off Hamlin Gardens.

Our award-winning retrofit programme is continuing to cut our carbon footprint and reduce energy bills for our tenants. By March we aim to have retrofitted 920 council houses.

A bid for £4.34 million of Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund Wave 3 has been submitted, supported by £5.6 million of co-funding.

If successful, it will deliver 140 property retrofit completions per year for the next three years.

Our Extra Care scheme Edwards Court continues to prove very popular and is at full capacity with a healthy waiting list.

We continue to work hard to assist those facing homelessness and rough sleeping.

The latest Rough Sleeper Count is expected to show a fall in the figures for Exeter. Although there is still much to do, this recorded reduction is great to see.

We continue to support residents struggling with the cost of living.

Our team delivered extra help to low-income households struggling with the high cost of essentials through the Household Support Funds 5 and 6 in 2024/2025:

- More than 5,000 awards have been made totalling more than £775,000
- 46% of awards made to low-income households including at least one child
- 47% of households contained a disabled person
- 923 low-income pensioners granted £200 to help with heating costs after losing Winter Fuel Payments
- More than 200 households identified as likely to be entitled to Pension Credit have received personalised advice and support to make a claim and access other support

I want to thank our Benefits Team for making sure help gets to those who need it most.

Lord Mayor, we recently published the Exeter Plan, our new Local Plan, following a major public consultation.

The plan addresses how we will achieve long-term sustainable growth in the city.

This has been a huge undertaking, and I'm delighted that it will soon be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

Outline permission has been approved for major new development and a new community at Water Lane.

This six-hectare brownfield former industrial site will be transformed into a vibrant, residential-led, mixed-use urban development featuring up to 980 new homes.

The plans include details of urban living with commercial, community, cultural and residential space and reflects Exeter's vision for a sustainable and inclusive future.

A significant sum in lieu of affordable housing at the Harlequins housing development will assist us in our own Council-build programme.

I shall be bringing forward further proposals on affordable housing in the near future.

A planning application has been submitted for a replacement Mallison Bridge at the Quay.

Working with Devon County Council, we look forward to the long-awaited completion of this project.

We have completed the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement, ensuring transparent reporting on developer contributions, and implemented the Revised CIL Charging Schedule.

The team secured approximately £4.7 million through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding and received £1.06 million in Section 106 funding to support infrastructure delivery.

There's much to look forward to in the coming year, including the long-awaited start of construction on prominent sites including the Royal Clarence and Harlequins.

The continued roll out of food waste collection has helped us to increase our recycling rate.

Over the next year we will be seeking to roll out food waste to those who currently do not receive the service.

And will be progressing with the redevelopment of the waste depot, including the refit of the Materials Reclamation Facility.

We have set aside an initial budget of £8 million from CIL receipts for this work, which will have a significant impact on our recycling rates in the future.

Latest figures show 99.9% of our black and green bin collections are completed successfully.

Our Environmental Health team continues to ensure 99% of food premises are compliant with food hygiene by securing good ratings.

Reducing carbon emissions and the fight against climate change continues to be a key priority for the Council.

We have achieved Carbon Literate Organisational Bronze Status after training more than 250 staff in Carbon Literacy, including the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, Heads of Service, councillors, and officers.

Our pioneering Water Lane Smart Grid and Storage Project was completed in 2024 and has received a series of industry commendations.

The City Council secured £100,000 from the Southwest Net Zero Hub to develop a case for new solar sites.

This will support the decarbonisation of Council-owned buildings, provide energy independence, and reduce energy bills.

Our parks and open spaces continue to be much-loved by our residents.

Exeter won Gold in the Southwest Britain in Bloom competition and Silver in the national competition.

Last year we secured the long-term future of Quay Cellars with significant repairs and stabilisation works to the historic retaining wall – a major feat of engineering.

Bromhams Farm Playing Field is being brought back to use with significant remedial works after being used by the Environment Agency during the flood relief scheme.

We continue to develop and regenerate play areas across the city for the benefit of local families, with Merrivale Park in St Thomas, Lakeside Avenue in Countess Wear and Mulberry Close in Whipton among those to benefit.

We also continue to maintain our splash parks in Heavitree and St Thomas which provide free family entertainment and are hugely popular during the summer months.

Work is ongoing to restore the canal to its former glory by removing old vessels from the waterway.

We continue to prioritise safety in the city centre.

The upgrade of the CCTV Control Centre was recently completed, and a new Community Safety Team for the city centre has been created in collaboration with our partners.

Improving the CCTV Control Room was a pledge that we made publicly a couple of years ago and I am so pleased that we have been able to deliver this.

I'm proud to say CCTV Control Room staff were recently awarded the Police and Crime Commissioner's Commendation for their excellent work in identifying and helping to apprehend a serious offender in the city centre.

We continue to invest heavily in our leisure service to improve health and wellbeing and quality of life for our residents.

There are currently more than 12,000 Exeter Leisure members regularly visiting our centres.

In the calendar year 2024 the number of visits across our leisure sites was 1,696,463.

The number of visits at St Sidwell's Point was 1,222,386. An increase in the swim school saw more than 2,500 young children learn to swim at SSP.

The number of visits at Riverside Leisure Centre was 372,303. And an increase in the swim school saw more than 2,000 young children learn to swim at Riverside.

Our pioneering GP Referral Scheme in partnership with the NHS is helping residents who have suffered heart attacks, cancer, and other conditions to regain their health and fitness.

A record number of tickets have been sold for the Women's Rugby World Cup 2025.

Exeter is a host city for with seven games at Sandy Park, including two quarter finals, and we are very much looking forward to this global event.

We have a team at the Council dedicated to making sure the tournament is a big success locally and that Exeter enjoys all the benefits it will bring.

They are dealing with things like transport and arrangements for the big games, as well as creating a lasting legacy for the city.

Exeter remains a thriving city of heritage and culture and a UNESCO City of Literature.

It was another successful year for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum with excellent figures for its exhibitions.

Events were held with partners across the city and beyond including the English Touring Opera, Exeter City of Literature, the Northcott Theatre and Dartmoor National Park.

As part of an ongoing collaboration with the NHS, Age UK, ECC social housing and care homes, RAMM delivered outreach sessions across the city.

The Corn Exchange continues to enjoy excellent audience numbers and recent works have further improved the experience for audiences and performers.

I'd particularly like to recommend that people attend the celebration of Northern Soul this summer – they won't be disappointed.

Our Historic Guildhall supported the Cathedral and Bishop offices with the Enthronement of the 72nd Bishop of Exeter.

We also celebrated the 80th Anniversary of D-Day and saw RAF Brize Norton exercise their Freedom of the City on Armed Forces Day.

We are proud of our links to the Armed Forces and the work that continues to support Exeter's Armed Forces Covenant.

Finally, a key priority is a well-run Council.

We are focused on delivering efficient and effective, value for money services that meet the needs of residents, businesses, visitors and other stakeholders.

Our recent Senior Leadership Restructure is now complete and has delivered a saving.

We will continue to improve the way we work and progress our plans to put the customer at the heart of everything.

The restructure will ensure we have a fit-for-purpose system and processes with empowered staff working in collaboration to deliver the best outcomes for residents.

We want our staff and members to feel valued, supported and equipped to achieve the best they can for residents and stakeholders, and we will work together to build a One Council ethos.

We will develop our staff to ensure they are highly motivated, value-driven, well-trained, and supported with agile working practices and technologies.

We will use customer insight to guide how our services are developed and delivered.

Modernised, cost effective and accessible customer-focused services will enable more people to self-serve when and how they want.

We will also maintain a face-to-face service for those who need it.

Transparency and openness in decision-making are essential and we will actively communicate and engage with our residents and communities to seek their views.

We have carried out widespread consultation and engagement with residents recently and will continue to do so in line with our Consultation Charter.

Equality and diversity are a top priority to promote inclusion in all that we do. This is an area that we will not row back from.

Lord Mayor, thank you for allowing me to highlight some of the things we do so well here in Exeter.

I'd now like to move on to the budget itself.

£3.5 million is a lot of money to find and I want to thank the work of our officers in preparing this budget. I also want to thank the opposition for taking the time to prepare their own budgets.

Again, I want to stress that this work has been framed by the consultations we have carried out with residents.

The areas of budget reductions have been set out and I will now explain what that means.

There are some relatively straightforward proposals which we are putting forward:

- We will reduce our assumption for the annual pay award by 1%
- Confirm Business Rates Pool membership for another year
- Stop budgeting for pension costs of individuals not in the pension scheme
- We will reduce duplication across our Culture portfolio now that it has been brought together under one Head of Service
- We will begin a project to improve the digitalisation of our services, to deliver efficiency savings.

Together, these proposals total £1.8 million.

The proposed adjustment to the Leisure budget is £586,000.

As I highlighted earlier, our leisure service has a thriving membership with fantastic facilities, and we continue to invest in it heavily.

But despite extensive efforts to drive income and footfall at Northbrook Swimming Pool since leisure services were brought back in house in 2020, low usage and revenue figures have seen little improvement.

Combined with a projected increase in repairs and on-going costs to maintain the building, the future management of the building by Exeter City Council has become unsustainable.

It is very disappointing that it has come to this. Of course we would like to keep funding this facility. But we must bear in mind that we have two exceptional swimming pools in very close proximity.

I want to stress that any changes to the current service will be subject to full consultation and impact assessment.

At Arena we are looking to work with partners in running this facility.

Athletics will of course still be there, and the community use will still be there.

These partnerships have worked very well elsewhere in the city, like at Exwick Playing Fields.

Partnerships help us reduce our costs while maintaining and improving facilities for the public.

Again, I want to stress that any significant changes to the current service provision would be subject to full consultation and impact assessment.

I want to briefly mention Citizens Advice Exeter. All of us here at the council, would wish to record our thanks and appreciation for the work of this organisation.

We have always had a good relationship with the CAE here at Exeter.

We have previously made a difficult decision on the ceasing of direct grant funding, but there are other ways in which we have and continue to assist with their work.

I've had meetings with CAE and all wish to reset our relationship going forward and discuss the best ways of working together.

I'm pleased to say that we have been able to reach a new rental agreement which will enable them to continue the very important work that they do.

We are budgeting for an adjustment to car park income of £627,500.

The Council has not increased car parking charges for two years, in recognition of the cost of living.

As you will see at the next Executive, the proposed increase for this year, that we consulted on late last year, will not go ahead.

But there's no escaping from the fact that revenue from car parking generates an important income for the Council to help run services.

After freezing charges for two years, the total car parking budget will increase by 7% from April.

To put that figure in perspective, the charge for a two hour stay in a central car park would increase by 32p.

We have studied the feedback from residents on the budget consultation on this subject.

Of course, when asked the question should we put car parking charges up, the answer comes back as no. But we still have to make these tough choices.

We are also going to look to modify the transaction charges for the Ringgo App, explore commercial activity options in the car parks and move Howell Road and Triangle to Central Zone.

Again, there will be a consultation before any changes to car parks are implemented.

It's worth noting that the Council has committed £2.5 million of capital resources to a number of car park upgrade projects for 2025/26, including Guildhall, John Lewis and Princesshay 2.

We are not proposing to levy any charges on the Arena site or any of our Council leisure sites other than Riverside.

From 2026 there is no budget for Net Zero. That's why we intend to use the former bus station site as a temporary car park to generate income, which will go directly towards creating a Net Zero budget.

We think this is a good use of the money that will be generated in the short term while the car park is there.

It is still our intention to work with partners to bring forward a 'meanwhile use' before the wider site is redeveloped, because we know this will take time.

We didn't think the time was right for emissions charges in our car parks – it risks hitting those who cannot afford modern, more efficient vehicles.

We are one of the few Councils that do not charge blue badge holders to use our car parks, unlike East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge.

We do not intend to change this now, but it may be something we have to look at going forward.

There are a number of other proposals in order to balance the budget.

The Net Zero team are qualified Carbon Literacy Trainers, and we will seek to offer this training to interested organisations in the region.

We will also seek to increase income across our Houses of Multiple Occupation Licensing, our Marketing and Tourism offer and our Livestock Centre facility.

We will continue our efforts to reduce the number of private leases used to provide temporary accommodation in favour of more cost-effective methods.

We will continue to increase the amount of time our Engineering team work on large capital projects and to use addition income from the Guildhall Shopping Centre as and when we borrow for further investment in it.

We are also proposing to stop taking cash and cheques directly at our premises.

However, we are mindful of the need to protect those who rely on this method of payment in their daily lives.

Already people can pay their Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Rent and debtor bills at the Post Office or local PayPoint convenience store.

We will also introduce the ability for people to pay for car parking via PayPoint, so that those who wish to pay cash to park will be able to do so.

We will of course factor in the time required to travel to the nearest store in order to pay.

Again, this proposal will be subject to consultation before implementation.

We have listened to the consultation views, and I am proposing that we will no longer clean private land without a contribution from the landowner saving around £30,000.

Added together, these proposals total £3.505 million and deliver a balanced budget.

We are proposing to increase our minimum General Fund reserves to £3.1 million.

It could be argued that at a time like this, we should use general reserves and papers later in the agenda detail the reasons, the areas and amount that the 151 officer states are appropriate.

Lord mayor, we intend to take this advice.

However, the MTFP plans to use General fund balances in future years and reducing these now merely pushes the requirement to save further amounts to next year.

It also reduces the safety net in place to address the risk of some savings failing to materialise or taking slightly longer than anticipated.

Suggestions to use Extended Producer Responsibility Tax is also legitimate.

However, the budget we have proposed offsets the NIC increase but leaves something in reserve as we do not yet know how much we will receive going forward.

Using it all now risks us needing to find further savings at short notice for next year. Doing what we are proposing means that if we receive what is expected, then we will have resources to put towards the £3m required next year.

There continues to be economic uncertainties and global volatility that makes this essential.

There are some earmarked reserves which we are planning to repurpose.

In the budget monitoring papers later on the agenda there is a proposal to transfer the reserve earmarked for the Lease Guarantee to the Governance Review Reserve to create funding for a budget for local government reorganisation and Exeter's unitary bid.

Additionally, we will propose to transfer the funding set aside for the Compulsory Purchase Order to this Governance Reserve at year end.

Lord Mayor, I want to stress that despite all the challenges we face, Exeter continues to set one of the lowest Council Tax rates in the country.

The proposed band D council tax for 2025/26 is £185.76, which means that our share of the council tax will increase by 2.99% per cent or £5.39 a year – around 10p a week.

In setting this budget tonight, the aggregate requirements of Exeter City Council, Devon County Council, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner Devon and Cornwall, and the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority will result in a Council Tax for the City of Exeter for 2025/26 of:

£2,379.90 per Band D property, an overall increase of £109.68 or 4.83%.

The breakdown of this charge is:

Devon County Council - £1,801.26

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner - £288.20

**Exeter City Council - £185.76**

Devon and Somerset Fire Authority - £104.68

This equals a total of £2,379.90 of which the Exeter City Council share is 7.8% of that bill.

I'll repeat, our share of the Council Tax is increasing by around 10p a week.

I think that it is pretty good value for a city which does so much, as I highlighted earlier, and we will continue to ensure that we provide the very best services we can for the benefit of everyone in Exeter.

While maintaining a responsible prudent approach to spending and ensuring that savings are realistic and achievable.

Lord Mayor, I move.

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## **EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

Thursday 20 March 2025

### **Present:**

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor Councillor Kevin Mitchell (Lord Mayor)

Councillors Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Begley, Bennett, Bialyk, Darling, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Hughes, Hussain, Jobson, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Parkhouse, Patrick, Read, Rees, Rolstone, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Williams, M, Wood and Wright

Apologies:- Councillors Ketchin, Pole, Sheridan, Williams, R, and Wetenhall

### **Also Present:**

Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Head of Service - Finance, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

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### **ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE LORD MAYOR**

The Lord Mayor welcomed Councillors, officer and members of the press and public.

He made the following statement:

“The report for this evening’s meeting has been published at short notice and has not been open for inspection by members of the public for at least five clear days prior to the meeting.

In my opinion, there are special circumstances as to why the item should be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency.

At the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 9 January 2025, we received an urgent report concerning the Council’s proposed response to the Minister of State concerning the English Devolution White paper. Members will recall that Council resolved on that occasion to support the submission of a Letter of Intent to government by 10 January 2025 indicating Exeter City Council’s opposition to any future proposal for one unitary council for Devon and expressed Exeter’s intention to submit interim plans for unitary status for Exeter once the invitation had been received from government. The resolution was unanimously supported by Members and the letter of intent was duly submitted.

Following the Extraordinary meeting of Council, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, sent a letter dated 5 February 2025 to the Leaders of two-tier and unitary councils in Devon - formally inviting proposals for local government reorganisation. In that letter, the Minister of State required local authorities to submit an interim plan on or before 21 March 2025 with a full proposal to be submitted by 28 November 2025.

The time between receipt of the letter dated 5 February 2025 and the requirement to submit an interim plan on or before 21 March 2025 is extremely short and substantial efforts have been made to put the interim submission before you in advance of the submission date.

Despite the interim proposals not being published with five clear days' notice, I consider that there are special circumstances to justify proceeding to consider the report and proposals this evening.

Those reasons are that there was a short period of time between the invitation from the Minister of State to submit interim proposals and the deadline by which those interim proposals have to be submitted to the Minister.

If the interim proposals are not issued to the Minister of State by Friday 21 March, then the Council's position will be compromised. The interim proposals and the requirement to submit them to the Minister of State within a short timescale means that the issues need to be considered and determined by this Council as a matter of urgency and cannot be delayed. We will therefore proceed to consider the report and the interim proposals for submission to the Minister of State."

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## **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

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## **URGENT REPORT - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - INTERIM SUBMISSION**

The Leader of the Council moved and read out the recommendations set out in the report as follows:

- 1) That Council approves the interim submission for local government reorganisation at Appendix A.**
- 2) That Council supports the proposal to engage with a range of stakeholders, including Exeter's residents, residents in surrounding areas, businesses, key partners, other councils in Devon, in the development of a final business case for local government reorganisation due to be submitted in November 2025.**

Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations.

The Chief Executive introduced the report making the following statement:

"Lord Mayor, in his letter of the fifth of February, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution invited Leaders of councils in two-tier areas to submit proposals for a single tier of local government. The letter asked for interim submissions to be sent to the government by the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, with a full business case submitted by the 28<sup>th</sup> of November. On the ninth of February, this Council agreed to indicate to the minister that we intend to make a submission seeking unitary status and we are therefore here this evening to ask members to approve this Council's submission ahead of tomorrow's deadline.

Officers believe that there is a compelling case for establishing a unitary authority for the historic city of Exeter and the surrounding area and that our submission will give assurance to members this evening as well as the government that we have a clear approach and methodology on which to build this case by the end of November.

In our submission Lord Mayor, we have considered the criteria set out by government along with key principles on which we will build our case, these include:

- Growth, Transport and Connectivity
- Ensuring an appropriate focus on both urban and rural issues in order to address inequality and local needs
- Accessibility to public services
- A sense of place and community
- A balanced population size and demographic, and finally, and of vital importance of course,
- Financial viability and value for money for taxpayers.

The principles have been developed through an evidence-led approach and have been used to assess initial options for local government reorganisation.

Because of our commitment to be led by evidence, Lord Mayor, our interim submission does not include an arbitrary map which identifies the boundaries for the proposed new council. This would not have been done with any robustness in the five weeks that we have had to develop our submission. We also have not been able to put forward a structure for the rest of the county as we have not been included in the plans developed by the remaining seven Devon district councils and therefore we do not feel that it is appropriate for us to suggest a structure that covers their area without their input.

We will work, using the criteria set for us and the principles set out to develop proposals for the geographic area once we have consulted appropriately and done the relevant financial modelling to ensure that proposed new councils across the Devon area deliver positive outcomes for the whole county.

We believe that to be financially viable but still retain local identity and a clear focus on the urban issues for the area, the proposed new council will serve, after planned growth, a population of between 300,000 and 350,000 expanding the current city council boundary into some wards and parishes surrounding the city.

The next stage in the development of our Business Case will be to collate and analyse additional data and evidence, collaborate with councils in our area and engage stakeholders and communities to develop a rational and cohesive solution that works for Exeter and Devon.

Our submission identifies that the proposed new council will streamline governance, reduce duplication, and ensure a place-based approach to policy making and service delivery. It also highlights how growth will lead to more jobs for local people and opportunities for businesses.

I wanted to return Lord Mayor to the issue of local engagement. We have already discussed key issues that will inform our Business Case with our valued partners in the Exeter Partnership but the five-week timescale to develop our submission has not allowed us to engage with our residents or other stakeholders across the various sectors.

Members are being asked to support a comprehensive programme of engagement with a range of stakeholders including Exeter's residents, residents in surrounding areas, businesses, key public sector and other partners and other councils in Devon.

This will include workshops, public surveys, and engagement with local authorities and town and parish councils - and regular updates and consultations with

businesses, communities and residents. On the relationship with towns and parish councils Lord Mayor, in the spirit of this council's renewed approach to community engagement as demonstrated in our recent work on our budget priorities and draft corporate plan, we intend that the proposed new council will develop a partnership approach to working with those town and parish councils that are at the heart of their communities.

Turning to next steps Lord Mayor, MHCLG have confirmed that they will provide feedback on interim submissions, to support our work on developing the final Business Case but they will not rule out any options at this stage recognising that there is further, more detailed work that councils need to continue to develop.

We will therefore work to bring before members a full business case for approval for submission by 28 November.

There will then be a Government-led public consultation between January and April next year with a decision on the proposals to reorganise local government being made between May and August next year. Elections to shadow unitary councils are expected to take place between May to December 2027 with new councils coming into being in April 2028.

Finally, Lord Mayor, I'd like to thank Members for their support and contribution to the council's work on local government reorganisation to date. Indeed, the unanimous support of all members at the last Extraordinary Council meeting on 9 January which agreed our expression of interest to government, was a huge source of motivation for officers who have worked at pace but with great care over the last five weeks to develop the submission, for which I sincerely thank them."

In proposing the recommendations, Councillor Bialyk made the following statement:

"In moving this Lord Mayor, I can say that Local government reorganisation means change for everyone and new councils representing new geographical boundaries will need to emerge.

A unitary authority for Exeter and the surrounding area would strengthen local democracy by ensuring that local decision-making aligns with the distinct needs of urban and rural communities. This has been a long-held ambition of this council and as members will recall, we have previously developed a successful bid for unitary status, in 2010, before that was taken away from us.

Exeter is one of the UK's fastest-growing cities, playing a pivotal role in driving economic and housing growth across the wider region. As a key member of the Key Cities Network, Exeter actively contributes to national infrastructure strategies. We play a crucial role in local and regional governance, and its economic importance extends well beyond its administrative boundaries.

Exeter is a young city with a rapidly growing population and strong businesses and industry sectors. We are ideally positioned to lead investment, innovation, and connectivity across Devon. The city is an economic powerhouse, outperforming the UK average in economic output per capita. It has a strong economy, driven by the University of Exeter, Exeter Science Park, the Met Office, and more than 4,000 businesses – a growth of eight per cent since 2019.

Exeter is a key strategic transport hub, connecting the South West to London and beyond via road, rail and air.

Our submission highlights the cost-efficiency of a unitary model, reducing overhead costs associated with multiple councils covering the same area. Exeter has a rapidly-growing population of 130,800 – and a travel-to-work area of almost 500,000.

A new council covering Exeter will expand beyond the city council boundary into wards and parishes surrounding the city. These are Exeter travel-to-work areas with a strong sense of identity to the city, fostered by its major institutions.

As the Chief Executive explained, we are not including a map of the proposed boundaries at the stage until the planned period of public engagement has been completed.

The government has stated its clear intention for reorganisation and devolution, so what are the alternatives to a unitary for the Exeter area?

There is broad agreement locally that a single, Devon-wide unitary authority is not the right approach. We also cannot support the proposed 1-5-4 model Devon district councils are putting forward. It is disappointing that this proposal has been developed without input from Exeter. If so I might have explained to them that excluding residents from the other side of the Devon Hotel is actually a mistake as they feel they live in Exeter. This 1-5-4 model has no logic – it recognises one of Devon's two cities, Plymouth, as deserving of its unitary status, but Exeter, which is one of the fastest-growing cities in the UK, doesn't. It implies that Exeter has more in common with rural and coastal communities in North Devon than it does with many of the towns and communities right on our own doorstep. That just doesn't make any sense. In my opinion this is simply a political plan that does not address the economic issues or the needs of the people of Devon, and it must be rejected.

Lord Mayor, Exeter is very distinct from Devon's rural and coastal communities – everybody knows that. It is vital we retain our sense of place and prioritise economic growth, using the strength of our city as the catalyst for growth in the rest of Devon. As councillors representing the residents and communities of this great city, we must all embrace the opportunity to deliver improved outcomes for those we serve. We're ready to work with neighbouring councils and all the residents and communities they represent. Their input will be vital in ensuring reorganisation delivers on the ambition to empower local communities.

So, I hope members can unanimously back our submission to government. It's the start, Lord Mayor of a long road and history tells us that the long march started with the first step and this is indeed the first step. Our city needs to be part of a unitary authority for the area covering just beyond the current city boundary, which would be a truly transformational opportunity for Devon. We now have a once in a generation opportunity to achieve that. If we do, we will continue to drive the economy for the city, for the rest of Devon and the region as a whole and deliver for the residents and communities of Exeter and beyond. The structure we outline aligns with the government's devolution objectives, strengthens economic growth and enhances local democracy.

Our submission builds on the case for delivering improved public services whilst ensuring Exeter and the wider region remain competitive, sustainable and resilient for the future.”

During the debate, Opposition Group Leaders made the following comments:

Councillor Mitchell:

- in representing our local communities this was a once in a lifetime chance to have our voices heard;
- suggested that all group leaders were invited to meetings rather than just Council Leaders;
- he challenged the questions set by government, would they provide the best solution for semi-rural Devon;
- building blocks of complete district council areas used artificial boundaries from 1972 and based on Victorian boundaries and questioned whether these made sense in 2025;
- collaboration could already be seen with Strata as an example;
- there were concerns regarding Devon County Council (DCC) services and the need for larger authorities for economies of scale;
- a federation system would allow economies of scale and everyone would receive the same standard of service regardless of where they were;
- town and parish councils could work in collaboration with a unitary authority and consider asset transfer;
- local government finance had not been mentioned and required reform before anything else; and
- the best for Exeter and Devon would be best achieved by listening and working together.

Councillor Jobson:

It was important that residents in Exeter and surrounding areas learned more about the council and all matters in the report in order to reassure them that we were not looking to take over their local parish councils as they had a lot to contribute.

Councillor Moore:

- the global happiness index was published today and the UK had dropped one place to 20<sup>th</sup>
- Government was a driver for growth and good quality of life in Exeter had been highlighted;
- a positive economy was not the only measure of wellbeing;
- the current model was unsustainable and local economic strategies led by local people were needed;
- the creation of good jobs was needed in order to create local wealth and public authorities played a key role;
- Government required an arbitrary 500,000 population but it was essential that local rural economies thought about their focus and look to strengthen;
- She would support a larger number of smaller unitaries across Devon and inviting our communities in would be essential;
- the financial pressure of austerity and rising demand for services required that the council ask for help with the costs of reorganisation;
- the council should focus on what we can control and negotiate cooperatively;
- expressed gratitude for the Leader's cooperative approach;
- Exeter is a generous and friendly city and she hoped that this approach encouraged our neighbours to join us.

Members made the following further comments:

Councillor Hughes

- Exeter was a city and deserved to stand on its own;
- rising incidences of hate speech and being treated with disrespect and expanding boundaries would bring marginalised people into the protection experienced in the city; and
- they were keen to learn more about the relationship with the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office.

Councillor Harding

Supported the recommendations given that the residents on the border of his ward identified with Alphington rather than Teignbridge or Newton Abbot and as a unitary authority there could be achievements with the bus service.

Councillor Atkinson

- spoke in support of the unitary option and was disappointed as a County Councillor for Alphington that DCC did not include this option
- there were only 2 metres separating developments which were marketed as Alphington and named South West Exeter not North West Teignbridge; and
- Pinhoe ward had the same situation.

Councillor Rolstone

- spoke in support and cited a resident who asked for support with a list of county issues;
- unitary was needed to support residents as councillors;
- there would also be an opportunity for the education system; and
- there were amazing educational establishments in the city and surrounding area and an opportunity to be revolutionary.

Councillor Palmer

- spoke in support and expressed frustration with national Government posing several questions, on timing, and that 5 weeks was insufficient for a complex submission;
- thanked all political leaders at the Council and the Chief Executive and Leader for the work done in such a short space of time;
- it was disappointing that other councils had not engaged;
- there would only be a positive outcome for Devon residents if political colours were put aside on this issue; and
- expressed hope that Exeter would be the council who role modelled good collaboration, extensive public consultation and that we were willing to extend our hand.

Councillor Rees

- welcomed the cross-party approach and commitment to genuine consultation and engagement with communities;
- communities were valued; and
- it would be good to see one consultation process across the county with a consistent framework which would provide an outcome which give meaningful information.

### Councillor Wardle

Spoke in support and suggested that there might be an opportunity to put right mistakes makes on the railway as the population growth seen had not been expected. Long loops cold be reinstated to allow trains to cross therefore increasing capacity rather than new roads.

### Councillor Fullam

- was attracted by the scale of this recommendation;
- he felt that an area which was too large would not support local concerns; ;
- consensus about the way forward was needed;
- there were no boundaries in the report and these could be tricky;
- collaboration was a good way forward;
- with many options on the table, the government may make decisions on the Council's behalf and asked what the Leaders vision was;
- language was important and merging could already been seen in Devon Home Choice; and
- devolving to local areas but driven from Exeter would be a positive approach and generosity of language would diminish resistance.

### Councillor Read

- welcomed the report being accessible and residents would be able to pick up read and understand;
- agreed with bring back rail tracks, more trains and longer trains;
- recognised that there would be fears in communities and perhaps loss of local connection in the 154 model;
- joined up local government was a very exciting prospect with greater strategic actions to protect nature;
- there was 50% biodiversity left intact which was considered poor;
- a larger decision-making area could have protection of nature as a key priority including addressing water pollution;
- asked that when boundaries were considered, that the Council look at a bio-regional approach supported by doughnut economics and that rights of nature be integrated into corporate strategy; and
- local resilience in the face of climate change shocks faced meant more than warmer weather, greater risk of flooding and wildfires and storms and must ensure the right balance was struck.

**Councillor Read left the meeting at this point of the meeting.**

### Councillor Vizard

- spoke in support as putting residents and the city first was a priority for decision making;
- it was clear that the joint passion for the city shone through;
- welcomed future collaboration with other councils, stakeholders, businesses and residents across the coming months; and
- biodiversity and nature recovery should be front and centre of our plans.

### Councillor Bennett

- November was not far away and priority must be on speaking to residents and stakeholders not just about this but also about the cost;

- offering certainty to council staff especially with huge pressures on them already would be important;
- with the £100,000 set aside how will we ensure it won't all go to a few consultants; and
- would the Leader share costs with other councils to ensure best value?

Councillor Darling

- spoke in support and was hopeful about plan for unitary; and
- residents of St Thomas often made contact regarding parking and other issues over which the Council had no control, how might a unitary help us to reform some of the parking legislation we currently have?

Councillor Parkhouse

Spoke in support and commented that Local government reorganisation meant change for everyone and there would be a move towards clarity and accountability for Exeter and surrounding areas.

Councillor Banyard

- England was overly centralised and there was a danger that this could shift power to large unitaries;
- decisions should be made at the most local level possible only referring on where necessary; and
- would the leader commit to town/parish councils across the whole area?

Councillor Wood

- Exeter had inspiring buildings and was the historic county capital with connections to its close neighbours;
- current city boundaries were dated and no longer fit for purpose, for example West Clyst and half of Monkerton were marketed as next to Exeter not Honiton
- Exeter was not a city in isolation but with a network of neighbouring communities; and
- he commended the report.

Councillor Haigh

- spoke in support with some trepidation regarding financial cost;
- given pressures on the budget it would be unreasonable to expect taxpayers to shoulder this cost;
- when the Council wrote formally it could request financial support for councils; and
- if the Government was serious about reorganisation it must be serious about funding it and ensuring the resources needed to carry out reorganisation were in place.

As seconder Councillor Wright made the following points in support of the recommendations:

- it was encouraging for Member and officers that there was support in the room but also encouraging to Exeter and surrounding area residents;
- Councillor took their roles seriously regardless of party; and

- the Council had tried to make the two-tier work but must change to help residents know who to approach and not have two political control centres.

The Chief Executive addressed questions from Members in the following terms:

- the City Council had a positive relationship with the Police and Crime Commissioner and it was assumed that this would continue;
- support for the cost of local government reorganisation from government was not available but civil servants had advised that the government may provide costs to support the implementation of any decisions made about which unitaries would be created;
- from December 2024 all districts had been meeting weekly or fortnightly with one meeting facilitated by the LGA with all leaders and Chief Executives. The meeting of the Devon Districts Forum, which usually met once a month, had voted for the remaining 7 districts with commonality to form a working group to take forward proposals and assumed that Exeter would be working alone. Joint work had been and remained the intention of this Council, however, following the decision of the other districts Exeter City Council commissioned our own support;
- some experts would be needed in areas such as social care and procurement processes would be followed; and
- the Council had hoped to share costs with other districts and would attempt to do so going forward.

The Leader of the Council addressed comments and questions from Members as follows:

- subsidiarity was very important;
- local organisations ran the swimming pool in Topsham;
- ward sizes may be approximately 4600 per councillor whereas two tier wards were currently 2200 and there maybe a loss of councillors carrying out some of the work;
- the meeting with other districts had become complex ;
- contact had continued with many of the other Devon leaders and intend to continue;
- he would put forward Councillor Mitchell's idea to have other party leaders involved in discussions;
- he would work to allay fears from Group Leaders and the public;
- there would be approximately 700 parish councils and the council would want to talk to them but given the number it would be unlikely to be all at once;
- the council were learning from the surveys undertaken and making improvements;
- the aim would be to ask communities and parishes how they saw themselves going forward and what they could do if they the powers proposed;
- a unitary authority would be strategic with some services devolved;
- there would be an aim to grow commitment in all parishes as not all performed to the same standard;
- there would be a portfolio holder for parishes and towns;
- he wanted a shared vision for Exeter;
- biodiversity was very important the 2030 aspiration remained;
- it was important that Exeter had a voice around the table with the Strategic Mayor;
- thanked other political leaders for putting Exeter and surrounding area before party politics; and

- must reach out to change culture and attitudes and people need to be heard, their not being heard would build internal fear, education was key and he assured Councillor Hughes of support in Exeter and that there was a will to reach out to other parts of the county.

The Leader of the Council called for a RECORDED/NAMED vote which received sufficient support.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Bialyk, seconded by Councillor Wright and, on a RECORDED vote, were CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY by those in attendance.

**RESOLVED** that Council:-

- 1) approves the interim submission for local government reorganisation at Appendix A; and
- 2) supports the proposal to engage with a range of stakeholders, including Exeter's residents, residents in surrounding areas, businesses, key partners, other councils in Devon, in the development of a final business case for local government reorganisation due to be submitted in November 2025.

(The meeting commenced at 6.02 pm and closed at 8.12 pm)

Chair

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# Agenda Item 4

## PLANNING COMMITTEE

Monday 17 February 2025

### Present:-

Councillor Knott (Chair)

Councillors Patrick, Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Hughes, Jobson, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, M, Pole and Rolstone

### Apologies

Councillors Bennett, Hussain and Ketchin

### Also Present

Strategic Director for Place, Assistant Service Lead – Development Management (Major Projects), Planning Solicitor, Principal Project Manager, City Development and Democratic Services Manager

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## MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2025 were taken as read, approved, and signed by the Chair as correct.

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## DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members declared the following interests:

- Councillor Asvachin – Minute No. 16.

15

## PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 25/0022/VOC - LAND SOUTH WEST OF BLAKESLEE DRIVE

The Principal Project Manager, City Development presented the application for a variation of condition 1 to supersede the affordable housing layout of approval 24/0317/RES (Approval of access, layout, scale, appearance and landscaping reserved matters pursuant to planning permission ref. 23/0584/OUT and additional details including lighting, drainage, and bat/bird boxes).

Members received a presentation which included:-

- site location plan;
- aerial view;
- approved tenure layout;
- proposed tenure layout;
- key issues; and
- officer recommendation.

Particular reference was made to the application proposed changing the approved 40 dwelling scheme from 35% affordable housing to 100% affordable housing, which would require a change to the Section 106 agreement. There was significant demand for affordable housing and the proposed tenure split of 55% social rent and 45% intermediate housing, was considered acceptable.

The Principal Project Manager, City Development responded to questions from

Members as follows:-

- the 100% affordable housing related only to this site and could not be carried forward to other sites;
- the selection of residents would be controlled through a choice system;
- the number of houses had remained the same;
- there were no changes to the layout of the site, but a change to the tenure of housing now being affordable housing;
- applicants would come through the Devon Home Choice scheme, but clarification would be provided by the speaker from Live West;
- Live West proposed managing public open space in house to prevent paying another company to manage it; and
- the original conditioned landscape management plan was still in place.

Mr GJ, speaking in favour of the application, made particular reference to:-

- Live West supported the revised application to deliver 40 additional affordable homes at the site;
- the revisions removed the requirement for first homes, removing the lower limits for the delivery of affordable homes, and amending the mortgage and possession clause within the Section 106 agreement;
- there were changes to the landscape management and a new layout plan;
- the changes aligned with recent national policy changes and were necessary for the funding and delivery of social rent homes;
- the application sought to vary the Section 106 to enable the delivery of affordable homes by Live West; and
- the Mortgage Possession Clause, sought to replace the clause to an industry standard and aid loan funding secured against homes.

Mr GJ responded to Members' questions as follows:-

- Live West worked proactively with Devon Home Choice to prioritise homes for those with priority housing needs to offer suitable accommodation;
- Live West was a strategic funding partner with Homes England, and had secured funds to deliver the homes;
- the proposal was to deliver 22 homes for social rent and 18 for shared ownership;
- social rent was normally 60% of the market rent, which was more affordable than affordable rent (80% of the market rent); and
- the mortgage clause changes related to securing funding from banks but were not directly related to shared ownership.

During the debate, Members welcomed the proposal and highlighted Live West as an excellent partner for housing provision.

The recommendation was for a variation of condition 1 to supersede the affordable housing layout of approval 24/0317/RES (Approval of access, layout, scale, appearance and landscaping reserved matters pursuant to planning permission ref. 23/0584/OUT and additional details including lighting, drainage, and bat/bird boxes) as set out in the report.

The Chair moved and Councillor Mitchell seconded the recommendation, which was voted upon and CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** to

a) delegate to the Head of City Development to grant subject to the conditions listed in the report and the completion of a Deed of Variation to the S106 agreement relating to planning permissions 23/0584/OUT to increase affordable housing levels, remove reference to First Homes, adjust mortgagee in possession clause and modify public open space maintenance responsibilities as set out in this report. / and as amended during the meeting; and

b) refuse permission for the reasons set out below if the legal agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) is not completed by 17 August 2025 or such extended time as agreed in writing by the Head of City Development.

16

**PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 24/1396/ECC - WONFORD COMMUNITY AND LEARNING CENTRE, BURNTHOUSE LANE**

**Councillor Asvachin declared a non-pecuniary interest and left the meeting as a Committee Member during consideration of the item. Councillor Asvachin, having registered to speak under Standing Order No. 44 and returned to speak during the Member and public speaking section of the item and left the meeting after speaking.**

The Assistant Service Lead – Development Management (Major Projects) presented the application for the redevelopment of the existing Wonford Sports Centre and Community and Learning Centre, including the demolition of the existing gym, Phoenix Centre and Outdoor changing rooms and construction of a new hub and FA changing facilities. The new Hub would also accommodate a cafe area, changing facilities, studio, and gym.

Members received a presentation which included:-

- the site location and context;
- location plan;
- an aerial view;
- photos of the existing building and view;
- the proposed ground floor and mezzanine;
- the proposed north, east, south, and west elevations;
- the proposed landscape plan;
- axonometric and illustrative views;
- the planning balance; and
- the recommendation.

The Assistant Service Lead – Development Management (Major Projects), responded to questions from Members as follows:-

- this was a full application and existing solar panels would be retained, with additional panels also being added;
- existing gas boilers would also be retained due to their age, and improvements to the building's thermal dynamics would be made. The design also allowed for future connection to the local energy network;
- although the image was illustrative, the submitted layout plan showed the actual number of disabled parking spaces;
- the Police Designing Out Crime Officer recommendations included CCTV, square drain pipes, and flush doors and there would be no issue in including a condition for these details;
- sports pitches were not included in the application;
- changing the material from red brick to another type could have visual

benefits, however if Members were minded to condition the Police Designing Out Crime Officer recommendations, antisocial behaviour issues would be covered;

- policies did not specify a number for EV charging points, but there were two spaces available in the scheme with a condition for their provision;
- confirmation was needed on whether there were accessible changing rooms;
- the boundary treatment provided a guardrail to indicate public and private spaces;
- the impact of the cafe viability and removing seating was expected to be minor;
- the car park footprint and number of spaces remained unchanged; and
- no additional information was available on proposals to encourage inclusiveness as part of the scheme.

Speaking under Standing Order 44, Councillor Asvachin made reference to:-

- after many years and consultations, the final plan application was welcomed;
- the Wonford Community Centre, operated a wide variety of clubs and activities, a friendly café providing a social lifestyle for Wonford residents;
- the building was in urgent need of updating, notably the heating and leaks;
- if approved the updates would commence as soon as funding was provided; and
- a lot of work had been undertaken between, the planning team, the trustees, and the community to move this forward and it was hoped Members would support the application.

In responses to questions from Members, Councillor Asvachin made the following further comments:-

- several consultations had been held, starting before the COVID Pandemic, which included resident sounding boards, open days, and social media to gather community input; and
- funding was the primary concern for residents and Trustees. A full-sized football pitch would be welcomed but was not feasible due to space constraints.

During the debate, Members expressed the following views:-

- there was concern about crime and antisocial behaviour in the area and the need to include the recommendations from the Police Designing Out Crime Officer as a condition to address these concerns;
- concerns about funding availability;
- was there a potential for a phased development approach with funding and delivery?
- there appeared to be insufficient accessible parking and electric vehicle charging points, with the recommendation only including one double electric charging point for two cars;
- the improvements to biodiversity were welcomed;
- recessed doorways and access control were raised were potential issues relating to the crime measures on the design; and
- the Planning Committee needed to consider all aspects of the application, rather focus solely on anti-social behaviour.

The Strategic Director for Place made the following concluding points:

- there was a further design stage (RIBA stage 4) which would be fully funded to

- provide detailed engineering plans before going to tender; and
- the comments from the Police Designing Out Crime Officer were advisory and could be considered as planning condition to ensure safety and security in building design stage.

Councillor Hughes proposed and Councillor Pole seconded that a condition be added to include additional security measures as recommended by the Police Designing Out Crime Officer.

The Strategic Director for Place advised that the exact wording of this additional condition could be delegated to Planning Officers, in consultation with the Chair for inclusion in the decision notice, should Members be minded to grant planning permission. The reasoning of the condition would be in accordance with Members comments. It was noted that RIBA stage four, would be where the issues raised would be considered.

During the debate on the amendment Members expressed the following views:-

- there was concern about the potential financial implications later in the process and there needed to be an allowance for design variance for later in the process;
- the planning committee needed to ensure there was still room for sensible planning considerations going forward to incorporate the Police Designing Out Crime Officer recommendations without imposing restrictions;
- it was noted that the plan showed 12 out of 18 spaces were for disabled parking;
- it was suggested that wording of the amendment should be kept vague to allow for future design improvements; and
- full consideration should be given to police recommendations, but the amendment process could proceed if the proposer and seconder agree for the exact wording to be finalised by officers in consultation with the Chair.

Cllr Hughes advised that the additional security measures listed, were for public understanding, rather than a directive for inclusion in the amendment. Cllr Hughes emphasised trust in the Strategic Director for Place and the officers to appropriately word the planning conditions.

The Chair moved and Councillor Patrick seconded the recommendation and inclusion of the amendment, which was voted upon and CARRIED as amended.

**RESOLVED** that planning permission for the refurbishment of the existing Wonford Sports Centre and Community and Learning Centre, including the demolition of the existing gym, Phoenix Centre and Outdoor changing rooms and construction of a new hub and FA changing facilities. The new Hub would also accommodate a cafe area, changing facilities, studio and gym be approved subject to the conditions set out in the report update sheet and as amended during the meeting.

Members received the report and following questions raised, the Strategic Director for Place and the Project Manager (Planning) advised:-

- a split decision in planning applications meant that one part of an application was approved and one part was refused;
- a certificate of lawfulness determined whether an HMO had lawful use and wasn't a planning judgment;
- the Article 4 direction required planning permission for the use of HMOs in

certain areas, to control their increased use.

The report of the Strategic Director for Place was noted.

18

**APPEALS REPORT**

The report of the Strategic Director for Place was noted.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.50 pm)

Chair

# Agenda Item 5

## AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 12 February 2025

### Present:

Councillors Jobson, Begley, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, M, Moore and Williams, M

### Also Present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Head of Service - Finance, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

39

### APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors and Wardle, Atkinson, Ketchin, Patrick and Palmer.

The Committee noted their condolences to the Chair, Councillor Wardle.

40

### MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 27 November 2024 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

41

### DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

42

### AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT FOR EXETER CITY COUNCIL 2023/24

The Director, Public Sector Audit of Grant Thornton presented the Audit Findings Report for 2023/24 making the following points:

- it was intended to issue an opinion by the end of February;
- the opinion issued would be an unqualified one;
- there were some areas of work ongoing but this was a small number as most work had been concluded;
- there had been work on significant risks including management override, land, buildings and pension liabilities; and
- some recommendations had been made but these were not material and would not affect the opinion.

The Director, Public Sector Audit of Grant Thornton and Strategic Director for Corporate Resources responded to questions from Members' in the following terms:

- that there were 10 super-users and whilst this was not unusually high some had finance roles therefore segregation of duty potentially could be an issue;
- the solution would be to have no instances of those with a finance role being a super-user;
- it was for officers to assess whether this posed an acceptable level of risk;
- the pensions adjustment would be updated but was not material;
- value of land and buildings was potentially not market value but replacement cost value and independent valuations would be made upon any disposal;

- housing stock would be allocated a value for similar properties in the area following spot checks;
- MRP showed charge on third party loans and there was a policy based on the annuity rates which would see charges increase in later years therefore this was an expected increase;
- MRP increase reflected the end of 2022/23 position with less interest and more repayment as voluntary repayment of debt was utilised to reduce the balance and 2024/25 capital finance requirement reduced due to ECL write-off; and
- officers were informed annually of the need to declare any interests they may have.

The Audit and Governance committee unanimously received and considered the Audit Findings Report for Exeter City Council 2023/24.

43

#### **AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT ON EXETER CITY COUNCIL 2023/24**

The Director, Public Sector Audit of Grant Thornton presented the Auditor's Annual Report on Exeter City Council 2023/24 making the following points:

- that there were three key areas, being Financial Sustainability, Governance and Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness as set out on page 56 of the agenda pack;
- there were no significant weaknesses in arrangements to ensure the Council managed risk to its financial sustainability;
- there were significant weaknesses in Governance with ECL and contract monitoring identified;
- there was a significant weakness in Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness but that work had begun on this;
- the key recommendations could be seen on pages 58 to 60, 2 of which had been reported in previous years;
- with regards to recommendation 4, there was evidence that discussion had taken place but were not reflected in the final contract;
- recommendation 5 was in reference to procurement issues where payments has been made but a contract was not in place; and
- there was an improvement recommendation on page 82 in relation to the level of savings and the management comment regarding risk to services could also be seen.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources spoke on the report making the following points:

- counter-fraud would be handled by SWAP and this had begun on 1 April 2024;
- counter-fraud information could now be found on the website but SWAP collect statistics, monitor and investigate;
- the issue had been that the outsourcing of audit had taken place with no lead immediately identified within the Council for counter-fraud;
- the Head of Service, Finance was now the lead for counter-fraud strategy, coordinating and communicating any responses as required which would be reflected in the next audit plan; and
- there was a procurement waivers report in the Scrutiny Bulletin but this would in future be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources and the Director, Public Sector Audit, of Grant Thornton responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the counter-fraud strategy was up to date and would be reviewed every two years although this may be undertaken sooner to reflect the changes within SWAP;
- the constitution review would include looking at independent people on Audit and Governance Committee;
- partnerships were not defined in audit terms but would be expected to include but not be limited to group companies, other Local Authorities, the NHS and Sport England;
- audit would only look at partnerships should they be challenged and look to test whether the Council could explain them;
- a procurement report would now be presented to the Audit and Governance committee; and
- arrangements would be made and training given.

The Audit and Governance Committee noted the Auditor's Annual Report 2023/24 following a unanimous vote.

44

#### **AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT - VALUE FOR MONEY**

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources presented the report making the following points:

- that this was the Council's response to the recommendations made by Grant Thornton held within their report;
- the recommendation was for agreement to bring a six-monthly report to the Audit and Governance Committee; and
- historically the Council had delivered 80% of savings which had this been implemented would have meant £4.2 million of savings needed rather than £3.5 million as seen.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources responded to a question from a Member stating that the year of recommendations referred to could be identified in future and that the Business Centre review would look at all options and consider whether its intention when set up had been met.

Councillor Moore proposed an addition to the recommendations which following discussion was deemed unnecessary and withdrawn.

The Chair, seconded by Councillor Mitchell, moved the recommendations as set out in the report and following a unanimous vote were **CARRIED**.

45

#### **MANAGEMENT LETTER OF REPRESENTATION**

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources presented the Management Letter of Representation explaining that this was a standard letter to the external auditor from the Council. The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources directed Members to an additional line which had been added regarding asset transfer in relation to Exeter City Living.

The Audit and Governance Committee agreed to approve and sign the Management Letter of Representation 2023/24.

46

#### **FINAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Head of Service, Finance presented the report on the Final Statement of Accounts making the following points:

- that the findings set out in the report mirror the findings as set out in the earlier external Audit Findings Report;
- that there were minor changes to the disclosure reports but no changes to the accounts; and
- that delegated powers were sought in the recommendation as set out in the report.

The Head of Service, Finance, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources and Chief Executive responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- £18 million was borrowed against St Sidwell's Point and the New Homes Bonus had been set aside to repay debt and a larger loan had been taken at a lower interest rate. This included Riverside and had a reducing balance;
- the update on page 126 in relation to the Live and Move Programme was expanded to better explain progress with a new Wonford Community and Learning Centre;
- the change in the number of staff in some pay bands was due to incremental pay increases resulting from the annual pay award; and
- Sport England grants formed part of the Council's accounts therefore were audited by Grant Thornton.

The Chair moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Knott, voted upon and CARRIED unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the Audit and Governance Committee give delegated powers to the Strategic Director Corporate Resources and Chair of Audit and Governance Committee to approve the Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 upon the conclusion of the audit and to report back to this committee any significant findings, if any are identified in the remainder of the audit.

47

**MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT - OPEN  
CONSULTATION:STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT  
FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND**

The Monitoring Officer presented the report and brought Members' attention to the consultation which ended on 26 February 2025 and encouraged Members to take park and make representations as they saw fit.

The Monitoring Officer responded to Members' question in the following terms:

- Members' could respond individually or collectively;
- Officers could also respond individually or collectively; and
- the Council's constitution could be looked at in light of the consultation but changes could not be implemented until legislation was in place.

Councillor Moore suggested that the committee may wish to respond as a whole but upon discussion it was not deemed that there was sufficient time to do so.

The Audit and Governance committee noted the report.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.49 pm)

Chair

# Agenda Item 6

## AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 19 March 2025

### Present:-

Councillor Wardle (Chair)

Councillors Atkinson, Begley, Ketchin, Mitchell, M, Moore and Williams, M

### Apologies

Councillors Jobson, Knott, Miller-Boam, Palmer and Patrick

### Also Present

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director for Place, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Net Zero Project Manager and Democratic Services Officer

48

### MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 12 February 2025 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

49

### DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

50

### INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26

The Assistant Director, SWAP, presented the Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 report making the following points:

- the Plan included the work to inform the annual opinion, and the process followed;
- the Plan and strategic risk register key;
- key financial control areas included procurement and risk management of which more detail could be found on page 16 of the report;
- the draft plan had been seen by Members and the opinion of the Chair were sought before meeting with SMB, which had been key in agreeing a programme of work;
- SWAP could provide member training;
- regarding conformance, an external assessment of SWAP had taken place in November 2024, and they were found to be compliant;
- global internal audit standards had been updated, and a plan was being put in place for compliance; and
- the Internal Audit Charter and Mandate had been updated to reflect global internal audit standards, which was presented as Appendix B of the report.

The Assistant Director, SWAP responded to questions from a Member in the following terms:

- the new Global standards presented no fundamental changes to the role of the Audit and Governance Committee and any subtle differences were being worked on; and
- processing of Housing Benefit had been added to the draft plan but with a high

number of services which could be audited there was a need to focus on areas which had not been audited in recent time.

The Chair moved, seconded by Councillor Atkinson that the Audit and Governance Committee review and approve the Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 and Internal Audit Charter and Mandate, and following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

51

### **INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT**

The Assistant Director, SWAP presented the Internal Audit Progress Report making the following points:

- the summary on page 36 of the report, showed that 92% of planned audits were complete or in progress and two were yet to start at the time of writing the report but had since begun;
- SWAP were confident that in July their opinion would be based on a completed plan of work;
- there was high operational risk with debt management;
- action plan monitoring was now live and being used by services and more detail was now being presented;
- there were 63 active agreed actions;
- page 39 of the report showed a table of fraud referrals in addition to the progress report;
- there was a confidential reporting line operated by SWAP and the referrals received over seven months to the beginning of February this year and half were regarding council tax. All were forwarded to the appropriate contact in the Council;
- appendix B of the report showed limited assurances, of which there were 3 which would be considered at the next agenda item;
- appendix C of the report showed advisory reviews with debt management being given an advisory report which was rated as high risk with senior management and the committee having been informed, a summary report was included. The Council had asked SWAP to conduct this work. Supporting documentation explaining how to conduct debt management which was and out of date and some incomplete. The next report would include context and an action plan; and
- appendix D of the report showed an action plan monitoring summary with 63 active actions. 14 were complete with evidence having been provided before they were closed. 22 had already been closed which related to previous limited assurances.

The Assistant Director, SWAP responded to a question from a Member stating that evidence would always be sought, and this may not always be by way of a document. It could be that SWAP accessed a system and conduct some testing and may request formal follow up to close an item.

The Chair moved, seconded by Councillor Begley that the Audit and Governance Committee note the Internal Audit Progress Report and following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

52

### **RESPONSE TO LIMITED ASSURANCE AUDIT REPORT**

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources presented the report making the following points:

- there was commitment to improving governance across the council;

- four action plans had been created for the areas reviewed by SWAP this year,
- two areas had been put forward by officers following their concerns and requested SWAP review these;
- the occupational health review had been commissioned by the Strategic Director People and Communities and a range of recommendations were made by SWAP and subsequently included in the HR improvement plan and would be delivered as soon as possible;
- in CIL/s106 significant work had begun to address issues with an officer panel looking at governance across the area, including existing commitments;
- Council tax arrears had seen simple improvements made, despite a shared service not having been implemented and a restructure was expected within the next couple of months;
- some findings were frustrating regarding write-offs having been applied before authorisation and this practice had been stopped; and
- sundry debtors had seen increasing debt which was not necessarily unusual in post-COVID times. This work had been moved from the Revenue and Benefits team back into the Finance team and resources increased from 0.8FTE previously to a team of four. Resources within legal had been reinstated to support recovery, having been lost some years ago in a previous savings exercise. A Collection Manager and 2 Collection Officer posts had been filled and would be starting imminently and were aware of their work plan.

The Strategic Directors for Corporate Governance and Place responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- the occupational health action plan would form part of the work of the new Head of HR including undertaking a review of whether the current provider was fit for purpose;
- this was the second audit undertaken for CIL and the actions found previously had been undertaken and implemented.
- there was a further linked audit regarding s106 and officers would like to bring before together;
- CIL process was being followed and there had been improvements since the previous audit including the formation of a CIL task group who now had almost full use of the system with the ability to monitor CIL;
- all CIL decision-making had been made in the proper way by the Executive;
- a governance framework was being designed which would look at part, present and future expenditure in an open and transparent way;
- the suggestion to register how outside agencies were spending the money would be incorporated into the process;
- there was no new finance system in place yet as there had been challenges with the supplier;
- there had been a new system introduced for part of sundry debt, housing benefit overpayments but the DWP required a lot more information and reporting, but this was working well;
- a write-off assessment was made each year which included a bad debt provision, a conservative approach was taken;
- in respect of material debts an individual view would be taken of recovery and there would be additional income if recovery were made;
- this was an important area of work which the finance team had a lot of experience in managing;
- there were several services where there was a significant amount of debt and those would be targeted;
- sundry debt was increasing slightly but there had been high debt for several years, so this had not been a sudden rise;
- Housing benefit overpayment could be anything from a few pounds to

thousands, but this was underpinned by £1 million debt which would be paid off in line with statutory payments each month;

- this would always be significant due to legislation;
- commercial property debt was being addressed by the new officer in post;
- financial regulations would be fully reviewed as part of the constitution review and would come before Members for consideration;
- a range of Portfolio Holders would be responsible for determining write-offs; and
- all write-offs were reported in the Outturn report.

The Chair moved the recommendation that the Audit and Governance Committee note the content of the audit reports contained at Appendix A and the actions that would be taken in response to the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Begley, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

53

### **REVIEW OF CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources presented the Review of the Corporate Risk Register Report making the following points:

- this was a quarterly update;
- there were no significant changes this quarter;
- the Council was in the final stages of the process in refreshing and producing the new Corporate Plan after which a review of the risk register would be undertaken; and
- the finance risk had been updated due to a balanced budget being agreed for 2025/26.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources and the Strategic Director for Place responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- the increase in parking charges agreed for 2024/25 had not been implemented which impacted the 2024/25 budget rather than 2025/26;
- the new Parking Places Order for 2025/26 would come before Council and any shortfall in the financial year should be addressed;
- indication could be provided in future as to which risks have changed since last reporting and whether they had increased or decreased;
- the net zero risk rating had not changed but the updated showed the efforts which had been made with partners to address net zero 2030 targets, but challenges remained which included government announcements and with limited resources there was a reliance on government funding;
- a review was in progress of the Net Zero 2030 plan and the Council's stated aims remained;
- the risk appetite rating was determined by Strategic Directors with Portfolio Holders; and
- the new Corporate Plan would be the first step towards monitoring progress before development of a full matrix began.

The Chair moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Atkinson, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

Having considered the Council's Corporate Risk Register the Audit and Governance Committee **RECOMMENDED** its approval to the Executive.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

The Monitoring Officer presented the report making the following points:

- the report covered 2023/24;
- compensation of £200 had been made in respect of one complaint; and
- section 8.3 of the report gave details of the complaints received and it could be seen that seven cases had been considered.

The Monitoring Officer and Chief Executive responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- ensuring adequate training for staff would be discussed with the relevant officer;
- there was no requirement for the reporting of issues relating to Members' Code of Conduct;
- there was an internal appeals process before complaints came before the Ombudsman;
- the service would be aware of complaints and have taken on board any learning before this report; and
- agreed actions were contained within the report.

The Chair moved, seconded by Councillor Atkinson that the Audit and Governance Committee note the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review of Complaints and following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

## CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE 2025/26

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources presented the Code of Corporate Governance 2025/26 report making the following points:

- the report underpinned the statutory Annual Governance Statement at the end of each financial year and accompanied the Statement of Accounts; and
- last year the Code of Corporate Governance had changed to better reflect the Governance structure in place and this year had been updated following the SMB restructure and SWAP having taken over internal audit.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources responded to a question from a Member regarding the role of scrutiny by agreeing to make a change to reflect the practice of post rather than pre-scrutiny.

The Chair moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Mitchell, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the Audit and Governance Committee supports the Code of Corporate Governance for 2025/26

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approves the Code of Corporate Governance for 2025/26.

## REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer presented the report making the following points:

- this had previously been reported to Members by Internal audit, but was now the responsibility of the Monitoring Officer along with policy;

- it was of note that this power had not been exercised;
- the updated policy was attached and was important legislation;
- the detail of the report set out the powers including covert powers; and
- those making requests to use these powers must appear before magistrates; and
- local authorities were not keen on using these powers as Article 8 was of paramount importance.

The Monitoring Officer responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- technically a renewal could be applied for, and this would go through both internal and court processes;
- it would be unlikely for an officer dealing with a matter to grant repeat authorisation and this would still need to go before a magistrate as well; and
- whether this would apply to Councillors would need to be investigated.

The Chair moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Begley, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the Audit and Governance Committee consider this report and in particular note that the powers of surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 have not been exercised for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024; and

**RECOMMENDED** that Council note and approve the updated 'Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 Joint Policy and Procedure'.

57

### **CORPORATE NET ZERO RISK REGISTER**

The Net Zero Project Manager presented the report making the following points:

- this was a six-monthly review and an assessment of the risk of carbon emissions;
- the register was developed in July 2022 and reviewed six-monthly and included 2030 targets;
- risks remained high and funding, capacity and skills were all issues;
- this report linked to the carbon reduction plan and the net zero team worked with other services and target grants where appropriate; and
- the recommendation was as set out in the report.

The Net Zero Project Manager, Chief Executive and Strategic Director for Place responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- funding potentially ending was a risk, but the role of the team was to bring together work across all services and there were several initiatives being delivered to help achieve targets and these would continue with or without the team;
- in the last year SMB had seen this report and coordinated at that level meaning work to achieve targets was infused through all council services;
- reports showed that SMB and the relevant Portfolio Holder would address carbon implications;
- a review of the Green Travel Plan was underway, and the policy was outdated;
- offsetting was a last resort and policy in relation to this would come forward with the costed Carbon Descent report; and
- Parks and Green Spaces were working on a Biodiversity Strategy.

The Chair moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Atkinson, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve the updated Net Zero Risk Register.

**RESOLVED** that further work is underway to reduce risk, and the Council's Costed Organisational Carbon Footprint projections be reported to Executive in June, will be fed into a service led Carbon Reduction Plan to progress with carbon reduction measures.

58

### **GOVERNANCE SOUNDING BOARD**

The Chair put forward the recommendation to form a Governance Sounding Board as a working group of this committee with the following remit and composition:

- to provide feedback to officers and Portfolio Holder on proposals to amend the constitution in advance of full proposals being brought before this Audit & Governance Committee;
- the feedback would be noted and included in the report to the Audit & Governance Committee; and
- to comprise, the Chair of this Committee, one member of each other political party represented on this Audit & Governance Committee along with the Portfolio Holder who would be invited to attend.

The Monitoring Officer in providing context to the item, advised:

- the process would be that proposals from the Sounding Board would be put before the Audit and Governance Committee before going to full Council;
- a working group would give Members of this committee, the opportunity to provide input before the revised constitution formally came before Audit and Governance Committee; and
- the working group would look at work done so far by officers which had been on the areas of Planning and Council procedure.

The Monitoring Officer responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- this would be a forward-looking piece of work;
- officers had looked at best practice;
- proposals would be open to discussion;
- the aim would be to have a constitution which was not political but would make processes efficient;
- it was not anticipated to be controversial, and feedback would be noted and included in the ensuing report; and
- points where agreement was not reached would be addressed at Audit and Governance Committee.

The Chair moved the recommendation to for a Governance Sounding Board, which Councillor Atkinson seconded and following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

The Monitoring Officer explained the proposed representation of the Governance Sounding Board as detailed below:

Political Party	Nominated Member
Conservative	Cllr Jobson

Green	Cllr Ketchin
Liberal Democrat	Cllr Palmer
Labour	Cllr Wardle (Chair)

It was proposed that the Portfolio Holder would be invited to attend the Sounding Board.

The Chair moved the recommendation that the Audit and Governance Committee agreed to the representation on the Governance Sounding Board, which was seconded by Councillor Mitchell and following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

(The meeting commenced at 5.32 pm and closed at 7.27 pm)

Chair

# Agenda Item 7

## EXETER HARBOUR BOARD

Monday 17 March 2025

### Present:-

Councillor Williams, R (Chair)  
Councillors Read, Rolstone, Sheridan and Snow  
A Garratt, Lt Col D Marino, J Prescott and C Seddon

### Apologies

R Eggleton, J Green and Councillor M. Williams

### Also Present

Harbour Master Exeter Port Authority and Democratic Services Manager

Also in attendance:

John Monks - Chair of Friends of Exeter Ship Canal  
Paul Craven - River Exe Cafe  
Martin Davies - Environment Agency  
Rex Harrison - Chair of the Exeter Port Users Group

1

### MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2024 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

2

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of pecuniary interest were made.

3

### PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public, Mr C submitted the following question: -

- Does the Harbour Board have any influence over the business and decisions of the Exeter Quay and Canal Trust?

The Chair advised that the Harbour Board do not have any influence over the business and decisions of the Exeter Quay and Canal Trust.

Mr C, in asking a supplementary question, enquired where there was overlapping membership between the two bodies, whether there were arrangements in place to avoid any conflicts of interest?

The Chair advised that arrangements were in place to avoid conflicts of interest relating to any overlapping membership between the two bodies.

4

### CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair provided the board with the following announcements: -

- meetings were scheduled for April 2025 with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, and Teignbridge District Council to discuss sea defences;

- there had previously been unanimous approval for the Harbour Master to communicate the Exeter Port Authority's best practice approach to the fire services in relation to the Princess Marina Ferry Fire;
- an emergency action plan for incidents had been written but was waiting to be reviewed the newly appointed Designated Person (DP);
- a visioning event had been held on 1 February 2025 where several suggestions had been made from Members and Waterways team;
- the Chair and Councillor Read had met Tom Watts of West Country Rivers Trust to discuss salmon passages on the Trues Weir and Mill on the Exe and were advised that further work was needed on those passages;
- the Chair had attended the Exe Estuary Management Partnership meeting on 11 February 2025, and further information about the partnership was available on their website;
- at the Exe Estuary Management Partnership meeting, Myles Blood-Smyth had proposed depositing spent oyster shells offshore to create a natural barrier and build up a sandbank, which was being considered by the partnership;
- the Chair and Harbour Master had attended a meeting with Ashford's solicitors regarding the Harbour Revision Order (HRO) and discussions had included Port Authority and Harbour Board governance arrangements, a focus on collaboration between the Harbour Board, the DP, and the Duty Holder and updating the Terms of Reference for the Harbour Board; and
- Board Member Richard Eggleton had resigned from the board due to other commitments, leaving three vacancies on the board. It was intended to fill these positions by June 2025, with information circulated to all members and advertised on the website.

A discussion was held on whether board members could reapply after partial terms and clarification would be sought on whether the limit was six years in total or per term.

5

### **EXETER PORT USER GROUP UPDATE**

The Chair of the Exeter Port Users Group (EPUG), Rex Frost, was in attendance. His update had been circulated to Members and was taken as read and the following discussion points were made: -

- the Exe Estuary Management Partnership included various councils and was well-attended, providing a platform for collaboration across the region; and
- the Exe Estuary Management Partnership participated in organising litter picking activities and residents who had expressed an interest in organising a floating litter pick for the canal would be encouraged to contact the relevant authorities for participation.

6

### **A STRATEGIC VIEW OF THE CANAL'S FUTURE**

The Chair welcomed John Monks, Chair of the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal to the meeting, who provided a verbal presentation on the strategic view of the canal's future. During the presentation, the following points were made: -

- the Port of Exeter had a rich maritime history, dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries when it was a bustling hub for sailors, highlighting the estuary and canal being vital for trade and transportation;
- the port currently supported an active boating and water sports community, with a renewed interest in maritime heritage and restoration of historic boats;
- Dawlish Warren, being a natural breakwater, was eroding and posed a risk to the port's safety, which a Senior Ranger, had highlighted the need for a 'Plan

- B' to manage high water levels, flood risk and impact to loss of moorings;
- the canal was an asset, offering safe moorings and a potential for economic growth, with strategic opportunities available;
- the canal and port needed to be integrated into strategic planning, focusing on new enterprises, skills, and investment and boost the stability of the Exeter's resilience over the coming decades;
- encouraging boatyard businesses in exploring clean propulsion technologies, would support the enhancement of the canal and boost Exeter's resilience, and prosperity, while offering benefits for locals, traders, and visitors;
- the canal could also support water-based passenger transport and commercial activities;
- there were concerns about current plans that could hinder future opportunities, such as the end of boat building on the canal and the earmarking of Grace Road Fields for industrial use;
- the canal and port needed to be viewed as integral to Exeter's strategic planning, requiring partnerships with communities and various authorities;
- as a comparative analysis, the canal was compared to the Kiel Ship Canal in Germany which demonstrated how inland waterways can thrive with marinas, pedestrian walkways, and cultural attractions; and
- viewing the canal and port as integral to Exeter's future was important and a high-level strategic feasibility study was proposed to explore the canal's potential as a future asset for Exeter, which could attract outside funding and consultancy support.

In response to questions and points raised, John Monks advised: -

- it was not proposed to abandon areas south of Turf Lock and the remit of the Harbour Board was acknowledged;
- a need for a contingency plan was being requested to address increasing costs and difficulties in providing winter mooring, which was crucial for the port's income;
- the cost of a waterway's feasibility study for climate change and development impacts of Water Lane were not known; and
- conducting a feasibility study with consultants to assess the potential of the waterways was important for Exeter's future planning and potential grant funding from the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) was a possibility.

The Chair advised that future changes and increased powers from the Harbour Revision Order (HRO), would influence future operations and partnerships. She thanked John Monks for his presentation. A copy of the presentation is appended to the minutes.

### RIVER EXE CAFE UPDATE

The Chair welcomed Paul Craven, Managing Director of the River Exe Café to the meeting, who provided a presentation and video on a new concept for canal pods. During the presentation, the following points were made: -

- an introduction and background of the River Exe Café which started as a local initiative and had been operational for 15 years;
- the introduction of two pods in the canal, designed to offer a unique experience beyond a typical Airbnb accommodation;
- the pods would be accessible by a specially designed boat that could navigate the canal's swing bridge and travel from Turf Lock to Double Locks for collection;
- the pods would be in the canal for eight months of the year and then moved

downriver for four months during summer season and permission had been granted for the pods to be placed in the river.

In response to questions and points raised, Paul Craven advised: -

- the boat to be used for accessing the pods would also operate as a taxi service between Double Locks and Turf Locks, enhancing accessibility and experience;
- the strong positive reaction from the Visioning Day was welcomed and highlighted the potential to boost tourism in both winter and summer months;
- currently there was a ferry service from Turf Lock to Topsham only operated during the summer, but historically there had never been a service running from Double Locks under the bridge;
- the new ferry would be enclosed, solar-panelled, and equipped with a backup diesel generator for emergencies, but would primarily run on an electric motor;
- trips would take about half an hour to avoid disturbing canal activities like fishing and a schedule would be developed in collaboration with Turf Lock and river users;
- the River Exe Cafe operated six months a year due to weather constraints, with attempts made to extend operations proving to be a challenge;
- the café did not directly compete with the Turf hotel and there was a potential for increased trade if the ferry service operated year-round;
- the service would offer two pricing tiers: affordable rates for the public during winter and higher rates targeting boat owners during the summer season;
- the boat currently accommodated up to 12 passengers, with potential plans to increase this capacity pending further approval;
- a waste boat system was currently in place, which operated in a comparable way to the cafe's operations, ensuring proper waste disposal;
- there was a potential to extend waste services to other vessels in the area, enhancing overall environmental management;
- there were plans to introduce electric people carriers to improve connectivity between Marsh Barton Railway Station and Double Locks, which was subject to demand;
- cycling routes were also being considered to enhance accessibility; and
- the possibility of establishing a floating restaurant / bar at the Quayside in Exeter, had recently been discussed and was pending a site evaluation.

The Chair advised that the Harbour Master would be able to provide further information on establishing a floating restaurant / bar at the Quayside. She thanked Paul Craven for his presentation which was welcomed by the board.

#### **DAWLISH WARREN MANAGEMENT**

The Chair welcomed Martin Davies from the Environment Agency to the meeting, who provided a presentation on Flood and Coastal Risk Management at Dawlish Warren and Exe Estuary. During the presentation, the following points were made -

- the Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy was initially developed in 2014, projecting changes to rising sea levels and climate change predictions for 100 years;
- in 2014 the Strategy originally planned for a 700mm sea level rise but had since been updated to plan for a 1-meter rise over the next 20 years due to changes in guidance, climate predictions, and legislation;
- completed and ongoing projects included: Exmouth, Topsham, Star Cross and Cockwood, and Clyst St. Mary;
- open coast resilience was being delivered with typical flood defence schemes

- which required some site changes for habitat creation, which the Exe Estuary was designated area for compensated habitat creation;
- Dawlish Warren had undergone significant changes over time, with images presented, showing shifts and erosion patterns;
- current monitoring indicated ongoing erosion trends, sand movement and the dominant wave direction and coastal processes, which contributed to erosion and defence challenges;
- erosion and defence strategies included continual beach lowering, and outflanking the relic gabion baskets;
- potential damage would primarily affect the western bank and the mainline railway, with declining impacts further up the estuary;
- the scheme was reviewed in 2020, which acknowledged larger changes than was first predicted and the next strategy update would include a consultation;
- there was a legal requirement to improve the condition of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and dune features through the removal of some defences;
- the smaller exposed geotube required patch repair and the larger geotube was undamaged and mostly buried providing further resilience;
- the current Environment Agency policy for failing relic gabion baskets was to do nothing, allowing them to fail over time and to removed failing groynes as the beach continued to lower;
- most of the local community preferred visible defences which contrasted with the ambition for broader maintenance and sustainable defences;
- collaborative work was being undertaken with Network Rail, notably a project to set back power banks to create habitat in front of the railway; and
- there were plans to review management positions at Dawlish Warren and assess business cases for Topsham and Powderham.

In response to questions and points raised, Martin Davies advised: -

- the exposure of geotube and gabions interfered with natural processes, which had a negative impact and there was ongoing debate about the responsibility for relic gabions;
- it would be difficult to predict and model channel changes and sediment movement due to historical and future scenarios;
- there was no Council budget available for the Harbour Board to look at additional modelling, but annual surveys were undertaken which were shared with the Port User Group;
- the original flood defence plans for Topsham were envisaged as an embankment, but were reconsidered for property-level protection and was now led by Exeter City Council, focusing on community involvement and economic assessments;
- the strategy included a review of economic, technical, engineering, and environmental aspects to determine feasibility and impact of projects;
- the strategy would also involve engaging with relevant communities and groups, including flood risk groups, to discuss and refine plans;
- the strategy aimed to complete by 2027-2028, covering the entire area discussed in presentation slides;
- there were legal requirements to include comprehensive assessments of economic, technical, engineering, and environmental impacts in the strategy; and
- reporting back to the Exe Estuary Management Partnership would occur annually through the normal channels.

The Chair thanked Martin Davies for his presentation. A copy of the presentation is appended to the minutes.

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## **GOVERNANCE AND HARBOUR REVISION ORDER UPDATE**

The Harbour Master advised that: -

- a meeting had been held with Ashford's Solicitors on 17 March 2025 to receive an update on the Harbour Revision Order (HRO) application;
- the application was one of three applications and was awaiting a 42-day consultation period by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO); and
- there was no fixed date for the consultation period or completion of the revision order, but it was hoped that the consultation would be completed by summer 2025.

10

## **HARBOUR MASTER'S REPORT**

The Harbour Master advised that an internal application to adopt MARNIS port risk assessment software for reporting had been approved by Strata.

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## **MARINE SAFETY PLAN - MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

The Harbour Master advised that: -

- the Marine Safety Plan had been written and was now awaiting sign-off from the new Designated Person (DP), before being published online;
- James Hannan, the new DP, will visit on 26 March 2025 and will be invited to the Harbour Board meeting in June 2025; and
- both the DP and another individual would be involved in MARNIS assessment and would have flexible availability for both in-person and remote interactions.

12

## **STATUTORY HARBOUR AUTHORITY STATEMENT OF ACCOUNT AND 2024-25 FEES & CHARGES**

The Chair advised that the statutory Harbour Authority Statement of Account and 2024-2025 fees and charges were included for members to note and had been compiled from reports to Audit and Governance Committee and the Council Budget.

Attendees were encouraged to email any questions that may arise from the Statement of Account and 2024-2025 fees and charges to the Chair.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.05 pm)

Chair

## **STRATA - JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2025**

**Present:**

Councillors Olive, Levine, Westerman, Knott, Mitchell, Radford (Chair), Smith and Swain

**Apologies:**

Councillors Patrick

**Officers in Attendance:**

David Sercombe, Head of Business Systems & Business Intelligence

Suzanne Edwards, Strata Finance Manager

Neil Blaney, Director of Place

Steve Mawn, Director of IT and Digital Transformation

Christopher Morgan, Trainee Democratic Services Officer

**These decisions will take effect from 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday 24 February  
unless called-in or identified as urgent in the minute**

### **35. MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Knott and seconded by Councillor Mitchell that the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

A vote was taken. All were in favour.

Resolved

That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

### **37. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER PROCEDURAL RULES**

None.

### **38. QUESTION FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCILS UNDER PROCEDURE**

## **RULES**

The questions and answers are attached to the agenda. There were no supplementary questions.

### **39. STRATA BUSINESS PLAN 2025-26**

The Director of IT and Digital Transformation introduced the item to the Committee. He highlighted the continuing improvements to IT and systems across the partner councils that were identified in the previously adopted business plan. Improvements in 2025/26 would include enabling a move to the cloud-based systems, which would replace the need for physical server rooms across the council estate. The Business Plan also included the Customer Relationship Management system which would provide significant savings, upgraded laptops for Officers, and the telephony replacement for Skype and contact centre.

In response to Members' comments, the Director of IT and Digital Transformation confirmed that the Business Plan was effectively split between the core demands of the Councils and optional extras. The optional projects would only be implemented if the Councils request them, and funding was secured. He also spoke on the move of over 300 servers to the cloud, which would be a massive undertaking and require significant resources.

In response to a question about the audit of Strata, the Director of IT and Digital Transformation informed the Committee that the audit considered how the Councils would be affected if the IT failed and how business would continue. During discussion of this item it was noted that the new laptops and move to the cloud would improve business continuity and that in the case of Wi-Fi failure, Officers would still be able to work from the laptops.

In response to other questions the Director of IT and Digital Transformation advised the following

- While there would be downtime during the digital transformation, this would be limited where possible and there would be significant cost to do this work outside of the working week.
- Councils have 3 choices of devices: iPads, laptops, and 'super laptops'.
- The CEF essentials framework set out how to combat cybersecurity threats
- The copper wire running underneath Exeter would be replaced with new fibre wire controlled and maintained by the Council only, and this would be an improvement.
- The Waste and Recycling phone application had been a success and Strata would look to implement it in the other authorities. The ECC Councillors endorsed the app.
- The Architecture Board was made up of representatives from all three Councils.

It was proposed by Councillor Olive and seconded by Councillor Mitchell that the Strata Business Plan be noted.

A vote was taken. All were in favour.

Resolved

that the Strata Business Plan be noted.

**40. STRATA BUDGET MONITORING AND PERFORMANCE OCTOBER 2024-25**

The Strata Finance Manager introduced the item to the Committee. It was highlighted that an underspend of £305,000 was forecast for the year and that these funds would be used to resource the partner councils' move to a cloud-based system.

It was noted that Strata had limited control over its spending of the budget, instead the partner councils decided where the money should be used. Impact of inflation had been limited to 3.5 percent which was below the national level.

It was also noted that the agreed Service Level Agreement performance had dropped from 96 percent to 92.5 percent, however this was above the target of 85% and it was considered that the drop can be explained by the amount of change currently being undertaken to implement new ways of working such as the new End User Computing model, new telephony system and several other major projects. If the partner councils sought to raise performance, a discussion on pausing projects would be available. The missed deadline peaks on the graph in the agenda report were when projects occurred, and so resources were focused elsewhere.

The Director for IT and Digital Transformation advised that the security team was strong and remained on alert, recounting that Exeter City Council had been targeted by a DDOS attack. Access to the partner councils' websites had been restricted abroad to help prevent against attacks. Other threats to security were user errors and phishing attempts.

It was proposed by Councillor Knott and seconded by Councillor Levine that the Strata Budget Monitoring and Performance report be noted.

A vote was taken. All were in favour.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

The meeting started at 3.00 pm and finished at 4.11 pm.

Chair  
Cllr John Radford

# Agenda Item 9

## EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 4 March 2025

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

Councillors Wright, Asvachin, Foale, Vizard, Williams, R and Wood

Also Present:

Councillor Jobson (as an opposition group Leader);

Councillor Moore (as an opposition group Leader); and

Councillor M. Mitchell (as an opposition group Leader)

In attendance:

Councillor Williams, M.

Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director of Operations, Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero and Democratic Services Manager

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## MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2025, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

25

## DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

26

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

No questions from members of the public were received.

27

## LORD MAYORALTY

The Leader proposed, and the Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and City Centre seconded, that Councillor Anne Jobson be nominated as Lord Mayor Elect for the 2025/26 Municipal Council year, and that Councillor Gemma Rolstone be nominated as the Deputy Lord Mayor Elect for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Jobson be nominated as Lord Mayor Elect for the 2025/26 Municipal Year and that Councillor Rolstone be nominated as the Deputy Lord Mayor Elect for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

28

## ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2023/24

The Executive received the report which provided an annual update of the scrutiny work achieved during the year 2023/24. The report had been presented to both the Strategic Scrutiny Committee and Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee and the minute extracts of those meetings were attached to the report.

Councillor M. Williams as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Board was in attendance to present the report and made the following points:-

- the report was a part of the work to align the Scrutiny Programme with the municipal year rather than the calendar year to avoid discrepancies;
- there had been an improvement to the scrutiny process through cross party working, with ongoing improvements being addressed;
- the annual report was being developed to focus on the impact of scrutiny rather than just listing items; and
- thanks were made to the officers and Members involved with preparing the report and the suggestions made to improve it.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- the collaborative cross-party nature of the scrutiny process was praised;
- the chance for the Executive to also feedback to scrutiny was welcomed;
- the clarity on timing issues and improvements made to the scrutiny process was welcomed; and
- what sort of measures were considered for the impact of work, notably to leisure services?

An opposition group leader raised the following points and questions:

- Scrutiny was an important function which provided a great opportunity for discussion and improvement;
- continued improvement in the collaboration between Scrutiny and the Executive was welcomed; and
- the idea of broadcasting scrutiny meetings would be a great opportunity for further discussion.

In response to questions and points raised by Members, the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Board advised:-

- the thanks of the Executive was welcomed and further thanks were made to the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Scrutiny for their hard work in improving scrutiny; and
- metrics and measures were still being worked through as part of the work of the Scrutiny Programme Board, but it was a goal to reflect on the impacts of scrutiny.

The Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and City Centre addressed the question of filming scrutiny meetings, and advised there were ongoing efforts to integrate new AV technology and how this would be resourced by relevant teams.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RECOMMENDED** that Council receive the Annual Scrutiny Report 2023/24.

The Executive received the report which provided the outcome of the public consultation for the 2024 Parking Places Order. Particular reference was made to:-

- the main change from the original proposal was no increase in parking charges for the 2024 Parking Places Order;
- the proposals focussed on addressing difficult trading conditions within the city centre;
- the proposals looked at reducing Sunday parking charges by 25% in central zone 1, and zone 2 car parks to encourage visitors and shoppers on Sundays, to reduce congestion and peak usage on a Saturday;
- re-introducing one-hour parking in zone 2 city centre car parks, following strong support from the public consultation and supported the business community;
- the John Lewis Multi-Storey car park opening and closing hours were proposed to be amended to 8am-midnight, following strong feedback to support the evening and night-time economy;
- two new car parks would be added to the Parking Places Order – the Riverside Leisure Centre and a temporary city centre car park. This introduction would ensure the Riverside Leisure Centre car park was used by its intended customers and to support parking transition following the closure of Mary Archer's car park; and
- changes to seasonal residential and business would take approximately six weeks, with more significant works for the Riverside Leisure Centre and a temporary bus station car park taking longer.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- there were concerns about the misuse of Pinhoe Railway Station and Riverside Leisure Centre car parks and whether these could be enforced as part of the Parking Places Order? and
- further information on the modelling used to determine the parking usage between Saturdays and Sundays to predict the impact on congestion?

An opposition group leader raised the following points and questions:

- how did the report align with the Council's corporate plan objectives?
- there was concern about the financial implications and impact to Net Zero?
- the recommendations did not show any commitment to how building a new car park would fund Net Zero work;
- what were the costs for setting up a new car park and what its income would be? and
- what would the costs be relating to the Net Zero work and would the car park be temporary until 2030?

The Leader advised that the points and questions raised were quite detailed and requested that the questions be submitted to him for response. The questions and responses will follow and be appended to the minutes.

In response to questions and points raised by Members, the Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero advised that:-

- the Pinhoe Railway Station was not part of the Parking Places Order and therefore misuse could not be enforced;
- the Exeter Leisure members would receive a permit to park and non-members would be required to pay; and
- modelling had been undertaken for parking use; however, the exact impact was challenging to predict, adjustments had been made to the income targets accordingly.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the amendment of the Parking Places order proceed with the following:

- reducing Sunday city centre car park charging by 25% for Central, Zone 1 and Zone 2 car parks;
- the re-introduction of 1hr (£2.00) parking for city centre car parks located in Zone 2;
- amending the opening and closing hours at the John Lewis car park to 8.00am - midnight;
- the additional of the following new car parks to the Parking Places Order:
  - Central Zone: Paris Street Car Park (Old Bus Station site); and
  - Zone 3: Riverside Leisure Centre.
- changing the cost of seasonal, residential, and business parking permits as set out in the report presented at the meeting;
- increasing the cost to purchase a seasonal, residential, and business parking permit by 5%;
- to increase the fee to purchase a discounted business and residential parking permits for existing permit holders, for the next 4 years, as agreed in the Parking Tariffs 2023 (as reported to the Executive on 7 February 2023); and
- to increase the cost for new permit holders by 5% for the purchase of a permit.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 5.55 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 15 April 2025.**

# Agenda Item 10

## EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 1 April 2025

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

Councillors Wright, Asvachin, Foale, Vizard, Williams, R and Wood

Also Present:

Councillor Jobson (as an opposition group Leader);

Councillor Moore (as an opposition group Leader); and

Councillor M. Mitchell (as an opposition group Leader)

Also present:

Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director for People and Communities, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Head of Service - Digital and Data, Head of Service - Customers and Communities and Democratic Services Manager.

30

## MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2025, were taken as read, approved, and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

31

## DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

32

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

No questions from members of the public were received.

33

## CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised Members of a recent hospital visit and expressed his gratitude to the NHS and commending the efficiency of the service provided.

34

## REVIEW OF CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Executive received the report on the Council's risk management progress and presented the revised Corporate Risk Register which was linked to the Council's Strategic Priorities. The Audit and Governance Committee had considered the report at its meeting on 19 March 2025, where it has been suggested to include a direction of travel indicator for risk scores, which would be incorporated in the next update.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:

- the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) funding for the Riverside had been approved, resulting in a £3.6 million grant award from the Department of Energy, Security and Net Zero. The funding would contribute significantly to decarbonising public sector facilities and the Council's previous prudent decision making was highlighted;
- a new Head of Service for HR had been appointed, and the HR improvement plan was now underway; and

- the register required an amendment to ensure that the Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism was listed for the relevant risks associated with that portfolio.

Opposition group leaders raised the following points and questions:

- the suggestion from the Audit and Governance Committee, highlighted the benefit in indicating text amendments in the document to help members track where changes had been made between meetings.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the Council's Corporate Risk Register be approved and that any necessary actions to help mitigate the risks for which it is responsible for be proposed to Council.

35

### UPDATE ON THE DIGITAL CUSTOMER STRATEGY

The Executive received the report on the update and progress to date of the Digital Customer Strategy. The strategy was vital for delivering Member aspirations for customer-focused services, emphasising the importance of a culture of excellent customer and digital service, digital equality, and efficient processes.

Members received a presentation (appended to the minutes), and particular points discussed included:

- the Digital Customer Strategy (DCS) was adopted in December 2023, and focussed on user experience, customer-focused services, digital equality, and efficient processes;
- pre-adoption work included providing a gateway for non-standard service requests, improvements to the 'contact us' form on the council website, the rollout of Microsoft 365, reduction of mailbox sizes, and audits on digital equality and data use;
- there were 10 DCS goals which included outcomes and priority actions;
- the formation of dedicated teams within the People and Community Directorate, with additional staff recruited in Spring 2025;
- the Council adopted the Strata Business Plan 2024-2025 which supported delivery of the DCS in a number of ways including: the rollout of a new end-user computer, replacing Skype with Teams, a new customer relationship management platform, Enterprise Middleware Architecture for data integration, replacing the intranet and document management systems with SharePoint and bookings/notifications for customer updates and reminders;
- the MyExeter Platform was launched in January 2025 and provided joined-up channels for customer interactions. Garden waste services have been successfully piloted with waste management services to follow;
- over 2,000 users have signed up to MyExeter providing positive feedback on the seamless user experience, and plans are under development to include a wide range of other services;
- having central customer records allows officers to access personalised information, be able track customer interactions and make improvements in resolving enquiries;
- all staff moved from Skype to Teams telephony in February 2025;
- a new CX One Contact Centre Platform was procured in December 2024 and was scheduled to go live in Exeter in Spring 2025;

- the CX One Contact Centre will allow better integration and communication channels, with AI virtual assistants also automating back-office processes.
- a new Customer Charter was scheduled for 2025 and both customer and Councillor involvement will take place to craft the charter and set standards for high-quality customer experiences;
- having secure data measures was a priority for the Council and would involve regular audits completion of the cyber assessment framework, and rollout of cybersecurity training; and
- the Council had made a significant capital investment to enable the delivery of the Digital Customer Strategy.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:

- would there be an App developed for residents to improve access to services?
- mailbox sizes were affecting Councillors' ability to manage casework;
- how would digital equality be put into practice?
- had mobile phone access been given more priority due to the likelihood of more residents having one and had the system been designed around this?
- there were some concerns about the phasing out of the global desktop for Members;
- Member training for cybersecurity would be necessary going forward;
- the update report and work undertaken to date was commended; and
- there was a need to address unique identifiers and links between users who lived in the same location with different subscriptions.

The Leader requested that a briefing session be arranged for Members to provide them information on the digital strategy and mailbox management.

Opposition group leaders raised the following points and questions:

- was the system compatible with neighbouring councils, notably for future planning with the Council's plans for Local Government Review;
- was there any system vulnerability and suitable backup in place?
- how would digitally excluded residents be supported?
- how were benchmarking and quality standards being addressed for the website, including the use of plain English?
- would there be an opportunity to include translation services for residents?
- how would chatbots be assessed to ensure they worked efficiently, given the allocated budget of £17,000?
- reassurance was sought on the prevention of sharing personal data for residents in an HMO; and
- there were residents who were potentially digitally excluded and required human contact for service delivery.

In response to questions and points raised by Members, the Strategic Director for People and Communities, the Head of Service for Digital and Data and the Head of Service - Customers and Communities advised that: -

- there were financial implications for data storage, notably for mailbox sizes as the Council moved to cloud-based systems. There is a legal duty to only store for the minimum amount of time necessary and whilst it is initially difficult it is important for officers and Members alike to manage their inboxes within the approved size limits.

- the rationale for this is set out in the data strategy which had been developed to improve data quality, governance, and rules for data retention. A programme to educate staff and Members on data management will be provided as part of the strategy implementation;
- the rollout of SharePoint and a data warehouse would also support the Council in ensuring compliance with data standards;
- the transition from the global desktop to new end-user computing systems, involved extensive testing and planning, with a focus on priority services and customer-facing staff;
- the global desktop was outdated and with several vulnerabilities, requiring a move to more secure and efficient technology;
- there were challenges in integrating council devices and systems and engagement with Strata and other councils to resolve issues was ongoing;
- digital equality was a priority, and efforts would be made to make staff available to focus on supporting those needing one-to-one contact;
- Exeter was noted as being a digitally evolved city, but there were still ongoing efforts to address digital exclusion through service transformation and consultations, and the engagement strategy consultation would also look at addressing these issues on an on-going basis;
- the underlying technology would enable all three authorities to deliver on their digital ambitions despite differing transformation strategies. The technology and move to a cloud-based system provided a foundation for future service integration for any potential future authority;
- there was a challenge for unique identifiers in households, particularly with mobile devices, and the importance of ensuring proper security in system design was a priority being worked on;
- the effectiveness of chatbots was dependant on the quality of the core data and learning from other Councils, work was being undertaken to improve data quality before any chatbot implementation;
- there would also be a focus on ensuring chatbots did not block access to services to ensure human support was available as needed; research had shown that when a chatbot was not resolving a customer enquiry, a swift transfer to an alternative channel was the best customer outcome;
- the Strata Business Plan 2025-26 included the development of an App, to improve communications with residents, providing updates on council services, and included waste management;
- the importance of holding briefings for Members was highlighted and the communications team was providing support;
- a Digital Service Officer was responsible for ensuring website content was in plain English and ensuring common standards across all services;
- the website had translation services for all users and the team was working on chatbot integration to address missing elements on the website;
- although the Council website scored well on independent assessments, there were plans to simplify navigation further;
- the Council planned to engage in more benchmarking activities with other authorities to help improve standards;
- over the past 18 months, a lot of work had been undertaken to align services, with a focus on high demand areas, notably council tax, and housing information. It was intended to integrate these into a single portal by the end of the year; and
- although the team had been cautious in promoting the changes to focus on quality, plans were in place to engage Members in April 2025 to seek feedback and support in communication.

The Leader thanked the Strategic Director for People and Communities, the Head of Service for Digital and Data and the Head of Service - Customers and Communities for the detailed presentation and work undertaken.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive noted the report.

36

## **DATA STRATEGY**

The Executive received the report which outlined the Council's approach to using data to achieve its strategic goals and was intended to align with the adopted Digital Customer Strategy and the revised draft Corporate Plan 2025-2028.

Reference was made to the importance of the data strategy for data security, appropriate use and that efforts had been made to ensure it was understandable and clear.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:

- interest was expressed in how data collection could streamline services and manage issues such as fly-tipping;
- were Councillors responsible for their own data control and protection? and
- the extent of efforts in meeting the needs of all customers was commended.

Opposition group leaders raised the following points and questions:

- would public databases be updated, notably for tree protection orders and heritage assets, which had not been updated in many years;
- the report advised that there would be no environmental impacts, but data servers would create carbon issues, which needed to be addressed;
- was the budget for the strategy sufficient?
- a query was raised on a potential typo in the report appendix; and
- did the strategy adhere to any imposed template by central government or other public document?

In response to questions and points raised by Members, the Strategic Director for People and Communities advised that:

- there was a challenge in making data publicly available;
- there was a focus on improving the quality of information on the website,
- there were further difficulties in recruiting individuals with digital skills to undertake the work due to competition with the private sector. However, partnership work with other councils and Strata was on going on project-by-project basis;
- Strat costs the council around £2 million revenue a year which is a sufficient budget, and the partnership arrangement provides economies of scale, aiding a timely delivery;
- Exeter's initial focus was on infrastructure before making changes to front line services: partner councils have taken other approaches and whilst collaboration had been effective discussions were being held with Strata on potential changes in the approach to increase the pace of delivery on some projects.;

- the carbon impact assessment was an issue which had been discussed with Strat Board a, who have committed to further work with all three local authorities to assess carbon impacts, which had previously been a challenge to assess.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and City Centre, confirmed that Councillors were the data controllers and suggested that Members should receive a briefing on the subject.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve the Data Strategy as set out in Appendix A of the report presented at the meeting.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.40 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 15 April 2025.**

# Digital Customer Strategy Update Report – March 2025

Page 81

Minute Item 35

# Introduction

- Adoption of Digital Customer Strategy
  - Implemented by the council in December 2023
  - Aims to prioritise customer needs
- Goals of the Strategy
  - Improve user experience
  - Guide service development and delivery
- Importance of the Strategy
  - Focus on customer-focused services
  - Emphasis on excellent customer and digital service
  - Promote digital equality

# Pre-Adoption Work

- Gateway for Non-Standard Service Requests
  - Agreement process for non-standard service requests
  - Managed by Strata IT Service Solutions
- BYOD Process Implementation
  - Developed and rolled out to testers
  - Implemented in SMB and OMB
- Contact Us Form Improvements
  - Enhanced form on ECC website
  - Customers can select from common enquiries
- Pre-Digital Customer Strategy Work
  - Microsoft 365 rollout to all staff

# Ten Goals for the Digital Customer Strategy

- Goals and Outcomes
  - Strategy includes ten goals
  - Covers all elements of digital customer service
  - Detailed outcomes for each goal
  - Priority actions specified for each goal
  - Refer to Appendix A for more details



# Creation of Dedicated Teams

**Stephen Clayton**

Head of Service,  
Customer and  
Communities

**Andrew Hopkins**

Head of Service,  
Digital and Data

- Formation of New Teams
  - Customer and Communities team
  - Digital and Data team
- Recruitment Timeline
  - New Heads of Service recruited in November 2024
  - Additional staff recruited in Spring 2025
- Key Positions
  - Consultation and Engagement Manager
  - Customer Experience Manager
  - Data Analyst
- Collaboration with Strata
  - IT service solutions and transformation company

# Adoption of Strata Business Plan and Enablers

we are  
your  
transformation  
partner

This is the  
Strata  
business plan  
for 2024/25

Version 1.8  
Date issued: 20 December 2023

## 1: New End User Computing Model

- Transforming user experience
- Phasing out Global desktops

## 2: Contact Centre and Telephony

- Replacing Skype with Teams Telephony

## 3: Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

- State of the art platform for all customer contact

## 4: Enterprise Middleware Architecture (EMA)

- Data warehouse from which we will get a single view of the customer

## 5: SharePoint

- Replacement for the intranet and document management system

## 6: Bookings

- Provides the ability to book appointments and playing pitches

## 7: Notifications

- Provides updates and reminder to customers for example missed bin

## 8: Website Content and Chatbot

- Enable more online self-service and resolution at first point of contact

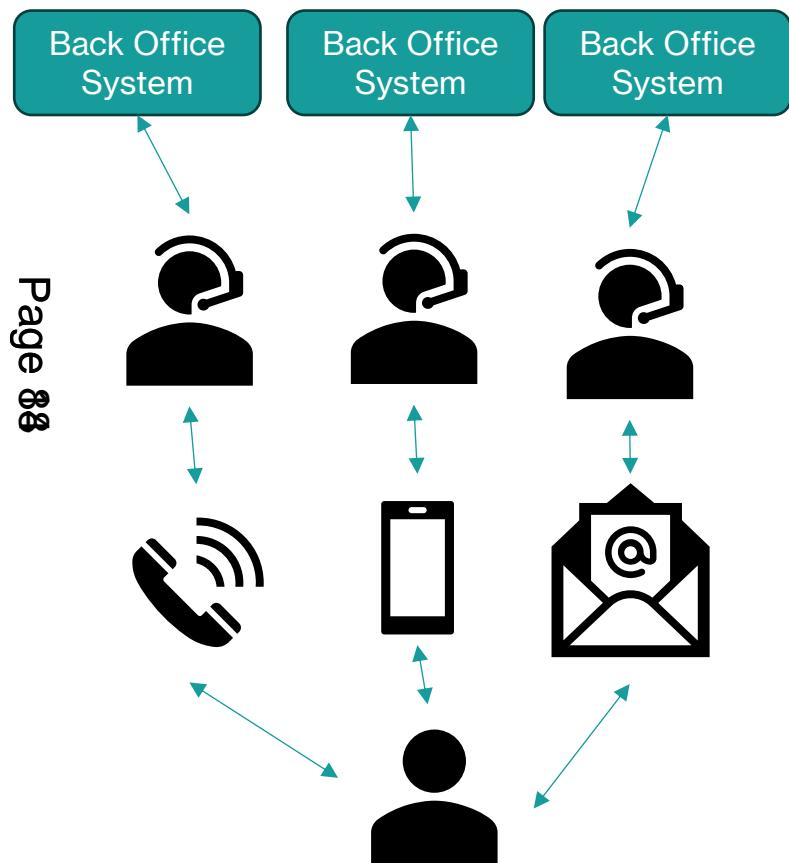
# Joined-Up Channels

Process	Demand / Usage
Bin Reminders	4,735 current subscribers
Bulky Waste Collections	2,096 annual collections
Order a New or Replacement Bin	4,187 cases per annum
Report a missed bin	10,672 cases (9,602 online, 1,957 via Customer Services, 1,070 via Bartec)

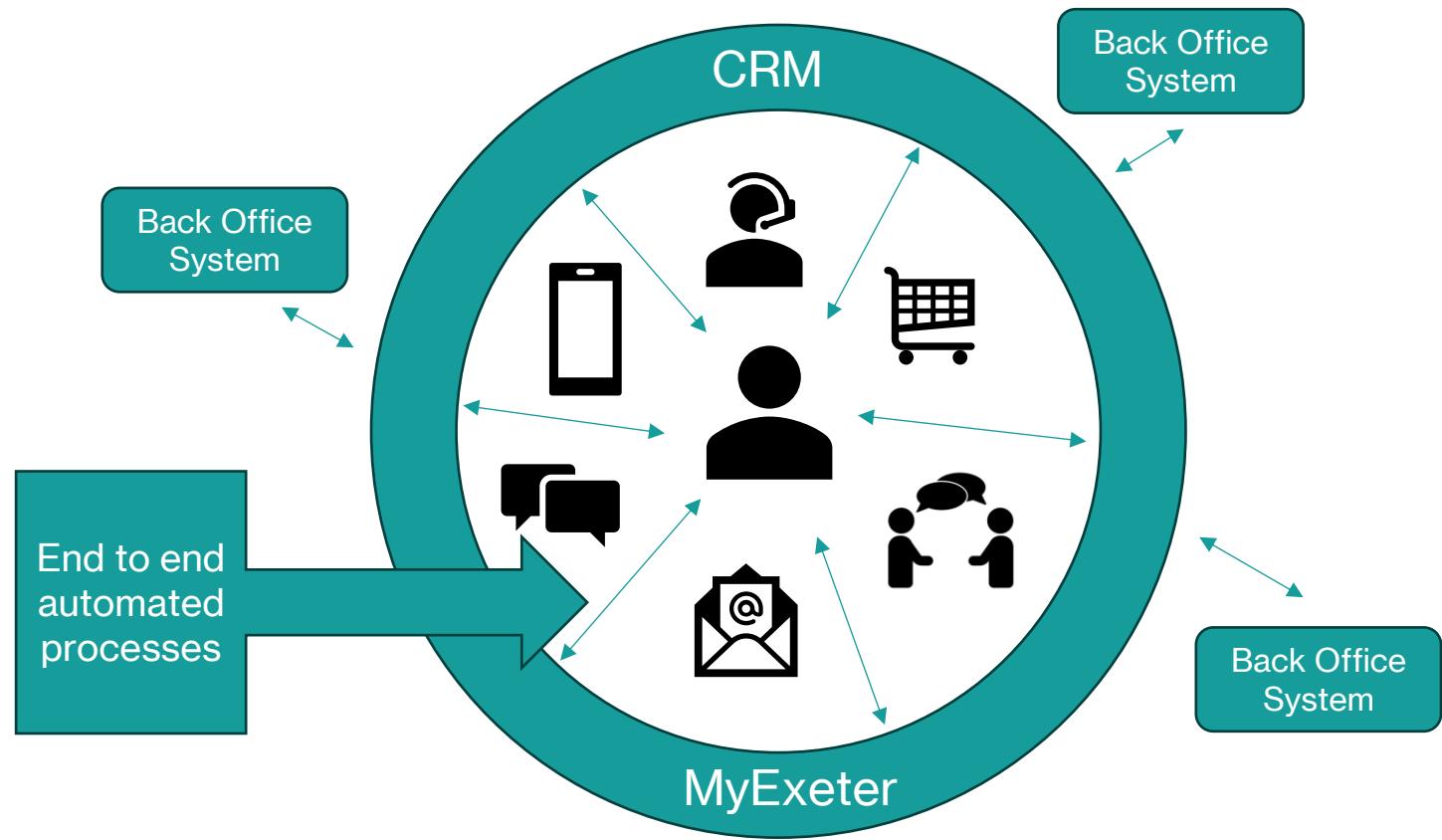
- Importance of Joined-Up Channels
  - Enhances customer interactions
  - Provides a single platform for multiple services
- MyExeter Platform
  - Significant step towards joined-up channels
  - Plans to integrate additional services
  - Chosen processes based on usage data and quick wins
- Garden Waste Process
  - First process added to MyExeter
  - Next processes from Waste Management service
- Quick Wins
- Communications Plan

# A Seamless Customer Experience

## Fragmented Customer Experience



## Joined Up Customer Experience



# Launch of MyExeter

## Log in to MyExeter

If you have already created a MyExeter account, you can log in now.

Email address \*

Password \*

**Sign in** >

[Forgot your password?](#)

See our [privacy notices](#) for details on how we manage personal information.

## Register for MyExeter

MyExeter is a new customer account where you can:

- Sign up to our garden waste collections service
- Access your account in our Tenant Portal (for council tenants)

Registering is quick and easy, and as an account holder you'll be able to log in at any time of day that suits you. We've introduced MyExeter as part of improvements we are making to our online services. New services will be added frequently and you will be able to track the progress of your requests.

**Register** >

- Introduction of MyExeter
  - New digital front door for the council
  - Went live in January 2025
- Initial Service
  - Garden Waste subscription service
- User Experience
  - Seamless and user-friendly
  - Positive initial feedback
- Future Plans
  - Dedicated communications plan for sign-up
  - Move from Digital and Data to Customer Support business as usual
  - Expansion of services in 2025

# A Seamless Agent Experience

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Mr David Sercombe  
56, Newton Abbot, TQ12, United Kingdom,  Self Account Created  
No D.O.B. given  
07816@gmail.com

[+ Raise Case](#)

Summary	Service Overview
Summary	
Details	
Cross References	0
Tasks   Cases	0   11
Relationships	0
Notes	1   0
Messaging	0
Service Summary	

**Waste Summary**

What collections does my property have?  
Garden (240L)  
Recycling (Box Black)  
Recycling (Box Green)  
Recycling (Food Basket)  
Recycling (Sacks Paper)  
Refuse (180L)

Why was my bin missed?  
No missed bin collection events recorded

Do I have a Garden Waste subscription?  
Yes, you have a subscription which renews on 31 August 2025 (Permit printed on: 07 August 2024)

When is my Garden Waste collection?  
Your collection is every other Monday

Am I registered for assisted waste collections?  
No, you are currently not registered for assisted waste.

When are my next bin collections?  
31 March 2025 - Refuse, Recycling  
07 April 2025 - Garden, Recycling

Have I any Bulky Waste collections?  
No, you do not have any bulky waste collections due

# Customer Contact in One Place

Page 97

Mr David Sercombe  
56, Newton Abbot, TQ12, United Kingdom

Self Account Created  
No D.O.B. given  
07816  
@gmail.com

**+ Raise Case**

Summary 

Details

Cross References 0

Tasks | Cases 0 | 11

Relationships 0

Notes 1 | 0

Messaging 0

Service Summary

Latest 3 cases

Search

Reference	Type	Current Stage	Status	Created	Created by	Completed by
FS-Case-609410662	Miscellaneous Enquiry (Environmental Health)	N/A	Closed	26/04/2024 13:06:22	@gmail.com	
FS-Case-593788413	Miscellaneous Enquiry (Environmental Health)	N/A	Closed	08/03/2024 13:18:49	@gmail.com	
FS-Case-586363409	Miscellaneous Enquiry (Planning and building control)	N/A	Closed	13/02/2024 09:58:07	@gmail.com	

Showing 1 to 3 of 3 entries

[Previous](#) [Next](#)

[Update Details](#) [Change Address](#) [Caution](#) [Alerts](#)

# Better Customer Data

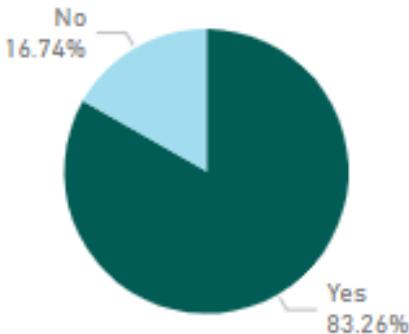
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## Enquiries by type

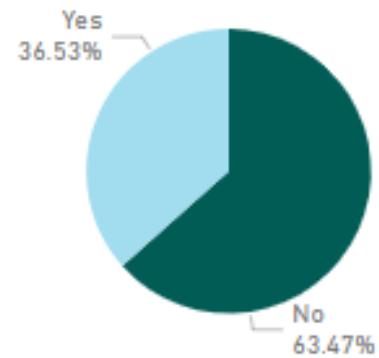
Function/activity/transaction

Function/activity/transaction	Enquiries
Council Tax	9475
Waste Management	2912
Housing Benefit	2353
Housing	2036
Parking	66
Information Management	41
Council Property	24
Other Services	8
Environmental Health	2
Leisure and Culture	2
Planning and Building Control	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16920</b>

## Resolved on first contact?



## Was contact avoidable?



## Number of enquiries

### Number of enquiries by date



# Next Steps in improving Customer Experience

- Develop ways of proactively notifying customers of service issues, such as missed bins, before they contact us
- Improve engagement with customers around service design and barriers to accessing service
- Moving towards a single online offer that links engagement activities, MyExeter and Newsletters and Bulletins subscriptions, along with personalised information relevant to that customer
- Adding more services to both MyExeter and the internal Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
- Testing new Chatbot in the contact centre
- Linking the new telephony system so that customer information pops up based on their phone number/email address etc.

# Telephony and Contact Centre Solution



- Review and Rationalisation of Contact Information
  - Ensured simple and easy customer journey
  - Promoted One Front Door approach
- Transition to Teams Telephony
  - All staff transferred from Skype to Teams by February 2025
  - Customer Services now control administration
  - Routing, in-call messaging, and opening hours managed by Customer Services
- Implementation of New Contact Centre Platform
  - Nice CX One procured in December 2024
  - Scheduled to go live in Exeter in Spring 2025
  - Phased implementation delivering measurable benefits
  - Single omnichannel solution (chat, telephony, online)

# Development of a Customer Charter

- Customer Charter Development
  - Involvement of Councillors and customers
  - Scheduled for 2025
- Standards for Customer Experience
  - Consistent service quality
  - High-quality customer experience
- Data for Improvement
  - Part of Corporate Performance Framework
  - Applicable across all service areas
- Fostering Excellent Customer Service
  - Broader effort within the council

# Efficient Processes

- Projects in Key Service Areas
  - City Development, Parks and Open Spaces, Waste Management
  - Reviewing processes and website content
  - Exploring digitalisation for service enhancement
- **City Development Transformation Project**
  - Delivering outcomes in the Digital Customer Strategy and become an exemplar of excellent digital and customer delivery
  - Collaborating with national initiatives and integrating best practices
  - Embed the Uniform (IDOX) system within the service
- **Rapid Impact Team Initiatives**
  - Project Feedback and Action Plans

# Secure Data

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- Secure Data Measures
  - Top priority for the council
  - Implemented to safeguard data and protect privacy
  - Regular audits and assessments by Strata
- Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF)
  - Tool for achieving and demonstrating cyber resilience
  - Consists of objectives, principles, outcomes, and indicators
  - Assesses management of cyber risks to essential functions
- Key Aspects of CAF
  - Decision Making: Led and supported at senior level
  - Staff Training and Phishing Test

# Customer-Centric Design

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- Importance of Customer-Centric Design
  - Designing services with the customer in mind
  - Actively seeking customer feedback
- Website Improvements
  - Enhancing user experience
  - Gathering customer advice
- Consultation and Engagement Manager
  - Discussing implementation strategies
  - Integrating feedback into business practices
- Customer Charter Development
  - Key initiative for meeting customer expectations
  - Ensuring customer satisfaction and exceeding expectations

# Continuous Improvement

- Commitment to Continuous Improvement
  - Regular reviews and assessments
  - Identification of areas for improvement
  - Implementation of necessary changes
- Transparency and Accountability
  - Progress report on the strategy
  - Example of council's commitment



# Capital Investment

- 2023/24 Capital Allocation
  - £288,989 allocated to support the emerging Customer Digital Strategy
- 2024/25 Capital Investment
  - £1,139,340 invested to support the delivery of Enablers within Strata Business Plan
- 2025/26 Approved Capital Investment
  - £452,758 additional capital investment approved



# Conclusion

- Dedicated capital funding
  - Enabled the Digital Customer Strategy
- New bespoke teams
  - Customer and Communities team
  - Digital and Data team
- Launch of MyExeter
  - Enhances digital engagement
- Digital skills development
  - Promote digital skills
- Procurement of new state of the art telephony and contact centre solution
- Digital transformation
- Continuous improvement

# Any Questions?

## SEATING IN THE GUILDHALL

		Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Knott (L)	Chief Executive	Lord Mayor Councillor K.J. Mitchell (LD)	Democratic Services Manager	Service Lead Legal Services	S151 Officer
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Democratic Services Officer				Strategic Directors	Strategic Directors	Strategic Directors
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Councillors	Councillors	Councillors		Councillors	Councillors
Darling (L)	Miller (L)	Bialyk (L)		Moore, (G)*	Jobson (C)
Atkinson (L)	Snow (L)	Wright (L)		Mitchell, M.N. (LD)*	Holland (C)
Patrick (L)	Hussain (L)	Wood (L)	TABLE	Fullam (LD)*	Sheridan (C)
Rolstone (L)	Parkhouse (L)	Williams, R.T. (L)		Read (G)*	Palmer (LD) *
Begley (L)	Pole (L)	Vizard (L)		Ketchin (G)*	Banyard (G) *
		Foale (L)		Rees (G)*	Wetenhall (G) *
				Bennett (G)*	

Clr Harding (L)	Clr Williams M.J. (L)	Clr Wardle (L)	Clr Asvachin (L)				Haigh (I)	Hughes(I)
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### Portfolio Holders

<b>L:</b>	<b>Labour:</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>G:</b>	<b>Green:</b>	<b>7*</b>
<b>LD:</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	<b>4*</b>
<b>C:</b>	<b>Conservative:</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>I:</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>Bialyk:</b>	<b>Leader</b>
<b>Wright</b>	<b>Deputy Leader and Corporate Services &amp; City Centre</b>
<b>Vizard</b>	<b>Climate and Ecological Crisis and Communities</b>
<b>Williams, R.T.:</b>	<b>City Management</b>
<b>Asvachin</b>	<b>Housing, Homelessness Prevention &amp; Customer Services</b>
<b>Wood:</b>	<b>Leisure Services and Healthy Living</b>
<b>Foale:</b>	<b>Arts, Culture &amp; Tourism</b>
<b>Allcock</b>	<b>City Development</b>

\* Known as the  
Progressive Group