

COUNCIL

Wednesday 25 February 2026

Present:

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor, Councillor Anne Jobson

Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Gemma Rolstone

Councillors Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Begley, Bennett, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Foale, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Hussain, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Parkhouse, Patrick, Payne, Read, Rees, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Wetenhall, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

Apologies:

Councillors Hughes, Mitchell, K, Pole, Sheridan and Williams, M

Also present:

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

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Lord Mayor advised that no questions had been received from Members of the public.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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TO NOTE MINUTE NO. 97 & 98 OF THE CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 22 JANUARY FEBRUARY 2026

The Lord Mayor asked that minutes No.97 **Quarter 2 Budget Scrutiny** and No.98 **Medium Term Financial Plan** of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee 22 January 2026, be noted.

136 **TO NOTE MINUTE NO. 92 OF THE EXECUTIVE ON 16 DECEMBER 2025**

The Lord Mayor asked that the minute **No.92 2026/27 Budget Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan** of the Executive on 16 December 2025, be noted.

137 **TO NOTE MINUTE NO. 93 OF THE EXECUTIVE ON 16 DECEMBER 2025**

The Lord Mayor asked that the minute **No.93 Council Taxbase and NNDR 1 2026/27** of the Executive on 16 December 2025, be noted.

138 **TO NOTE MINUTE NO. 94 OF THE EXECUTIVE ON 16 DECEMBER 2025**

The Lord Mayor asked that the minute **No.94 Housing Rents and Service Charge 2026/27** of the Executive on 16 December 2025, be noted.

139 **BUDGET 2026/27**

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 2026/27.

In moving the resolution, the Leader proposed, and Councillor Wright seconded additional wording to the resolution:

(1) On 27 January 2026 the Licensing Committee:
RESOLVED unanimously that the Licensing Committee recommends the following:
That Council approves for the period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027 that the fees shall be set as specified in Appedix B.

Minutes of the above meeting have been published and will be received by Council on 3 March.

These fees can be found on pages 228-230 of the agenda pack and form part of the budget before you today.

(2) That the following, as submitted, be approved:
(a) the Revenue estimates for 2026-2027 with an additional budget added of £130,000 for tidying, cleaning and improving the public realm, to be funded from the General Fund Working Balance.

Councillor Moore proposed, and Councillor Rees seconded, the Green Group amendments to the budget in the following terms:

Green Group Budget Amendment 2026

To reduce the General Fund Surplus by £255,000 the Council's already agreed minimum of £3.1m.

To fund:

1. Securing Community Assets – a community Asset Transfer programme:

As part of the Local Government Reorganisation programme undertake a review of Council assets (property and land) to identify property which has previously been, currently is in or suitable for community ownership and community benefit.

To ensure that community assets can be protected and improved by the Council and communities ahead of LGR, to enable a programme of Community Asset Transfer (CAT) upon request and in line with the [Councils CAT policy](#) (adopted 2022), to support local (appropriated constituted) community organisations take on assets in Exeter's neighbourhoods and secure them for the long term as community owned and run assets.

The programme would provide revenue funds for capacity building for the organisations and funding expertise (e.g. Surveyors, business planning); and small capital grants to act as 'first funder in' to underpin and attract external capital funding for the project or fund the Council to undertake essential and urgent repairs to the building before disposal.

Disposal may include all the methods that the Council has used to date, including: freehold sale at less than best consideration (allowed under government guidance), long leases at less than best consideration or peppercorn.

Note: It is noted that the approach might generate some capital receipts - which can be used to continue the programme (revenue or capital).

The programme will be funded as follows:

Revenue grants: £155,000 reduction to General Fund min reserves levels.

Capital funding: An amount, allocated from the non-neighbourhood portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy, to be decided by the Executive once the review has been complete.

2. Nature Towns and Cities Accreditation:

The Accreditation demonstrates a "commitment to transforming green infrastructure to benefit people, place and nature. By achieving the award, you'll have shown that you have good leadership, are involving and engaging communities and building effective partnerships. Together, you will have developed ambitious plans to improve the natural infrastructure of your town or city. You will also have considered how to secure funding and developed new ways to deliver with communities and partners."

This budget amendment will help support the proposal to seek accreditation and address feedback in the budget consultation for more support for parks and greens spaces.

The proposal is to fund infrastructure (beyond play equipment which has separate budget), support gardening (vs 'maintenance'), planting (for plants - noting the separate tree budget), and fund community groups that are, or wish to, get involved in the accreditation to undertake this work.

Revenue funding £50,000 from a reduction to the General Fund minimum reserves level.

3. Adapting to our changing climate:

To develop an adaptation and resilience action plan for the City of Exeter (not just Council services) which involves communities and partners in practical action.

This will sit alongside the Net Zero 2030 City Council's Carbon Action Plan being developed by the Net Zero Project Board and help partners and communities really consider the impacts of the changing climate on communities. The Council attends Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Climate Impacts Group (Climate Impacts Group

- Devon Climate Emergency) meetings, which discuss climate resilience and adaptation.

The work will facilitate the co-development of a resilience and adaptation action plan and access to technical expertise to identify risks and how they can be reduced or managed. There needs to be a big emphasis on working with communities for this work to be effective. Community engagement can, in part, be covered by some of the £120k budget already identified in the budget book.

Funded by £50,000 adjustment to General Fund minimum reserves level.

In presenting the Green Group's budget amendments, Councillor Moore made the following points:

- all aspects of the proposal were aligned with the Council's policies and priorities;
- these were based on proposals from the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee;
- the Council already had a policy on Community Assets and this would help move it forward;
- working alongside the community was necessary for a long-term and viable future;
- the parks and green spaces in Exeter were much loved and valued;
- the climate crisis was happening now and had already been recognised in the draft Local Plan;
- it was necessary to work with businesses and communities;
- nature based solutions were needed to deal with the increases in rain and temperature; and
- the General Fund could be used and the minimum level was at the higher end for a Council.

During debate Members made the following comments:

- the UK Government Adaptation Research Framework had made it clear that climate change was already challenging and the challenges were increasing;
- the ability to adapt was critical and widespread action was needed for climate resilience;
- work needed to be done with communities to strengthen their response;
- £50,000 to the Parks and Open Spaces Team was completely in line with the Council's policies and strategies;
- this was a win-win amendment with lasting outcomes;
- unusual was becoming usual because of climate change; and
- a pivot to adaptation was common sense.

In seconding the amendments, Councillor Rees made the following points:

- she was delighted to have completed the first full round of budget scrutiny;
- scrutiny was an evolving process that would hopefully be strengthened;
- the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources had welcome amendments from Members of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee;
- these discussions should be collaborative across all parties;
- these amendments supported wider council strategy and that was the spirit in which these proposals were made; and
- this amendment was not in opposition or contradictory in any way.

Councillor Moore responded to comments made in the debate, stating that it would be good to hear more debate on this matter as the issues raised were important for the residents, and there were only two years left for this Council to make these changes.

The Leader, as mover of the original motion, replied to the amendment, making the following comments:

- no one could disagree with the spirit of the amendments;
- there was a lack of detail in the amendment; and
- he would address the issues raised later in the meeting.

Councillor Michael Mitchell raised a point of clarification regarding Standing Order 30 and was advised by the Lord Mayor that this was not applicable when voting on an amendment.

Following a vote the amendment was **NOT CARRIED**.

Councillor Michael Mitchell proposed, and Councillor Palmer seconded, the Liberal Democrat Group amendments to the budget in the following terms:

2026/27 Budget Amendments proposed by the Liberal Democrat Council Group Supporting local communities.

1. In addition to support with office costs, a grant of £50,000.00 to support Citizens Advice Service whilst it develops alternative income sources and works to integrate with any proposed Unitary Authority structure implemented in Devon. To negotiate a contract based on savings to Council because of CA's work to bring in additional money to the council e.g. rents and council tax and other bad debts. The cost of this grant to be met in in 2026/27 from General Reserves.
2. HMOs – to review and adjust fees to ensure the service breaks even and provide support to improve standards in the HMO sector.
3. The council is requested to investigate a city-wide voluntary licensing scheme for properties in the rented sector. The scheme should aim to be self-financing.

In proposing the amendments Councillor Michael Mitchell made the following points:

- he was disappointed that the Council would be raising the Council Tax by the maximum allowed;
- the original business rate amounts were embedded in the budget;
- the elections would still be held on 7 May, so this was in many ways a temporary budget;
- the Liberal Democrat group only wished to make one minor change to the proposed budget;
- the needs of the Citizen's Advice Exeter continued to grow, and they still had professional staff and support services that they needed to fund;
- Citizens Advice Exeter was only supported financially by Devon County Council;
- he believed that if this became embedded this year, this could be carried forward in the new unitary authority;
- without support the Citizens Advice Exeter was running at a deficit;
- there were issues with licensing charges in relation to Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs);
- properties in the rental sector in a voluntary licencing scheme should be self-financing; and
- he welcomed the government's stance on the Renters' Rights Act.

Councillor Moore, as Leader of the Green Group made the following comments during debate:

- she agreed about the importance of Citizens Advice Exeter;

- during the first quarter of this year, Citizens Advice Exeter had helped 1300 clients with 4844 issues;
- Citizens Advice Exeter brought income for the Council, and had secured a £1,000,000 gain for residents; and
- this would be a strategic investment for the Council.

During debate a Member highlighted that demand did not disappear when services were cut, and that people should be campaigning and canvassing Devon County Council to invest in services that people relied upon.

Councillor Palmer, as seconder, made the following comments in support of the amendments:

- she had a high concentration of HMOs in her ward;
- Exeter City Council was the only authority with such a high-level HMOs without a licensing scheme;
- residents were living in appalling housing conditions and a large number of students would not complain because they were worried about losing their housing;
- vulnerable people were living in unregistered, poorly maintained housing;
- political belief should not be considered in this matter;
- everyone had a right to live in a decent home;
- the Council could play their part by having these schemes; and
- they were encouraging that a legacy be left for residents in Exeter to have a safe place to live.

Councillor M Mitchell responded to comments made in the debate in the following terms:

- it was only a few years ago that Exeter City Council had been giving Citizens Advice Exeter £75k a year;
- the Council did not make a contribution, and charged Citizens Advice Exeter for the use of the building;
- Citizens Advice Exeter was a desperate service for people in extremely dire circumstances; and
- if Exeter City Council did not care, why should anybody else.

The Leader, as mover of the original motion, responded to comments made in the debate in the following terms:

- this Council had given support to Citizens Advice Exeter in the past;
- the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee had been clear regarding peppercorn rent;
- the Chief Executive had written a letter to Citizens Advice Exeter and he could not see why this letter could not be shared with all Members; and
- they could not precondition the new Unitary Authority going forward.

Following a vote the recommendations were **NOT CARRIED**.

Councillor Moore and Councillor Read raised a Point of Order under Standing Order 10 (7) regarding the Leader's additional wording added to the resolution, as she believed it had not been submitted in accordance with the Standing Order.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources advised Members that the Labour Group had proposed an acceptable amendment to the budget.

The Lord Mayor advised that additional wording had been added to the budget rather than an amendment.

In presenting his Budget speech, appended to this set of minutes, the Leader, Councillor Bialyk, covered the following themes:

- a balanced budget had been achieved through effective financial management;
- extensive consultation had ensured alignment with resident and community priorities;
- no frontline service cuts were anticipated for the next two years;
- the proposal for LGR had been developed with cross-party support, and was now out for public consultation;
- elections would now go ahead and the government were providing additional resources to support;
- the Community Safety Team (CST) had expanded citywide, contributing to notable reductions in ASB and city centre crime;
- 311 new high-definition CCTV had been installed, with additional cameras planned;
- a new City Centre Strategy was being developed using input from the Residents Survey, focusing on safety, accessibility, economy, housing, and travel and would go to consultation later in the year alongside the updated Safety of Women and Girls at Night Charter;
- over £526k had been distributed to low-income households through the Household Support Scheme;
- there was ongoing support for community groups, and Citizens Advice Exeter, including peppercorn rent, and access to future funding opportunities;
- the Exeter Plan had been submitted and was about to begin examination;
- there had been progress on new council housing at Vaughn Road, the St Thomas redevelopment, retrofit programme, and social housing partnerships;
- major regeneration was underway in a number of areas across Exeter, with 182 affordable homes secured via s106 funds;
- Newtown active-travel scheme was due to start, and significant engagement had been undertaken;
- a climate resilience plan was being developed, with long-term investment expected to fall to a future unitary authority;
- restoration of the Royal Clarence Hotel and the new Wonford centre had been approved;
- the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy would be reviewed for consistency and transparency;
- there would be no increase in parking charges and refurbishment was being planned at key car parks;
- the Leisure Service had seen a growth in membership and high participation levels;
- Exeter had submitted a bid for the UK City of Culture 2029; and
- major operational upgrades had been approved, including the new MRF purchase, waste hub development, and the proposed office relocation which would enable CityPoint redevelopment.

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

- the government had provided a multi-year settlement for the first time in 10 years and funding for 2026/27 remained the same as that for 2025/26;
- Exeter City Council continued to set one of the lowest council tax rates in the country;

- the proposed increase was 2.99 percent, which was £191.31 for band D properties, around 11p a week;
- the total Band D charge for 2026/27 was £2,495.36
 - Devon County Council: £1,891.17
 - Police and Crime Commissioner: £303.20
 - Exeter City Council: £191.31
 - Devon and Somerset Fire Authority: £109.68
- the Labour Group had proposed the creation of a new “Pride in Exeter” neighbourhood improvement fund totalling £130,000, which could be used to support small-scale local improvements such as clearing overgrowth, minor repairs, and tidying work;
- the council had delivered against key commitments including cost-of-living support, climate action, homebuilding, green space protection, cultural investment, and a stable, well-led council; and
- this council would hand over to a new unitary authority in a strong, well-managed position.

During debate, Councillor Holland, as Leader of the Conservative Group, made the following points:

- there was much to be celebrated in this budget;
- the £2 million given by the Football Association for the development of King George V playing fields should be celebrated; and
- he was pleased that car parking charges had been frozen.

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

- Passivhaus council houses were brilliant;
- she was concerned that the budget set out a continuation of doing, rather than working with;
- the CAT needed to be put into action, with money;
- the Council needed to work with communities,
- she wanted long term investment in the city’s parks and green spaces;
- the inequality gap in the city was growing; and
- core spending power had actually decreased by 16.7% when compared to 2010.

The meeting was adjourned for a break at 20:12 and resumed at 20:22.

During debate on the substantive motion, Members’ made the following comments in support of the proposed budget:

- it was incredible that Exeter was the fastest growing city in the UK;
- it was important to recognise retrofitted homes as there was still lots more work to do;
- there was lots of work to be done that was not in the remit of the council, such as flood prevention, transport, and roads;
- the Newtown scheme would make a huge impact on safety, use of green space, and active travel;
- the leisure service was not an optional extra;
- inactivity had been targeted through the Live and Move project;
- 1.7 million people had visited the leisure facilities in Exeter this year;
- money was being saved by building Passivhaus council houses;
- the extension of the Community Safety Team into Heavitree was very welcome;
- community asset transfer was challenging but was progressing;
- culture facilities across the city, such as the RAMM and the Phoenix were reaching wider audiences;

- students were welcome in the city and they should feel welcomed;
- the housing development work in St Thomas was very positive;
- public realm improvements were vital;
- the City Centre Strategy included improving climate resilience;
- planting more trees would become easier under the new Unitary Authority;
- the amendments couldn't be accepted with a specific amount of money, as it was included as part of the City Centre Strategy;
- the Community Safety Team were not a massive team but were doing incredible work; and
- the Leader would be looking at the existing Community Asset Transfer policy.

During debate, Members' made the following comments opposing the budget:

- community balance had been taken away in the local plan;
- the co-living policy was inadequate;
- residents wanted actual help;
- in 2003, Exeter was a debt free authority, in 26/27 it would be £4.3million in debt;
- it was really important to have nature-based solutions for climate change and these could have been done locally with small amounts of budget; and
- the Green Group amendment did not have figures because it was advised against.

Councillor Rees raised a Point of Order under Standing Order 10(15) and was advised by the Lord Mayor that this was only applicable for clarification on something they themselves had said.

In summing up, the Leader made the following points:

- he would write to the Leader of Devon County Council and would like to meet with him and the Leaders of the other parties;
- the Portfolio Holders had demonstrated their understanding of the portfolios and what they intended to do;
- the car parking did not go up as it had increased the previous year;
- decent public transport was necessary for getting around the city, and it was not possible to tell people to leave their cars at home until that was sorted;
- the leisure service had been brought back in house;
- he was not against asset transfer;
- he wanted transparency, not bureaucracy;
- local councillors needed to get involved with community builders;
- he was open to ideas on how to speed up the retrofit; and
- he did understand the concerns surrounding Citizens Advice, and he would circulate the letter from the Chief Executive.

In accordance with Standing Order 30, a named vote on the resolution including the additional wording proposed by the Leader, was recorded, as follows:

Voting for:

Councillors Asvachin, Begley, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Foale, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Hussain, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, Parkhouse, Patrick, Payne, Read, Rolstone, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Williams R, Wood, Wright, and The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor Councillor Jobson. (25 Members).

Voting against:

Councillors Banyard, Bennett, Mitchell M, Moore, Palmer, and Wetenhall. (6 Members).

Abstaining:
Councillors Fullam and Rees. (2 Members).

The Resolution was CARRIED:

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the following, as submitted, be approved:
 - (a) the Revenue estimates for 2026-2027;
 - (b) the Capital programme for 2026-2027;
 - (c) the Fees & Charges for 2026-2027;
 - (d) the Treasury Management Strategy for 2026-2027;
 - (e) the Prudential indicators for 2026-2027 (incorporating the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement); and
 - (f) the Capital Strategy for 2026-2027
- 2) that it be noted that, at the meeting of the Executive on the 16 December 2025, the Council calculated the figure of 40,186, as its council tax base for the year 2026-2027 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 2026-2027 in accordance with Sections 31A of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992:-
 - (a) £127,722,990 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) £120,035,006 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) £7,687,984 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) £191.31 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
£127.54	£148.80	£170.05	£191.31
E	F	G	H
£233.82	£276.34	£318.85	£382.62

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 2026-2027, 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
£1,260.78	£1,470.91	£1,681.04	£1,891.17
E	F	G	H
£2,311.43	£2,731.69	£3,151.95	£3,782.34

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall

A	B	C	D
£202.13	£235.83	£269.51	£303.20
E	F	G	H
£370.58	£437.96	£505.33	£606.40

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority

A	B	C	D
£73.12	£85.31	£97.49	£109.68
E	F	G	H
£134.05	£158.43	£182.80	£219.36

- 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 2026-2027 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

Valuation Bands

A	B	C	D
£1,663.57	£1,940.84	£2,218.09	£2,495.36
E	F	G	H
£3,049.88	£3,604.42	£4,158.93	£4,990.72

That the following, as submitted, be approved:

- (a) the Revenue estimates for 2026-2027 with an additional budget added of £130,000 for tidying, cleaning and improving the public realm, to be funded from the General Fund Working Balance.

The Leader moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Wright, and invited the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources to introduce the report.

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

- the term of the current Independent Persons would end on the 26 February;
- this report sought to approve the appointment of two new Independent Persons; and
- they were required by law to give a view in the event of investigations into Members Code of Conduct complaints.

Following a unanimous vote the recommendations were **CARRIED**.

(The meeting commenced at 6.02 pm and closed at 9.00 pm)

Chair

Lord Mayor

The balanced budget we present tonight has been achieved through good financial management and a focus on priorities, service efficiencies and sustainable income streams.

In setting this budget, we continue to rise to the challenge of maintaining those statutory services we are obliged to deliver, and those discretionary services that we choose to deliver here in Exeter.

As usual, 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.

After years of tough and difficult decisions, we are in an enviable position of not having to cut frontline services for the next two years – the remaining life of this council.

This year's budget is of course set against a backdrop of major change.

Over the last year we have built a powerful case for a new unitary authority which includes the city of Exeter at its heart.

Our case was developed after extensive consultation and with cross-party support, and I thank all councillors for their collaboration on this.

Our proposal, and those from other authorities in Devon, is currently out to public consultation, and I would urge people to have their say by taking part in the online consultation.

Local Government Reorganisation provides a fantastic opportunity for Exeter to continue to thrive in the future, just as it has in the past.

The Centre for Cities named Exeter as the fastest growing city in the UK, with significant housing and investment plans for the region.

According to Centre for Cities, Exeter's population grew by more than 15 per cent between 2014-2024 – the highest of any city in the country.

The city is also in the top 10 for:

- Numbers of pupils with GCSEs Maths and English grades 9-4.

- The recent increase in the city's housing stock

Lord Mayor

At the end of last year, the Minister wrote to me to ask whether postponing this coming May's election would assist in the efficient delivery of local government reorganisation.

Having listened to a lengthy and passionate debate at Council I concluded that a postponement would assist that process.

Having recently seen the huge number of workstreams planned and the massive task of preparing for a new unitary council - whatever that looks like – the points I made to the minister in my opinion remain valid.

But the Minister has said that on reflection the elections should be held in May.

And given the number of representations we had - and how divisive this issue became - I think the decision is no bad thing.

We have been pledged extra resources from the Government to prepare for local government reorganisation and that addresses concerns around the capacity to deliver, and I await this support.

I am glad this has brought a resolution to the situation, and everyone will get the chance to have their say in May, and I hope we can all now focus on the issues that impact on our residents.

Lord Mayor

It is very important not to lose focus on the work to build a new unitary council for Exeter and the surrounding area - that remains the big goal that we all want to see.

We have a great team of officers in Electoral Services, led by the Chief Executive, who will work extremely hard to facilitate the elections, as they always do - I have no doubt they will deliver.

We will be ready, and we will be defending our record of achievement in Exeter.

Over the last year we have continued to deliver excellent services for the residents of our city.

If I may Lord Mayor, I want to briefly highlight some of our achievements before coming on to the details of the budget.

Our Community Safety Team was recently made permanent and expanded to cover the rest of the city, including parks, neighbourhood shopping areas and cemeteries, with new posts created to improve our visibility in the city.

This will help to further drive down anti-social behaviour.

I say further drive down, because comparing 2024 to 2025, the figures show anti-social behaviour reduced by 21.9%.

All recorded crime in the city centre reduced by 11.6% over the same period.

A lot of investment has gone into improving our CCTV coverage – with 311 high-definition cameras across the city centre now linked to our Control Room.

This deters crime and assists the police in finding perpetrators when crime does take place.

Additional CCTV cameras are planned in the next financial year.

A new Safety Charter for the city centre is being developed and will be launched this spring to support city centre community safety.

Exeter City Centre was recently given a Purple Flag Award - a mark of excellence for a safe, well-managed and vibrant evening economy.

Led by InExeter, this award recognised the work that has taken place to make Exeter a safe and welcoming place for all. I would like to thank all those organisations that work to support this.

The Safety of Women and Girls at Night Charter is currently being reviewed and will be relaunched in the summer.

A new City Centre Strategy has been developed and will go out to consultation in the summer.

The results of the 2025 Residents' Survey played an important role in the development of the strategy.

It focuses on the appearance of the city centre, safety and accessibility, developing a vibrant economy, building new homes and how people travel to get there.

The strategy is owned and led by the city council and will be delivered in partnership with businesses and partners.

Lord Mayor

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

The Benefits and Welfare Team have helped distribute funding to low-income households as part of the Household Support Scheme during 2025/2026.

£526,300 has been awarded to 4,848 households during this latest scheme.

It provided:

2,673 awards - totalling £267,300 - to low-income pensioner households in autumn 2025, as energy bills began to rise.

2,175 awards - totalling £259,000 - to low-income working age households struggling with ongoing high cost of living.

We continue to support community groups directly through our grants programme.

We continue to support Citizens Advice Exeter, and while we cannot provide a transitional grant for 2026/2027, we remain committed to ensuring that residents have access to effective, high-quality advice and support.

We hope the continuation of the peppercorn rent and forthcoming commissioning opportunities under the national Crisis Resilience Fund will assist the organisation in planning for the future.

Lord Mayor

Housing remains one of our key strategic priorities.

The Exeter Plan – our new Local Plan - has been submitted and is now progressing to examination hearings.

This is a major milestone that will guide sustainable housing, regeneration, climate action and infrastructure planning for the next 20 years.

The second development phase of the council's housing development at Vaughan Road is set to commence shortly - 16 new apartments which will be constructed by June 2027.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting the first tenants to move into the council's 35 new Passivhaus apartments at Vaughan Road.

This development is fantastic and is changing people's lives.

You don't have to take my word for it.

Here's what resident Tom Hannaford, a former tenant of Rennes House, said after moving in with Christine, his wife of 60 years.

"We were the first ones in, and our new home is really lovely. We are so happy. There's no way you're going to get better than this – we love it."

Lord Mayor

Work is starting in St Thomas where seven more non-traditionally built council properties are being demolished and replaced with new family homes.

Our programme of retrofitting council properties to cut bills for residents as well as reducing carbon emissions continues.

Last year 152 council properties were retrofitted, bringing the total in the city to 1,250.

We are working with partners to create 100 much-needed new social housing units on land off Pendragon Road.

Exeter remains a vibrant and fast-growing city.

Our city development team determined 1,350 planning and related applications, and 52 enforcement cases were closed during 2025.

182 affordable homes were secured through Section 106 agreements, supporting the delivery of much-needed housing across the city.

Major progress has been made at Water Lane, where approvals for up to 980 homes, student accommodation and commercial space will help create a new community on a brownfield site.

Regeneration is taking place along the Heavitree Road corridor, with schemes delivering more than 800 student and co-living units bringing new investment and activity to an important route into the city and supporting local services.

Delivery is continuing at Exmouth Junction, including 100% affordable homes in Phase 2, with the scheme set to provide around 540 new homes in total.

When it comes to HMOs, Executive will look at the current regulations around licensing and consider proposals for what changes may be possible, and to ensure that this service breaks even.

Lord Mayor

Exeter has continued its steady reduction towards net zero, with total city-wide greenhouse gas emissions in Exeter for 2023 - the year with most recent data available - reducing by an estimated 8% compared to the previous year.

Through working in partnership with Sport England, we are soon to begin delivery of the Newtown community scheme.

Works will begin in March to improve cycling and walking infrastructure in the Triangle Car Park and onwards through the neighbourhood, past Belmont Park and Clifton Hill.

There has been significant local community engagement and partnership working with a large number of stakeholders to bring this active travel scheme forward.

An action plan that focuses on adaptation and resilience will provide Exeter City Council, and the new unitary authority that replaces it, with a document on how to adapt to the impact of climate on our services, residents and business community.

This will include incidents such as flooding, extreme heat, food resilience, land and water, and infrastructure.

At present, the City Council has limited resources to focus on existing city-wide net zero activity.

If we focus on adaptation as well, it will require a change of focus. Shifting focus to adaptation, would require significant investment, which only the new authority could make.

Lord Mayor

The renewal of the historic Royal Clarence is underway, with new homes and commercial space helping to secure a long-term future for this landmark site.

Permission has been granted for the new Wonford Community and Learning Centre, supporting improved community, learning and wellbeing facilities for residents.

As well as investing in the future we also invest in the past.

Work on repairing the City Wall at City Gate was recently completed at a cost of around £480,000, demonstrating our commitment to protecting the historic fabric of our city.

Turning to our Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy - which was agreed in 2022 - I have been approached with suggestions and that there are concerns over inconsistent handling of requests, and transparency around asset disposal.

There are areas that can be reviewed and issues that can be resolved under the current policy, many of which would not require formal policy change, but may require resources and time investment from officers.

Therefore, I have asked the Chief Executive to examine the policy and bring forward improvements to a future Executive.

Lord Mayor

We continue to invest in maintaining and improving our car parks in the city.

Work is planned to refurbish the Cathedral & Quay car park enabling all five decks to be utilised.

The Guildhall car park will also be refurbished to provide a better experience for users.

Lord Mayor

I'm also very happy to report that there are no increases in car parking charges planned in the next financial year.

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

Last year we hosted seven games of the highly successful Women's Rugby World Cup in Exeter.

It was a brilliant showcase for the city - and leaves a legacy of participation in sport, particularly among women and girls.

New figures released this week show that directly boosted the economy in Exeter by more than £30 million.

I want to thank all those involved in delivering it.

Our Leisure Service goes from strength to strength.

There are 13,646 active Exeter Leisure members – a 16 per cent increase on last year.

Last year there were 64,429 casual users – a 20 per cent increase on the previous year.

Over the past year we welcomed more than 95,000 group exercise participants and more than 800,000 swimmers.

Our dedicated Exeter Leisure staff taught more than 2,000 children to swim at St Sidwell's Point and Riverside last year.

Our GP Referral Scheme has delivered more than 1,600 sessions to some of our most vulnerable residents in Exeter and surrounding areas.

Lord Mayor

We recently submitted a bid for Exeter to become UK City of Culture 2029.

The bid emerged from the months of consultation work carried out with the sector in the city to develop the city's new Cultural Strategy.

Exeter continues to be a UNESCO City of Literature and has five National Portfolio Organisations supported.

Cultural facilities in the city – including the council’s own Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Corn Exchange – continue to thrive.

Our annual Residents’ Survey recently revealed that 86 per cent of residents had participated in Exeter’s cultural scene over the past 12 months.

Talking of our annual Residents’ Survey, figures for 2025 show more than 80 per cent said they were satisfied with their local area as a place to live.

Other key findings include:

50 per cent are satisfied with how the council runs things – the same as last year

40 per cent agree the council provides value for money – up on the previous year and above the national average

52 per cent think the Council keeps them well-informed – up on the previous last year and above the national average

60 per cent trust the council a great deal or fair amount – up on the previous year and well above the national average

Satisfaction levels with council services were similar to the previous year – with sport and leisure services, parks and green spaces, social housing landlord services, homeless prevention and museums and visitor attractions all showing an increase.

Top reasons why Exeter is special were:

- Independent outlets
- The Quay
- History and heritage
- Green spaces and parks

Our dedicated council staff put a lot of effort into making sure the city always looks its best and it is very satisfying to know this is appreciated by our residents.

In 2025 a total of 6,700 residents took part in council consultations - something we are very proud of.

Lord Mayor

Our operations team had another busy year.

99.9% of waste was collected successfully.

Food waste collections were rolled out to around 44,000 homes, with the remaining properties expected to be completed shortly.

629 cases of graffiti were cleaned up.

799 trees were planted.

877 noise complaints were investigated.

Our parks and green spaces continue to be maintained to a very high standard.

Our rolling programme of improvements to play areas in the city continues, and some major improvements took place last year, including at Exwick Station Road.

We continue to invest in Exeter's popular water play facilities - the much-loved paddling pools at Heavitree Pleasure Ground and the St Thomas Splash Pad.

The Heavitree Pool redevelopment is expected to start this year and will create major improvements at this popular site.

Collaboration with our partners is leading to major improvements in community sports facilities across the city.

This includes Exeter's College's work at Flowerpots and Exeter City Community Trust's plans for major improvements at King George V.

Lord Mayor - we continue to invest in the future.

Council recently approved ambitious plans to purchase a new Materials Reclamation Facility and relocate key operational services.

The aim is to drive regeneration, improve frontline services and secure long-term financial and environmental benefits.

The creation of a modern waste and operations hub at Exton Road will be a major boost to the city's recycling operation.

Our planned office relocation to Senate Court – modern offices which the Council already owns - is a major investment in the city centre.

It will also enable the CityPoint redevelopment – a 1,000 unit residential-led mixed use scheme on council-owned land covering the Civic Centre and former bus station sites.

Thank you, Lord Mayor, for allowing me to highlight some of the things we do so well here in Exeter, and I now come on to the details of the budget itself.

For the first time in a decade, the Government have provided Councils with a multi-year settlement, providing stability and certainty over the funding available for the next three years.

This year we will receive the same amount of funding as we did in 2025-26.

Despite everything we do as a local authority, Exeter continues to set one of the lowest Council Tax rates in the country.

The proposed band D council tax for 2026/27 is £191.31 which means that our share of the council tax will increase by 2.99 per cent or £5.55 a year – around 11p 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: £2,495.36 per Band D property, an overall increase of £109.91 or 5.01%.

The breakdown of this charge is:

Devon County Council - £1,891.17

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner - £303.20

Exeter City Council - £191.31

Devon and Somerset Fire Authority - £109.68

This equals a total of £2,495.36, of which the Exeter City Council share is 7.6% of that bill.

I'll repeat, our share of the Council Tax is increasing by around 11p 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.

As I stated at the beginning, after years of tough and difficult decisions, we are in an enviable position of not having to cut services for the remaining life of this council.

Lord Mayor, I covered a lot of things tonight, but that's not all.

A new temporary fund will be created to enable residents and community groups in Exeter to improve their neighbourhoods.

The council is putting £130,000 into Pride in Exeter – the equivalent of £10,000 for every ward in the city – to be spent on tidying, cleaning and improving neighbourhoods.

Exeter is already a clean and tidy city, but with more resources there's always more than can be done, where local communities request it.

Residents and community groups will be encouraged to apply for things like fixing broken fences, clearing overgrown spaces, removing excessive weeds and general small repairs and tidying.

The work will be carried out by our dedicated teams at the council, in conjunction with community groups where appropriate.

The process will be similar to applying for ward grants and we will work with all ward councillors, community builders and groups on this.

This extra resource is in addition to all the usual cleansing operations the council carries out – it is extra resource for non-essential but important work that improves the quality of life for residents in our communities.

It is about having pride in our city, to ensure that Exeter continues to look the best it can be.

I believe I have addressed many of issues previously raised by the parties opposite and hope we can now work together to take the city forward.

Lord Mayor

An Additional Recommendation:

On 27 January 2026 the Licensing Committee

RESOLVED unanimously that the Licensing Committee recommends the following:

That Council approves for the period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027 that the fees shall be set as specified in Appendix B.

Minutes of the above meeting have been published and will be received by Council on 3 March, but these fees can be found on pages 228-230 of the agenda pack and form part of the budget before you today.

Lord Mayor

The following amendment to the resolution is made:

That the following, as submitted, be approved:

(a) the Revenue estimates for 2026-2027 with an additional budget added of £130,000 for tidying, cleaning and improving the public realm, to be funded from the General Fund Working Balance;

Lord Mayor

We will be able to demonstrate to a new unitary authority the legacy of a well-run council, with serious, sensible and well-argued projects backed up with strong business cases, like the bus station redevelopment, MRF expansion and new Wonford community hub.

We said we would:

- Support residents through the cost of living
- Lead on climate action
- Build more council homes
- Protect green spaces
- Invest in culture and leisure
- Run a stable, well led council

This budget addresses these points and over two consecutive years, we have delivered on those commitments.

Our legacy will be handing over this authority in a sound way.

Under our leadership Exeter has thrived in the past, and I know that it will continue to thrive in the future.

Lord Mayor, I move!