

## **STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

5 December 2024

### Present:

Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Atkinson, Haigh, Jobson, Knott, Moore, Palmer, Rees, Rolstone, Snow and Williams, M

### Apologies:

Councillors Ellis-Jones and Hughes

### Also present:

Interim Director – Environment, Waste and Operations, Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero, Net Zero Project Manager, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer(LS)

### In attendance:

#### **45 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2024 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

#### **46 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

#### **47 Questions from Members of the Public Under Standing Order No.19**

There were no questions submitted by the public.

#### **48 Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order No.20**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Banyard in relation to the Portfolio of Councillor Wood who attended the meeting. The question was circulated at the meeting to Members of the Committee. The response of the Portfolio Holder is set out below:

**Question:** According to the Financial Conduct Authority, “Access to cash and banking services remain vital for many consumers and businesses” Not being able to pay for a swim or a gym session with cash at St Sidwell’s point, and other Exeter Leisure locations, is a barrier to access for at least the 10% of the population who use cash for most or all of their transactions, according to the FCA.

<https://www.fca.org.uk/publications/research/uks-cash-infrastructure-consumer-research>

This barrier disproportionately affects elderly individuals, disabled people, refugees, undocumented migrants, and the homeless, many of whom may lack access to technology or the skills needed to navigate online systems. For these groups, the inability to engage with services that should be universally accessible exacerbates marginalisation and isolation.

The Council hasn't completed an EQIA on the use of cashless payment systems since cash was removed as a payment option during Covid.

**When will all customers be able to pay for Exeter Leisure facilities with cash?**

**Response:**

The Leisure service went cashless in 2020 - at the time due to Covid restrictions. The concept proved popular with our customers. Following the pandemic we analysed our data and concluded that the benefits of a cashless service far outweighed our previous model. From a security point of view it is a safer environment for our staff as well as saving on staff costs due to the reduction in administration associated with cash transaction, including third party collection/deposit service.

We prioritise the data of all customers in our building as a H&S duty of care, taking their name and next of kin in case of emergency. This allows us to ensure we have data should an incident occur, which is industry best practice.

Since we introduced a cashless service, we have had a small handful of customer impacted, our team work with these customers and have managed to find solutions. A number of residents do use cash and we are looking at workable solutions and balancing the risk for staff.

**Supplementary Question and Response**

Councillor Banyard recognised that a small number of people would be affected but questioned why no formal EQIA had been carried out to assess impact of policies on all?

Councillor Wood responded stating that an EQIA relates to when a decision was made and that the leisure service was brought in-house during COVID when there was no choice but to be cashless and that there was no facility for cash at St Sidwell's Point.

Councillor Knott stated that cashless is often preferred in his trade, hospitality as cash is twice as expensive to process. Was there a study of how much it would cost to introduce the facility to accept cash in leisure facilities? Councillor Wood responded that the cost would be greater than to a retail organisation who would handle large amounts of cash but be able to spread that cost wider. There would be a significant cost to introduce cash handling in car parks, leisure and RAMM shop.

**Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services and Healthy Living, Councillor Wood:**

Councillor Moore asked why Live and Move consultations were not on the Charter page. Councillor Wood agreed to answer outside the meeting as he was not aware that this hadn't been placed on the website.

Councillor Palmer stated that there was also a wider cost in tackling health inequality.

Councillor Moore asked the Leader, Councillor Bialyk if following the Executive decision last week to publish the local plan, could he be sure that enough brownfield sites were being built on? Councillor Bialyk responded making the following points:

- commitment remained to 15% brownfield sites;
- the Plan was evidence-based not political;
- there was a need to balance what they would like, what was needed and reality and that the local plan brought these together;
- social and affordable housing was important to this council;

- 35% hadn't been achieved; and
- there was more good in the Plan than may be evident.

#### 49 **City Wide Net Zero programme of work and update on delivery**

The Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero presented the report making the following points:

- data was for 2022 as there was a two year lag;
- this was the second report, the first having been three years ago covering 2019;
- the Greenhouse Gas Report was kindly funded by the University of Exeter, via the Exeter Civic University Agreement;
- Exeter's greenhouse gas emissions decreased by 45,000t between 2019 and 2022 to an estimated 466,000t which represented a 9% decrease. The majority of the decline reflected the continued decarbonisation of power;
- a lack of progress in the buildings and transport sectors was particularly concerning as these sectors are the major sources of GHG emissions for Exeter, and reductions fell well short of the level of change required;
- reducing emissions and achieving net zero would require a concerted effort from all stakeholders within the city: businesses, residents, VCSE sector as well as the public sector;
- waste was now treated within the city therefore included in emissions but biogenic content and energy generation not considered;
- change in behaviour was required – such as where residents go on holiday, where and how they spend and where businesses bought raw materials;
- the team would work with Building Greater Exeter in how the construction sector was supported and advised on consumption-based data; and
- the next update would be in March 2025.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities and the Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero answered Members' questions making the following points:

- access to active travel for those with a disability could be drawn into the Transport Working Group and reported to DCC;
- cost of living had an impact on behaviour change;
- government grants could be made more visible;
- carbon budget had not yet been discussed;
- milestones and metrics would be available in March;
- there was work to be done in reaching out to residents about schemes such as Warm Homes; and
- the council remain committed to Net Zero 2030.

Following a vote the recommendations set out in the report were **CARRIED**.

#### 50 **Working Towards Net Zero - Exeter City Council's Corporate Carbon Footprint Report and Carbon Reduction Action Plan**

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

- recommendation 2.2 was needed in order to ensure activity could continue;
- key activities, PSDS 4 was now open with the only viable building being the Riverside Leisure Centre with a bid submitted (heat pump and insulation of central roof – if successful would be submitted to Executive);

- the Green Accord scheme had been launched in April 2023 and a recent sustainable supplier event had been held, with 70 companies and the Chief Executive in attendance and electric bicycles and vehicles on display;
- carbon literacy training had continued with 132 staff and councillors now carbon literate;
- Bronze status had been achieved;
- the Housing retrofit programme continued;
- SWEEG had been commissioned to carry out a fully costed Carbon Descent Report;
- an EV strategy report would go to Executive in the future; and
- Water Lane solar farm produced renewable energy and was a demonstrator project with a large battery funded through the European Development Fund. There had been a visit, of 16 Officers from various public organisations across Devon, Torbay and Plymouth, to the solar farm during the week.

The Net Zero Project Manager and Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities answered Members' questions making the following points:

- new UK Climate Score card rankings would be expected in 2025;
- that three costed scenarios for the decarbonisation of RAMM would be provided outside the meeting
- the City Council's Energy Manager was on the group to input into local energy discussions and work with the DNO;
- in regards to PSDS4, the bulk supply point was one of the main issues at the RAMM;
- there were different restrictions across the city but this was a similar picture nationally and the council would learn from other projects;
- there was a need to understand future demand and now have dialogue with National Grid which wasn't previously possible;
- carbon literacy training would now be service specific where possible;
- the Carbon Descent Plan would be put to SMB and committee for debate and discussion;
- it would be hoped that actions would filter into the emerging corporate plan;
- Portfolio Holders were working together and there may be external opportunities such as carbon literacy training; and
- the council was highly ranked with the Climate Score Cards and other councils were looking at what was being done here.

It was noted that on page 36 6.4 there was a minor typographical error and should read Decarbonisation Plan.

Following a vote the recommendations set out in the report were **CARRIED** unanimously.

## 51 **Air Quality Performance**

The Interim Joint Director for Environment, Waste and Operations presented the report which had previously been heard by the Executive and Council, making the following points:

- there was a statutory duty to measure nitrogen dioxide concentration and report to central government on a set template;
- there were 85 diffusion tubes mainly on arterial routes looking for issues and giving monthly data;

- there were two fixed stations on the national network, at the RAMM and Alphington Street;
- the lead officer vacancy was an issue as an expert of twenty years had been lost;
- the annual status report would be presented to Executive once the appraisal letter from Defra was received; and
- Defra had now advised that waiting for a year to revise the Air Quality Management Area and subsequently the action plan would be preferable to allow there to be data three years out of COVID.

The Portfolio Holder for City Management and Interim Joint Director for Environment, Waste and Operations answered Members' questions making the following points:

- the primary objective was to look at exceedances of which there was one area in East Wonford Hill;
- this was a sealed order of Council but Defra had a say in it;
- air quality knew no boundaries, local, national or international;
- there had been a change for the better in the last ten or eleven years due to improvements in technology;
- every petrol or diesel car replaced by electric had a positive impact however behaviour change out of vehicles would still be needed;
- mapping of placement of diffusion tubes was available in the public domain, on the council website, there were a number near schools and they were placed in areas where dispersal was difficult with buildings close to the roadside, with some in parks to give background levels;
- the team were not resourced to provide education but DCC active travel have done and the team had input, this is funding dependent;
- reasons for the rise in particulate matter in recent years on page 138 were unclear;
- they had already written to the Director of Public Health with regard to the there being no mention of air quality in the Devon and Torbay Transport Plan;
- all 17 actions would be reviewed
- 4.1 of the Action plan on the website showed significant consultation ([Air quality action plan - Exeter City Council](#)) and a similar level of involvement would be intended upon revision;
- there would be different measures as some such as Co-bikes/Co-cars would no longer be relevant; and
- the Chair of HATOC had agreed to add Air Quality to their agenda.

Councillor Moore proposed a recommendation which was subsequently withdrawn following debate and additional information from the Portfolio Holder.

## 52 **Annual Scrutiny Report**

Councillor Williams presented the report and thanked Councillor Allcock who had been the previous Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Board. The changed timescale of the report was explained.

During discussion Members made the following comments:

- the format was the same as last year; and
- it would be good to see impact and outcomes.

Members of the Scrutiny Programme Board responded making the following points:

- this was an interim report; and

- other authorities had fuller reports but they also had dedicated scrutiny officers.

The Strategic Scrutiny Committee received the report and recommended that the Executive note the Annual Scrutiny Report 2023/24.

### 53 **Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan**

The Chair explained that no proposals had been received in the shape of proformas or as Standing Order 18 requests. The Carbon Descent item had not been available therefore a Chair's decision had been taken to move it to the January meeting due to the work plan item being deferred in November.

The Chair proposed that the Live and Move programme update and Councillor Wood's Portfolio update on Leisure Services and Healthy Living, be heard in March rather than January to allow changed information to be provided from that which was presented in June, in addition for more information on future plans to be presented. The Chair proposed that Deputy Leader's Portfolio Holder Report be heard in January.

Following a vote the amendments to the work plan were **CARRIED**.

Councillor Mitchell asked and the Monitoring Officer agreed to discuss with Officers outside the meeting the Combined Scrutiny meeting scheduled.

Following a vote the plan as amended was **AGREED**.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.56 pm

Chair