



A meeting of **EXETER CITY COUNCIL** will be held at the **GUILDHALL, HIGH STREET, EXETER** on **TUESDAY 7 APRIL 2026**, 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 the Democratic Services Manager - democratic.services@exeter.gov.uk

The following business is proposed to be transacted:

Agenda

1 Minutes

To approve and sign the minutes of the ordinary meetings held on 25 February 2026 and 3 March 2026. (Pages 3 - 58)

To approve and sign the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 10 February 2026.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillors are reminded of the need to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests that relate to business on the agenda and which have not already been included in the register of interests, before any discussion takes place on the item. Unless the interest is sensitive, you must also disclose the nature of the interest. In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, you must then leave the room and must not participate in any further discussion of the item. Councillors requiring clarification should seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer prior to the day of the meeting.

3 Local Government Act 1972 - Exclusion of the Press and Public

It is considered that the Council would be unlikely to exclude the press and public during consideration of any of the items on the agenda, but if it should wish to do so, the following resolution should be passed:

RECOMMENDED that, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the particular item(s) on the grounds that it (they) involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Act.

4 **Official Communications**

To receive official communications of the Lord Mayor.

5 **Public Questions**

To receive questions relating to items on the agenda from members of the public and responses.

Details of questions should be notified to Democratic Services by 10am at least three working days prior to the meeting which for this meeting will be Tuesday 31 March 2026.

Further information about speaking at a committee can be found here: [Public Speaking at Meetings](#).

TO RECEIVE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING COMMITTEES AND TO DETERMINE THEREON:

- | | | |
|----|---|------------------|
| 6 | Minutes of Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee - 5 February 2026 | (Pages 59 - 64) |
| 7 | Minutes of Planning Committee - 9 February 2026 | (Pages 65 - 82) |
| 8 | Minutes of Audit and Governance Committee - 11 February 2026 | (Pages 83 - 86) |
| 9 | Minutes of Licensing Committee - 26 February 2026 | (Pages 87 - 90) |
| 10 | Minutes of Strategic Scrutiny Committee - 12 March 2026 | (Pages 91 - 94) |
| 11 | Minutes of Executive Committee - 17 March 2026 | (Pages 95 - 106) |

REPORTS TO COUNCIL

12 **St Nicholas Priory**

To receive the report of the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources. (Pages 107 - 110)

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

13 **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

Date: 26 March 2026

Bindu Arjoon
Chief Executive

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, Rolstone, 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, Communications Officer and Democratic Services Officer.

133

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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

134

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

135

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 Appendix 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 and this was no longer the case;
- 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!

COUNCIL

Tuesday 3 March 2026

Present:

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor Councillor Anne Jobson (Chair)
Councillor Gemma Rolstone (Deputy Lord Mayor)
Councillors Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Begley, Bennett, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Foale, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Hussain, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Parkhouse, Patrick, Payne, Pole, Read, Rees, Sheridan, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Williams, M, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

Apologies:

Councillors Hughes, Palmer and Wetenhall

Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director for People and Communities, Head of Service - Commercial Assets, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

141

MINUTES

The minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 13 January 2026 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as a correct record.

142

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

143

OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Lord Mayor advised Members of the events she had attended, which included:

- attended the Exeter College Awards, celebrating the achievements of young people, and visited the Exeter College Technology Centre to see cutting-edge apprenticeship work;
- joined the opening of Tops Nursery, meeting staff and pupils;
- attended Clyst Vale Community College's production of 'Beauty and the Beast' at the Barnfield Theatre;
- attended the Exeter University Theatre Company's production of 'And Then There Were None' at the Northcott Theatre;
- supported the IJW Dance Show at the Cygnet Theatre and the Mayura Dance Awards at America Hall;
- attended performances by the Band of the Royal Marines at the Northcott Theatre and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra at the University Great Hall;
- celebrated the 75th Anniversary of Exeter Writers at the Custom House and attended the Exeter History Book Festival at the Mint;
- spoke at the Southernhay and Topsham Rotary Club breakfast meeting;
- attended the AGM of Exeter Twinning Circle and heard about plans in Rennes to mark the 70th anniversary of the twinning between the two cities;
- met with crafters and members of the Hong Kong community at Spring Festivals hosted at the Phoenix and the University Forum, celebrating the Year of the Horse;

- attended Evensong for the Northern European Cathedrals conference;
- marked the appointment of Canon Chris Palmer as Dean of Winchester Cathedral, with thanks given on behalf of the city;
- commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day at services held in the Cathedral and the Guildhall;
- marked four years of war in Ukraine with a vigil and an evening of Commemoration & Culture at St Stephen's Church; and
- attended the wreath-laying ceremony and service at the Cathedral to commemorate HMS Exeter.

The Lord Mayor invited the Leader to speak to make a special announcement.

The Leader expressed appreciation for the Chief Executive's 20 years of dedicated service to the Council.

The Leader described the Chief Executive, Bindu Arjoon, as a respected leader who demonstrated integrity, intellectual rigor, genuine warmth and approachability with a strong sense of public service. It was noted that she joined the Council in 2006, providing two decades of senior strategic leadership and was appointed Deputy Chief Executive in 2021, leading corporate transformation during a period of significant financial and operational challenge, and became the Council's first female Chief Executive in 2023.

Members were advised that she had led on a wide range of major service areas, which included: housing, homelessness, planning, business transformation, ICT, HR, corporate strategy, community safety and strategic partnerships. Her work had strengthened the Council's financial resilience and governance arrangements, while overseeing significant regeneration programmes supporting housing, economic development and environmental sustainability.

The Chief Executive had been recognised for her steady leadership through the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living pressures, championing inclusive growth and community wellbeing, and maintaining a strong focus on residents and frontline services. It was noted that she has represented the city regionally and nationally through Local Government Association peer work, contributing to improvement across the wider sector.

In addition to her Executive duties, she had demonstrated a strong commitment to education, serving as Chair of Governors at St Thomas Primary School and St Peter's School, and as Chair of the Corporation of Exeter College. She was also recognised as a mentor and champion for colleagues, supporting the development of future leaders.

The Leader described her as a leader of integrity, humility and loyalty, who exemplified modern civic leadership through a thoughtful, inclusive and determined approach.

The Lord Mayor was invited to present the Chief Executive with her long service award on behalf of the Council, and congratulations were formally recorded.

The Chief Executive thanked the Leader for his kind words and reflected on her 20 years of service to the city, describing it as a great privilege. She recalled first arriving in the city with her young son and noted that it had since become her home, where she has felt welcomed and supported. She expressed her appreciation to colleagues, elected Members and partner organisations for their support and friendship over the years.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Lord Mayor advised that two questions from Members of the public had been received.

Question from Mrs Jane Smith:

Post meeting (1/12/2025) a planning officer admitted she had not read the 36 objections but would “have a look”. Vital information was ignored, a significant impact on the outcome. No mention of environment impact (normally included), in spite of e-mail to environment enforcement officer in September. How was vital information ignored and how could residents ensure their concerns were properly heard and considered within the planning process?

The Portfolio Holder for City Development acknowledged the resident’s concerns and apologised that she felt her views had not been heard. However, it was confirmed that all 36 objections submitted in relation to the application were read, assessed and analysed by the planning team prior to the committee meeting, and were considered by Members as part of the published committee report.

It was clarified that no officer had stated that objections had not been read. It was further advised that environmental and ecological matters were fully addressed within the committee report, including impact assessments, habitat and species considerations, biodiversity net gain requirements and associated management plans.

With regard to the reported site works, it was confirmed that this matter was being dealt with separately through the Council’s enforcement process and remained under investigation. Officers were satisfied that the issues raised did not alter the recommendation or the Planning Committee’s decision, which was taken with reference to the full report and all relevant information. She invited Mrs Smith to make further contact for updates if required.

In a supplementary question Mrs Smith acknowledged the response but maintained concerns regarding the accuracy of the developer’s environmental surveys. She stated that she held filmed evidence of wildlife activity within the hedgerows and field which, in her view, contradicted the submitted environmental assessments, and indicated she was willing to share this information.

The Portfolio Holder for City Development responded that she would be happy to receive and review the additional evidence. They expressed confidence that the planning team had presented all relevant information to the Committee but acknowledged the resident’s concerns regarding a lack of response to previous communications and invited her to forward the information directly.

Question from Mr Kris Christmann:

Why has Exeter City Council (as the principal duty holder for Rougemont Gardens, a Grade II listed historic park) tolerated long-term homeless encampments with tents, open defecation, and associated graffiti damage to the city walls for months—despite available powers under park byelaws, civil remedies, and (previously) Section 4 of the Vagrancy Act 1824—rather than enforcing removal and restoration, or has the park been redesignated as a campsite?

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services responded that the City Council's housing team regularly visited encampments across the city to offer support and assist individuals into suitable housing. Where antisocial behaviour occurred, notices to leave were issued under the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014; however, such notices must be served to an individual, which can be challenging in some cases.

The encampment at Rougemont Gardens had now been cleared, with rubbish and tents removed, and any remaining damage being addressed by the relevant services.

In February 2026, the Council's Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee received a report and presentation on homelessness. The housing team was working towards ending homelessness in the city, with a focus on prevention, particularly for care leavers and single homeless individuals. The Council aimed to develop a proactive, integrated, and trauma-informed homelessness and housing needs service to support those in need.

Kris Christmann commented that while it was positive that the encampment had now been removed, the process had taken around six months and expressed concern about the length of time taken. They noted this was not viewed as an issue of homelessness, as the individuals were voluntarily homeless, and emphasised the need for more timely action by the Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services acknowledged the concerns, apologised for the delays, and provided assurance that the Council addressed such issues as quickly as possible, while recognising the frustration caused by the time it can take.

145 **AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 27 NOVEMBER 2025**

The Minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee of 27 November 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Wardle, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 27 November 2025 were received.

146 **CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY - 13 NOVEMBER 2025**

The Minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 13 November 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Rees, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 13 November 2025 were received.

147 **CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY - 22 JANUARY 2026**

The Minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 22 January 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Rees, and taken as read.

Councillor Banyard asked which cultural organisations, partners, or individuals were consulted or involved in preparing the City of Culture expression of interest, and whether the expression of interest would be shared with the Council.

Councillor Rees as Chair of Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee expressed enthusiasm for the City of Culture proposals and stated that the Portfolio Holder

would be consulted and information regarding which organisations and individuals were involved would be provided.

Councillor Read asked whether it was appropriate that no cultural stakeholders were involved in drafting the City of Culture expression of interest and whether the Council considered this as a suitable approach.

Councillor Rees responded she would consult with the Portfolio Holder and a full response would be provided and made available to all Members.

The Lord Mayor following discussion, advised Members that questions during Council meetings were formally addressed to the chair of the relevant committee. If further detail was needed, the chair may consult with others and any additional responses will be attached to the minutes. The Lord Mayor further emphasised that detailed questioning of Portfolio Holders was normally conducted at scrutiny committee meetings.

The Lord Mayor also confirmed that any Councillor may speak at a committee meeting on any agenda item regardless of committee membership.

(A copy of the questions and responses are appended to the Minutes).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 22 January 2026 were received.

148

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15 JANUARY 2026

The Minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 15 January 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Pole, and taken as read.

Councillor Moore asked for an expected timeline for the introduction of the negotiated stopping policy.

Councillor Pole as the Chair of Strategic Scrutiny Committee advised that the negotiated stopping policy had been referred to the Executive, and an update was pending. She would continue to monitor progress and provide an update when available.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee held on 15 January 2026 were received.

149

LICENSING COMMITTEE - 27 JANUARY 2026

The Lord Mayor advised Members that the recommendation for the Licensing Fees and Charges in Minute No. 11 were taken as part of the budget setting meeting held on 25 February 2026 and was voted on accordingly.

Councillor Moore asked about antisocial behaviour, noting that while the committee minutes explained why no changes could be made, she wished to understand how the Council's wider objectives and licensing objectives could be considered. She requested that the chair ensure the scrutiny committee's intentions were followed through, particularly in relation to access to alcohol in the city centre and its impact on antisocial behaviour.

Councillor Snow as Chair of Licensing Committee, responded that the minutes (Minute No. 10) clearly outlined the position under the Licensing Act 2003, which did

not allow blanket restrictions on licensed activities. Each application must be considered on its individual merits, though cumulative impact areas in parts of the city centre required applicants to demonstrate how they would maintain an orderly operation.

He offered to take any specific points back to the licensing officers for further consideration and confirmed that the actions the Council could take to address antisocial behaviour were clearly set out in the minutes and further information could be provided if requested.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Licensing Committee held on 27 January 2026 were received.

150 **PLANNING COMMITTEE - 19 JANUARY 2026**

The Minutes of the Planning Committee of 19 January 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Planning Committee held on 19 January 2026 were received.

151 **STRATA - JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 28 JANUARY 2026**

The minutes of the Strata – Joint Executive of 28 January 2026 were presented by the Leader and taken as read.

The Leader advised that a report relevant to this item was not attached to the minutes. It was therefore agreed that the item would be deferred for consideration at the March meeting.

RESOLVED that the matter be deferred to the meeting on 24 March 2026.

152 **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 3 FEBRUARY 2026**

The Lord Mayor advised the recommendations for the following minutes were considered at and voted at the meeting Council budget setting meeting held on 25 February 2026 and would therefore not be debated or voted upon:

- Minute No. 103 General Fund / HRA Estimates and Capital Programme 2026/27;
- Minute No. 104 HRA Estimates and Capital Programme 2026/27;
- Minute No. 105 Capital Strategy 2026-27;
- Minute No. 106 Treasury Management Strategy Report 2026/27.
- Minute No. 107 The Prudential Code for Capital Finance.

The minutes of the Executive Committee of 3 February 2026 were presented by the Leader, Councillor Bialyk, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 102 - Exeter Plan: Process for Authorising Proposed Changes Resulting from the examination**, the Leader moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Wright. Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 108 - Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2026/27**

the Leader moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Wright. Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 109 – Consultation and Engagement Strategy** the Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright. During the debate, the following points were made:

- the strategy was welcomed as a positive step in strengthening relationships between the Council and the community;
- there was an importance in establishing clear mechanisms to report back to communities following consultations and asked how this would be implemented;
- further information on community insights was sought and how these would be shared with Councillors and local communities;
- there was a need to move beyond small grants and ad hoc networking towards genuine investment in building community capacity;
- supporting social enterprise organisations as long-term partners was suggested;
- clarification was sought on how the proposed civic society covenant would operate as a meaningful framework for engagement with the community sector;
- welcomed the concept of citizen assemblies as a space for deliberative discussion;
- stressed the importance of two-way dialogue and active listening to improve communication and collaboration with communities;
- expressed overall support for the strategy and interest in a future iteration being focused on consultation, engagement, and cooperation;
- the portfolio holder's commitment to exploring citizen assemblies was welcomed;
- such initiatives should not be deferred until the new unitary authority was established, which may be more than two years away; and
- similar arrangements could be implemented sooner, potentially with the shadow authority.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities in responding made the following points:

- many of the points raised were already under discussion;
- referred to the recent Member briefing on the strategy, which addressed several of these points;
- expressed personal support in principle for citizen assemblies and confirmed discussions with officers would explore capacity and practical implementation;
- noted that governance considerations may arise in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the future unitary authority;
- confirmed that a civic society covenant was being considered in early discussions with the Strategic Director and service portfolio;
- advised that further work was still required to determine the covenant's scope and application; and
- welcomed the feedback and highlighted the topic as an area of ongoing interest.

The Leader in summarising advised:

- noted that citizens assemblies were an interesting concept but were not currently included in the strategy under discussion;

- emphasised that elected Councillors retained ultimate decision-making responsibility;
- highlighted the importance of consultation and engagement, allowing residents to provide input while Councillors made the final decisions;
- clarified that no commitment was being made to implement citizens assemblies at this stage, given the upcoming unitary authority and other governance priorities; and
- stressed that focus should remain on current priorities and expressed his support for the recommendation as presented.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 110 – Amendment to Grants Panel Terms of Reference – Ukrainian Community Grants** the Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright. During the debate, the following points were made:

- there was strong support for Exeter being a ‘City of Sanctuary’ and commended the Council for establishing this status;
- highlighted the severe conditions currently being experienced in Ukraine, including prolonged electricity outages and limited access to clean water;
- emphasised the importance of continuing to provide sanctuary and support to Ukrainians in Exeter until it was safe for them to return home;
- welcomed the proposal for funding to be overseen through the Council’s Grants Panel to ensure proper scrutiny and governance;
- highlighted that funding was external, meaning it would not impact the Council’s own finances;
- highlighted the importance of supporting Ukrainian residents; and
- welcomed establishing a clear framework for managing and awarding funding through the existing Grants Panel and urged members to support the proposal.

The Leader in summarising made the following points:

- highlighted the seriousness of the ongoing situation in Ukraine and the need for a transparent approach in providing support;
- referenced personal communications reflecting the difficult conditions being faced by people in Ukraine;
- Ukrainian residents were valued members of the Exeter community; and
- commended how different communities in Exeter had worked together to welcome Ukrainian residents.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 111 – Temporary Accommodation Allocations Policy** the Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright. During the debate, the following points were made:

- referred to a previously submitted question and requested clarification on a legal matter regarding housing allocations for people fleeing domestic violence, noting current regulations may restrict a placement in private accommodation;
- highlighted the potential need to prioritise this group differently within the policy; and

- sought guidance on how to proceed if the policy was agreed but later required adjustment to include this special criteria.

The Leader in responding:

- apologised for any delay in response and confirmed that directors would provide a formal reply;
- noted that the issue was addressed in supporting operating procedures and proposed clarifying these procedures and circulating them to all members; and
- he provided reassurance that the Council's approach aimed to include everyone appropriately and to do the right thing.

The Lord Mayor emphasised that policies could be amended if needed, through the proper Council processes.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Executive Committee 4 November 2025 be received.

153

ANNUAL PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2026/27

The Leader moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Wright, and invited the Strategic Director People and Community to introduce the report

The Strategic Director People and Community in presenting the report made the following points:

- the Annual Pay Policy Statement was a statutory requirement under the Localism Act 2011, in which the full Council must approve and publish it annually before the start of the new financial year;
- the statement ensured there was full transparency, accountability, and public assurance regarding employee pay;
- it included details on: Chief Executive pay, definitions of lowest paid employees, pay multipliers and pay governance framework;
- benchmarking showed that Exeter had a favourable pay ratio between its lowest paid employees (Grade B) and the Chief Executive, performing better than other regional authorities with the lowest ratio; and
- the recommendation was for Council to approve the Pay Policy Statement and enable its publication.

In summing up the Leader advised Members that the Council adopted the real 'Living Wage' as the minimum spinal column point from 1 January 2014 which had served the Council well and was continuing to work effectively. He expressed hope that all parties representing working-class constituents shared this view and expressed his support for the recommendations.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED.

154

OVERVIEW OF THE GENERAL FUND BUDGET QUARTER 3

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 in presenting the report made the following points:

- the report highlighted there were continued financial challenges;
- the General Fund working balance was projected to fall below its minimum recommended level;
- with 28 days remaining in the current financial year, the final position would be assessed after year-end and officers would prepare a list of recommendations for Council to consider in June 2026 as part of the outturn reports if any actions were needed;
- the shortfall was primarily due to delays in implementing planned savings, which were part of a longer term strategy to balance the budget over multiple years; and
- there had also been some unavoidable costs exceeding the budget, but many of those had been addressed in the recently approved budget.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources responded to Members questions as follows:

- the overall budget for car park income had been between £9.5 million and £10 million of income, and was currently down by £895,000;
- the car parking fee increase was approved in February and the full-year effect was expected to significantly improve income;
- some costs had increased such as the Ringgo expansion, but other budget recommendations and a new app contract would help reduce expenses;
- car parking finances would improve and no additional income assumptions had been built into this year's budget;
- regarding final costs for Northbrook, the final closure cost was not yet available and negotiations with the trust were still ongoing;
- asset maintenance related to rental income at the Civic Centre, which would not improve by the end of the financial year; and
- a more realistic figure had been included in next year's budget, which would address the issue going forward.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED.

155

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL MONITORING QUARTER 3

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 in presenting the report made the following points:

- there were still ongoing challenges like previous quarterly reports;
- there was a limited expenditure this quarter, with many schemes being deferred to next year's capital programme;
- there were no additional capital expenditure requests included in this report;
- a Capital Programme Board was now in place, which was chaired by the Chief Executive, and was actively monitoring capital spend and the capital programme to move projects forward;
- finance would be working with Strategic Directors and project managers at year-end to reflect realistic delivery timelines;
- the capital programme spanned multiple years, so not all projects needed to be completed in the first year; and

- there was a commitment to producing a more realistic multi-year capital programme going forward.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources responded to Members questions as follows:

- the Capital Board was chaired by the Chief Executive and included the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources, Strategic Director of Operations, Head of Commercial Assets, Head of Finance, and Head of Asset Maintenance;
- additional members were invited as required and the board met every two months to review progress on capital projects;
- key projects were defined as projects of significant cost, value, and importance to the city. Examples included the MRF project approved on 10 February, which was considered to be a key project by the Board;
- the Board reviewed the full capital program, identified risks and issues, and monitored significant projects;
- Council funding for the Mallison Bridge project remained in place and allocation and expenditure would be reviewed and managed accordingly;
- current works on the Topsham Museum focussed on waterproofing and scaffold removal, which was expected to complete before year-end; and
- the budget did not cover the full long-term cost for Topsham Museum and work was ongoing regarding a long-term lease, with a report expected in the new financial year to outline options.

In summing up the Leader advised Members that the Council was actively working with the museum and maintaining regular communication with Strategic directors and heads of service. He advised that some legal issues remained unresolved, limiting progress on certain matters. He confirmed that board members and local residents were being kept informed and provided assurance that the Council was committed to a collaborative approach with the museum. He further acknowledged frustration over delays but stressed the importance of doing things correctly before moving forward.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED.

156

HRA BUDGET MONITORING REPORT Q3

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 in presenting the report advised that the HRA was performing well with no significant issues to bring to Council's attention.

Following a unanimous vote the recommendations were CARRIED.

157

CATHEDRAL & QUAY MULTI STOREY CAR PARK REFURBISHMENT

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 in presenting the report made the following points:

- the report was requesting approval for a £2.5 million capital budget to enhance and improve the Cathedral Quay multi-storey car park;
- the car park had required improvements for some time and a recent intrusive structural analysis confirmed the car park was structurally sound, contrary to earlier concerns;
- given the concerns of the structural analysis had been alleviated, the budget would be used to improve appearance, lighting, and overall user experience as well as upgrading the surrounding landscape;
- the budget would also enable the re-opening of two and half decks which had been closed for an extended period of time;
- the site had experienced ongoing antisocial behaviour issues and the proposal sought to outsource the day-to-day operation to a specialist car park managing agent to address operational and safety issues;
- the Council would retain full control of decisions and all income from the car park;
- the estimated borrowing cost would be around £158,000 per year and additional revenue was expected from re-opening of the closed decks; and
- the projected additional income was expected to offset both the borrowing costs and operator fees.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources and Head of Service for Commercial Assets responded to Members questions as follows:

- the recommendation was seeking Council approval to outsource the management of Cathedral Quay car park only and the decision would be made by Council;
- the recent structural report included an intrusive structural analysis, unlike the report from two years ago and the latest findings were considered more reliable;
- consultants had confirmed that the car park was structurally sound and met the required standards, even in the unlikely event that it was fully occupied by heavier electric vehicles;
- the refurbishment works could require the car park to be closed for six months', though this was not yet confirmed. A phased refurbishment option may allow parts of the car park to remain open, but this would be more complex;
- it was likely there would be some disruption to nearby businesses during the works but the Council would consult and engage with local traders to minimise disruption as plans developed;
- although a private operator would be managing the car park, the Council would retain full control over all operational decisions and requirements;
- the refurbishment provided an opportunity to improve the carpark layout and usability of its spaces, taking into account larger modern vehicles;
- the aim was to maximise usable spaces and create one of the city's best multi-storey car parks;
- to confirm, Members were being asked to approve a £2.5 million capital budget, with the borrowing decisions being delegated to the section 151 officer in consultation with the Council Leader, with updates reported back through normal reporting processes;
- the main measures proposed to address anti-social behaviour were - installing CCTV, re-opening and providing full usage of the car park, increasing natural surveillance and providing an outsourced operator presence, with staffing and active management on site;
- KPIs would be included in the contract to ensure proper staffing, maintenance, and a high-quality user experience;

- the operator would be appointed through a formal competitive tender process in line with procurement regulations and Council approval would enable officers to negotiate commercial terms;
- Council would be consulted again if there were any significant changes or if costs become unaffordable;
- the Council currently managed multiple surface and multi-storey car parks across the city using existing council staff;
- currently staff were capacity stretched, particularly due to the need for requiring an on-site presence at John Lewis, Guildhall, and Mary Arches, in the event of machine failures;
- by outsourcing management at the Cathedral and Quay car park, it would support existing staff capacity and act as a trial to assess effectiveness and maximize that that benefit of improving the car park;
- initially, outsourcing arrangements would be for a three to five year period, though a shorter contract was preferred. This was the first time using this approach, and having flexibility was important in case that it did not work as intended;
- the Council would retain responsibility for parking enforcement and would not be outsourced to the private operator;
- cameras could be installed on site, and enforcement would still require Council officers to check vehicles and issue Penalty Charge Notices on site;
- the existing Council enforcement team would continue to manage enforcement at the Cathedral Quay car park and would operate to the same standards and processes used across all council owned car parks;
- the debt servicing included repayment of the principal and interest and borrowing for the project would be repaid over 50 years, reflecting the expected lifespan of a building asset;
- borrowing periods typically aligned with the asset life span;
- the Council's car park service would manage the contract, with oversight from the Head of Commercial Assets, with clear KPIs being established to ensure service quality and accountability;
- performance would likely include regular monitoring with monthly records covering cleaning, security, and maintenance and formal reviews would occur annually or biannually depending on contract terms; and
- the agreement would include a termination provision, allowing the Council to end the contract if performance issues arose and persisted.

The meeting was briefly adjourned between 20:05 and 20:15.

The Leader proposed an amendment to recommendation 2, which was seconded by Councillor Knott to read as follows:

- the outsourcing of the management function of the Cathedral and Quay MSCP park on terms to be agreed shall be delegated to the Strategic Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to enable it to re-establish itself as a premier car park for the city.

The Leader in speaking to the amendment advised:

- the amendment highlighted that he had listened to concerns raised and had previously held discussions with the Head of Service regarding the proposal;
- he clarified the proposal related to outsourcing the management of the car park, rather than full privatisation;
- he clarified that external operators could bring additional capacity, expertise, and resources, while recognising there would be financial considerations;

- there were examples from other cities such as Liverpool and Manchester, where modern systems (including number plate recognition and controlled access) provided a safe, efficient, and welcoming parking experience;
- the Cathedral and Quay car park was an important asset to the area and should be improved for visitors and residents;
- the current car park condition and management could be significantly improved, particularly with safety and environment;
- the intention was not to outsource all civic car parks immediately, but to trial the approach first and assess outcomes;
- proportionate enforcement was needed to ensure drivers were not penalised for minor issues while addressing persistent misuse and antisocial behaviour;
- details of enforcement, expectations, and service standards must be clearly defined in any agreement;
- a forthcoming meeting with the Strategic Director was planned to refine the tender offer, expectations, and financial arrangements;
- contract terms, including break clauses and review periods, would be carefully considered; and
- the primary aim of the report was to improve the quality and management of city car parks, ensuring they provided a good service and supported the attractiveness of the area.

During the debate on the amendment, the following points were raised:

- the amendment, provided greater oversight by Members regarding the proposed outsourcing of car park management;
- Portfolio Holders routinely brought issues from their areas to the Executive informally, and this matter could also come to the Executive formally in the future if required;
- the amendment provided reassurance that decisions would not be taken without proper consideration, particularly given concerns raised by residents;
- the clarification that parking enforcement would not be outsourced was welcomed;
- the Leader's amendment was welcomed but considered not going far enough;
- concerns were raised about the principle of outsourcing a public sector function and lack of detailed reporting, evidence, and discussion prior to the proposal;
- there was a significant policy shift from in-house provision to outsourcing should be supported by clear evidence and fuller debate;
- given the timescale for capital work, there would be sufficient time for further review of the management arrangements before any implementation and the matter needed to come back to a future Council meeting for further consideration;
- concerns were raised regarding the employment conditions of staff working for any external operator, including wages, pensions, and working conditions;
- employment standards could potentially be addressed through contract requirements or KPIs;
- more detailed evidence, scrutiny, and discussions were required before proceeding and there was no need to rush the decision;
- any outsourcing arrangements needed to include ongoing feedback mechanisms from both car park users and nearby residents;
- live performance data linked to KPIs should be made available, using digital tools such as QR codes to gather feedback;
- there was support for the amendment, given the alternative options were less favourable;
- clarification was sought on how the proposal aligned with the Council's procurement processes, including the role of the Procurement Board;

- no best value or cost–benefit analysis had been presented, particularly comparing outsourced management with in-house provision;
- a Member enquired how outsourcing would integrate with existing Council services, including community safety priorities and initiatives to protect women from violence;
- funds potentially used for contractor profit could instead be reinvested in council teams;
- there was a need to demonstrate best value for money;
- the proposal to restore the car park to full operation was welcomed, the amendment provided reassurance on outsourcing issues, and the approach ensured outsourcing would only occur if it represented best value and was the most practical solution; and
- a Member considered that the wording of the amendment still assumed that the management function would be outsourced, albeit subject to delegated approval.

In summing up the amendment, the Leader advised that

- delegation to the Strategic Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder would not make outsourcing a foregone conclusion, and allowed for further consideration before any final decision;
- he acknowledged the point raised regarding the need for a cost–benefit analysis, which would be discussed with the Strategic Director;
- he noted the need to clarify operational details, including the potential use of number plate recognition technology for entry and exit, and confirmed further questions would be addressed with officers;
- the Council's reputation and service standards would be protected in any arrangements made;
- re-iterated that the amendment followed standard Council practice of delegating decisions to officers in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder;
- appropriate safeguards, guidance, and contractual conditions would be put in place, including consideration of issues raised during the debate;
- confirmed that outsourcing the management function remained the proposed direction, subject to delegated decision-making;
- further delays or additional lengthy council processes would be unnecessary, as the matter could be progressed through delegated authority;
- it was important to move forward with improvements and investment in the car park, noting that local traders and the public wanted improvements to be made; and
- the intention was to listen to contributions in the debate and ensure concerns raised were addressed in the implementation process.

Following a vote the AMENDMENT was CARRIED.

Councillor Fullam proposed an amendment to recommendation 1, which was seconded by Councillor K. Mithcell to remove the word “estimated” to read as follows

- a budget of £2,500,000 for undertaking the refurbishment and upgrade works at Cathedral and Quay MSCP.

Councillor Fullam in speaking to the amendment advised:

- the minor amendment was to solely remove the word “estimated” from £2,500,000 budget, and he expressed his support for the figure provide that it was a fixed figure;
- any additional funding should be requested through a future supplementary budget if needed;
- he welcomed the redevelopment as an opportunity to improve a problematic area of the city;
- he acknowledged general scepticism toward large capital projects but expressed confidence that the officers’ financial projections were robust;
- he highlighted the potential for increased revenue from improved car park facilities, benefiting wider city spending; and
- expressed support for the proposal, subject to the requested wording amendment.

The Lord Mayor advised that removal of the word “estimated” would not alter the substance of the motion and the Leader accepted amendment to remove “estimated” from the substantive motion to assist procedural clarity.

Councillor K. Mitchell proposed an amendment to recommendation 2, which was seconded by Councillor M. Mitchell to read as follows:

- that a further report be brought back to Council on the outsourcing of the management function of Cathedral and Quay MSCP versus retaining the service in-house.

Councillor K. Mitchell in speaking to the amendment advised:

- he had reservations after reviewing the report and listening to the debate;
- expressed support for recommendation 1, agreeing that the car park required additional funding and improvements, including addressing anti-social behaviour;
- he was not able to support recommendation 2 due to concerns about outsourcing the management function and there was a lack of sufficient evidence or justification that the service could not be delivered in-house; and
- he raised concerns about maintaining staff standards and protecting employee terms, including pensions, under outsourcing and further information was needed;

The Leader advised that he would be deferring the report to allow for further work to be carried out and explained the following:

- he acknowledged the concerns raised during the debate and confirmed he had listened to Members’ views;
- a revised report would be brought back to a future Council meeting which would provide clearer detail on the proposed outsourcing/management arrangements;
- he emphasised the need to address key issues, including understanding of what was being proposed, ensuring strong governance, oversight, and performance measures and maintaining control over pricing and service standards;
- he referenced past issues with outsourced services to highlight the importance of proper controls and accountability; and
- reiterated that the intention was to ensure any future proposal was robust, transparent, and compliant with the Council’s constitution.

RESOLVED that the report be deferred.

**NOTICE OF MOTION BY COUNCILLOR DARLING UNDER STANDING ORDER
NO. 6**

Councillor Darling moved, and Councillor Cookson seconded the Notice of Motion as outlined in the agenda requesting that the Council resolves to:

- Request that the Leader of the Council write to Devon County Council urging them to reconsider its proposed severe reduction in branch library opening hours that adversely affect Exeter's residents, especially given the recently announced county council multiyear settlement.
- Now that the survey consultation has closed, request that Devon County Council consult directly with the staff at Exeter's branch libraries, before any decisions are made, to explore more modest changes to opening hours based on firsthand knowledge of the way the libraries are used.
- Encourage Devon County Council to explore options to protect and/or enhance library access and services, for example, by drawing on existing case studies such as those published by Independent Mind. This should also involve an exploration of collaborative opportunities with existing public services, such as the arrangement St Thomas Library has with Theatre Alibi.
- Request that DCC provide a full Equalities Impact Assessment to decision makers before the decision is made to cut this key public service. It is not enough to simply ask for views on the proposed changes, as stated in the introduction to the consultation.

As Secunder, Councillor Cookson spoke in support of the motion, making the following points:

- he welcomed Devon County Council's reversal of the proposed £650,000 library cut, driven by community pressure;
- restoring funding did not guarantee restoration of access or opening hours;
- he highlighted concerns over a lack of commitment to reverse reduced staff hours and library opening times;
- commended the motion to urge for a reconsideration of cuts, direct consultation with staff, exploration of ways to protect/enhance access, and a full Equalities Impact Assessment;
- he was disappointed with the shift in language from libraries to hubs;
- he commended the local community efforts, particularly campaigners organising opposition and emphasised the importance of libraries as essential safe and warm spaces for vulnerable residents; and
- strongly supported the motion.

During discussion, Members made the following comments on the motion:

- the motion was welcomed and reaffirmed the importance of libraries;
- local councillors were credited for identifying funding and helping reverse proposed cuts;
- the debate had shifted to consultation on opening hours, with significant public engagement;
- libraries were evolving due to technology and changing community needs;
- there was limited transition funding from Devon County Council, but was not sufficient for all libraries;
- it was important to identify stable funding to maintain staffing and opening hours;

- councillors needed to engage locally on how transition funding could best support libraries;
- libraries now served as vital community hubs, providing a wide range of services to vulnerable groups, families, and elderly residents;
- reducing hours would significantly impact community services and access;
- Councillors Darling and Cookson were thanked for bringing the motion forward;
- Pinhoe library was facing a reduction in operating hours from 15 to 6 hours (around a 60% cut);
- there was a community value with over 9,000 visits in less than a year;
- there were concerns about reliance on volunteers, who could not replace trained staff;
- the reversal of budget cuts were welcomed but the lack of commitment on restoring hours and staffing was a concern;
- there was an absence of direct consultation with library staff;
- libraries provided a wide range of services beyond books, including classes, story times, baby groups, breakfast clubs, board games, Wi-Fi, and computer access;
- it was important to protect libraries as community hubs;
- Devon County Council's proposal to rely on volunteers to run libraries was criticised, noting volunteers often had other jobs and could not fully operate a library;
- having experienced library staff managing the services, volunteers would provide assistance which was important;
- the debate was welcomed but it would have been preferable during the formal consultation period so the Council could submit official views;
- the previously proposed £650,000 cuts were efficiencies carried forward from last year and had been reinvested in library services;
- an additional £1 million has been allocated for the library transformation scheme; and
- there was an ongoing consultation, which had already received over 23,500 responses.

Councillor M. Mitchell proposed an amendment to the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Fullam to read as follows:

- that the Leader of the Council writes to the Leader of Devon County Council requesting that the cabinet member responsible for library services be invited to a meeting of Exeter City Council to meet with interested Members and discuss both the current provision and future provision of library services in Exeter.

Councillor M. Mitchell in speaking to the amendment, advised that the amendment was a more proactive way for the council to engage and influence library services locally.

The Leader raised a protocol concern, noting that a local authority could not be summoned to a meeting and suggested the appropriate forum would be an invitation to a scrutiny committee meeting.

Councillor M. Mitchell agreed that an invitation to scrutiny would be acceptable, allowing discussion and public attendance without mandating participation. Councillor Darling as the mover of the Motion accepted this amendment as an additional recommendation to the motion.

Returning to the debate on the amended motion, the following points were made:

- the motion was important particularly for Pinhoe as one of the fastest-growing areas in Exeter with rising demand for community facilities;
- the proposed reduction of Pinhoe library to just 6 hours per week was not acceptable;
- thanks were made to local campaigners, for pressuring Devon County Council to listen to them;
- volunteers, brought skills, commitment, and local knowledge, but required clear frameworks and support from paid staff;
- volunteers could not replace trained professional staff and should not be used as a cost-saving measure;
- cross-party support for the motion was commended;
- additional funding from central government enabled Devon County Council to reconsider cuts;
- the Save Devon's Libraries campaign was praised for raising awareness and influencing decisions;
- it was regretful that the motion was necessary but was commended as a positive step for protecting library services;
- reading was a fundamental life skill, and reducing opportunities for families to take young children to libraries was a concern;
- Devon County Council should not have considered making cuts to library funding;
- the St. Thomas library was a valuable community facility;
- the motion was slightly out of date due to recent developments;
- libraries had evolved beyond books to include technology, computers, and modern community services;
- reduced hours in one area could be balanced with increased hours or new resources elsewhere;
- the consultation process was welcomed and seen as a way to tailor services to public needs, such as book availability, computer access, service complexity, or location; and
- the earlier amendment strengthened the substantive motion and supported maintaining or enhancing library provisions.

In summing up, Councillor Darling as Mover of the Motion made the following points:

- thanked all Members for engaging in the debate and acknowledged the contributions of Solomon Elliot, Lucy Finlay, and other campaigners;
- welcomed the reversal on the proposed library cuts but stressed that restored budgets did not guarantee restored hours or services;
- that libraries were evolving into hubs, but standard hours failed to reflect the needs of individual libraries, causing dramatic reductions in services;
- branches, like St. Thomas, faced significant cuts on operating hours impacting on community use;
- she was critical of the move toward a volunteer-led model, stressing that professional librarians were essential for reading support, IT assistance, material selection, and community engagement;
- consultations had been limited and functioned more as volunteer recruitment exercises than opportunities to shape library services;
- case studies and examples of enhanced library programs could not operate effectively with only six hours of opening; and
- although Devon County Council announced the reversal of cuts on 18 February, the motion was still needed to protect library hours, professional staffing, and service quality.

Following a vote, the motion was CARRIED as amended (as follows):

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Leader of the Council write to Devon County Council urging them to reconsider its proposed severe reduction in branch library opening hours that adversely affect Exeter's residents, especially given the recently announced county council multiyear settlement.
- 2) now that the survey consultation has closed, that Devon County Council be requested to consult directly with the staff at Exeter's branch libraries, before any decisions are made, to explore more modest changes to opening hours based on firsthand knowledge of the way the libraries are used.
- 3) Devon County Council be encouraged to explore options to protect and/or enhance library access and services, by drawing on existing case studies such as those published by Independent Mind. This should also involve an exploration of collaborative opportunities with existing public services, such as the arrangement St Thomas Library has with Theatre Alibi.
- 4) Devon County Council provide a full Equalities Impact Assessment to decision makers before the decision is made to cut this key public service. It is not enough to simply ask for views on the proposed changes, as stated in the introduction to the consultation.
- 5) That the Devon County Council cabinet member responsible for library services be invited to a Scrutiny meeting with interested Members to discuss both the current provision and future provision of library services in Exeter.

159

**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 Moore to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services:

“I appreciate that the Council listened to St Petrock's to change the methodology so that we get a better picture of how many people are experiencing rough sleeping. The Customer Focus minutes highlight the new strategy which plans tackle homelessness in a more systematic way, and that is expected in the autumn. In the meantime, what is the interim plan to respond to the growing rough sleeping crisis?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services responded to this question stating that the increase in reported numbers was largely due to a change in methodology this year, designed to better align with partner organisations and provide a more inclusive and accurate count, meaning the rise appeared greater than it actually was.

In response, a range of improvements were being introduced, including a new “off the streets” offer providing same-day accommodation, a re-designed and more integrated outreach service, and a new commissioning model separating personal support from accommodation to improve stability and engagement. There would also be gender-specific accommodation, enhanced support pathways for people leaving institutions such as hospital, prison, care, and the armed forces,

and an expansion of Housing First and long-term supported housing for those with complex needs.

All current contracts would be replaced with new outcome-focused ones by summer 2026, alongside embedding a trauma-informed approach across services. Overall, these changes aim to deliver a more effective and sustainable reduction in rough sleeping throughout the year.

In asking a supplementary question, Councillor Moore thanked the Portfolio Holder for the response and requested that the information be shared more widely with residents. She noted that many residents were asking about the issue and emphasised the need to reassure the public that the Council was improving how it supported people quickly.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services agreed with the request to share information with residents and would see about exploring ways to communicate the updates more widely.

In accordance with Standing Order No.8, the following question was put by Councillor Read to the Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Community Safety and City Centre:

“It was really interesting to find out recently that there are 58 services which are now only accessed by a digital login to My Exeter, e.g. making a noise complaint, reporting graffiti, ordering a new or replacement bin and 55 other services.

This method of digitally logging into My Exeter to report issues and request Council help puts off many people and potentially creates digital exclusion. I know that ECC is using various different performance indicators for analysing if people are being excluded from services, and that there has just been a review of this, when will the next review be planned for to ensure that no one suffers from an inability to access Council services due to digital exclusion in Exeter”.

The Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Community Safety and City Centre clarified that services were not only accessible through the MyExeter platform; it was encouraged for convenience but was not mandatory.

She confirmed that residents could still access services via phone or in-person at customer services and provided assurance that multiple communication channels remained available and functional. Access and performance were continuously monitored rather than reviewed annually and any accessibility issues would be addressed promptly as they happened. There was no evidence that improving online access reduced availability for those using non-digital methods.

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

“In the light of the shocking docudrama ‘Dirty Business’ does the Leader think we can do more to have liaison with our local water company, South West Water, and the Environment Agency to understand whether situations here are likely to improve or worsen”?

The Leader, Councillor Bialyk, responded to this question stating that Members should recall that it had previously been agreed that contact with South West Water would be made but unfortunately the offer of a meeting was declined. As a district authority, the Council had no statutory powers over water companies or the Environment Agency. Regulation, enforcement and investment decisions rested entirely with national agencies and Southwest Water themselves.

However, the Council was committed to representation and partnership liaison whenever and wherever possible in order to ensure that service delivery concerns are raised on behalf of residents.

In asking a supplementary question, Councillor Read noted that South West Water had declined to attend a meeting, which was disappointing and urged continued pressure for engagement. She asked whether farmers or their representatives could be invited to future discussions, noting their absence at previous meetings despite their role in water pollution.

The Lord Mayor advised that the supplementary question was not related to the response provided.

(The meeting commenced at 6.10 pm and closed at 9.56 pm)

Chair

Member Questions Raised at Council

Minute No: 147 – Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee – 22 January 2026

Question from Councillor Banyard to the Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism

Please could the portfolio holder tell us which of Exeter's cultural organisations, partners, or individuals were asked, consulted, or involved in the preparation of the Expression of Interest for the Exeter City of Culture bid. Also, will the EOI be shared with councillors?

Response

The Expression of Interest was produced as part of the work on the emerging Cultural Strategy and was informed by 5-months of engagement activity with a broad range of cultural organisations, stakeholders and individuals from the cultural sector.

Question from Councillor Read to the Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism

I understand from cultural stakeholders in the city that they had not been consulted with in the preparation of the Expression of Interest for the Exeter City of Culture bid. Does the Council think that this is the correct approach? Would the Council have the same approach in future bids?

Response

The Connected Culture Group, which supports the Exeter Partnership, is made up of over 20 people representing a range of organisations from the cultural sector and helped shape the Expression of Interest.

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EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Tuesday 10 February 2026

Present:-

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor Councillor Jobson (Chair)
Councillor Rolstone (Deputy Lord Mayor).
Councillors Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Begley, Bennett, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Foale, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Hughes, Hussain, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Patrick, Payne, Pole, Read, Sheridan, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Wetenhall, Williams, M, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

Also Present

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director of Operations, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Head of Service - Environment and Waste, Head of Service - Commercial Assets, Democratic Services Manager, and Democratic Services Officer.

13

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

14

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Lord Mayor advised that there were no part 2 items on the agenda.

15

USE OF CITY COUNCIL ASSETS TO DRIVE REGENERATION

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bialyk, moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Wright, and invited the Strategic Director of Operations, Strategic Director of Corporate Resources, and the Head of Service – Environment and Waste to present the report.

The Strategic Director of Operations and the Head of Service – Environment and Waste presented the portion of the report on the Materials Reclamation Facility (MRF) making the following points:

- this supported all of the Councils' corporate policies;
- progress was required now, despite uncertainty surrounding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)
- the current (MRF) was over 25 years old and required a full refurbishment;
- increase processing volume capacity was needed;
- frequent machinery downtime was causing financial loss;
- the existing site was small and lacked sufficient capacity;
- installation of update fire suppression measures was required;
- the layout of the current MRF was complex due to multiple services operating there;
- survey work indicated that a sewer line ran close to the railway, creating constraints;
- the Environment Agency requirements were increasingly challenging to meet, and South West Water required 3-meter clearance on each side of the sewer line, which impacted usable space;
- this project concerned the entirety of the Operations service;

- Belle Isle was outdated, with temporary facilities, compliance issues, and restricted space;
- the welfare facilities at Belle Isle were porta cabins and this proposal aimed to provide proper facilities for all Operations staff;
- there were concerns around the safety and security of machinery at the current site;
- this proposal sought the acquisition of the Envirohub site near the current MRF;
- the Envirohub was close to the Devon County Council recycling area, the weighbridge sites, and the ARC building, which increased the strategic value;
- moving to operations to the Envirohub would allow work to continue without disruption;
- an update assessment of the cost of refurbishment was £13,586,000, whereas moving to the Envirohub would cost £12,871,000;
- the Envirohub had an improved EPC rating and had capacity for additional solar panels; and
- there was office space available for approximately 50 members of staff, with room for the frontline teams, training facilities, and significantly improved toilet and shower facilities.

The Strategic Director of Operations and the Head of Service – Environment and Waste responded to Members' questions on the new MRF in the following terms;

- the building was fully accessible and had passenger lifts;
- they were open minded for making improvements, and would look at it subject to agreement from Members;
- the Environment Agency feedback had been noted, and a report would be brought before Members regarding Belle Isle;
- increased facilities would decrease levels of rejected waste and secondary processing;
- a big challenge for increasing the recycling rate was changing behaviour, however there had been an improvement following better education and engagement surrounding food waste recycling;
- the existing permit was larger than needed, included mixed waste, and could be transferred easily;
- the focus had been focused largely on capacity in Exeter;
- they were confident that it would be possible to do two collection policies if it was needed after LGR;
- the building layout would be different, but the machinery would be the same;
- they were not yet at the point of purchase yet so it is possible the figures could change, however an external party had also been used to develop the figures;
- it would cost an estimated £2.5 million to resolve the issues at Belle Isle;
- the building had become available following the sale of the business that was previously working within the premises;
- the solar farm was not currently being used at full capacity, there were 11 electric vehicles, but it was not necessary to have a charger for each vehicle;
- Members would be offered the chance to visit the existing MRF;
- a secure tariff would be sought to ensure income on an annual basis;
- there would not be the capability for a textile collection service and this was not currently required as a district council, but this would need to be considered following LGR;
- £7.7 million had been approved for existing project but they were seeking to add £2.5 million for Belle Isle and £2.6 million from CIL funding;

- the cost had increased as there were greater levels of contamination that anticipated and the railway tracked was causing restrictions;
- technology was changing all the time, so it was difficult to predict future capacity;
- the figure for the renovation of the existing MRF and the figure for moving to the Envirohub was the same;
- the customers of Devon Contract Waste were now with a well-known national firm; and
- it was believed to be a 12 month programme if approved, the Council had been working with a consultant so it would be possible to move quickly.

The Strategic Director of Corporate Resources presented the portion of the report on Senate Court, making the following points:

- this had previously been discussed in September;
- the civic centre was old and needed repairs with an estimated cost of £5 million;
- this move would help to deliver part of the Liveable Exeter program and was in line with the local plan for housing;
- Senate Court was the most financially viable option, as the building was already owned by the Council;
- the report sought delegated authority for the Chief Executive for the final decision regarding the layout;
- the staff would be engaged with to understand what worked best for them and their service;
- moving to Senate Court would save the Council £164,000 a year moving forward, with an estimated benefit of £868,000 over ten years;
- there were significant environmental benefits, with an expected change of EPC rating to B;
- Senate Court was much more accessible, with two lifts and accessible toilets;
- the committee rooms would be much larger and could accommodate up to 70 members of the public;
- there would be secure bicycle storage in the basement; and
- it would be possible to install focus areas for working, and pods to enable private conversations.

The Strategic Director of Corporate Resources responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- when looking at unitary authorities such as Plymouth, it was believed Senate Court would be a suitable size;
- the cost plan assumed an EPC B rating, to achieve EPC A further repairs and refurbishment would be needed;
- the travel to work plan was not part of this report but was being reviewed by Human Resources (HR);
- it was intended for the cycle storage to be secure;
- additional costing for unisex toilets on each floor was approximately £375,000;
- if the decision was delayed for 6 months the move date would be closer to Christmas 2027 and the Council would have to pay a holding cost for the empty building;
- there had been plans to move for a number of years, this was being done now as the building had become vacant;
- the Civic Centre would be sold by the new unitary authority;
- it was likely that a city centre location would be desirable for the new authority;

- there was a holding cost for Senate Court at the moment, but this was built into the cost moving forward;
- Senate Court was entirely electric, 25% from solar panels and the remainder from the grid;
- the implementation program needed to be updated;
- County Hall had not been considered due to the location and the size, the future authority was likely smaller than the existing Devon County Council, and would need to be easily accessible for residents;
- it was not envisaged that Senate Court would hold full council meetings;
- there was £3 million available from the Guildhall budget;
- the Council did not own the adjacent The Senate, only Senate Court;
- welfare facilities had been considered and were reflected in the drawings; and
- it was not yet known what would happen to assets owned by existing councils following LGR.

Meeting paused 19:30, resumed 19:40.

During debate, Councillor M Mitchell, as leader of the Liberal Democrat group, made the following points:

- the outcome of the LGR proposal would be known in 17 weeks;
- concerned for the duality of services offered by other authorities;
- he was satisfied that there would be an appropriate transition period;
- moving the MRF was a risk worth taking irrespective of LGR;
- the outcome of LGR would change the need for a new civic centre;
- the Minister could decide a different outcome to what was proposed; and
- he did not know what the rush was to move to Senate Court.

Councillor Moore, as leader of the Green group, made the following points;

- it was important that this decision was transparent;
- moving the MRF provided a real opportunity to improve the recycling rate;
- she would be supporting the move of the MRF;
- deferring or delaying the decision to move the Council to Senate Court would not increase the cost that much;
- she might support the move in a few months' time, but could not support it today;
- Belle Isle was based in the corner of Belle Isle park, and it had previously been determined that there was a high risk of flooding and that a housing development was not suitable; and
- what did the Leader envisage would happen to the existing Belle Isle site.

During debate, Members made the following points about the Materials Reclamation Facility (MRF):

- the biggest problem when making a new space was construction costs, buying a new building eliminated that issue;
- the emphasis was on staff facilities at the MRF, it would help to recruit and retain staff if the conditions were improved;
- a new MRF was essential and would solve issues with Belle Isle;
- this offered opportunities to bring staff together and could provide improved cross departmental working;
- the Operations staff did an outstanding job and a new MRF was exactly what they needed;
- the new authority would need recycling handling facilities within the city;
- moving the MRF delivers the improvements at a lower cost than refurbishment of the existing site;

- the capacity and working conditions of the MRF staff were significant;
- this proposal met the Council's climate change and net zero objectives;
- the figures for moving the MRF looked better than those for refurbishment, but they were an increase on the original figure of £8 million;
- moving the location of the MRF had been years in the making; and
- there would be learning and development space within the new building, which was pleasing to see.

During debate, Members made the following points about Senate Court:

- an estimated price of £375,000 for unisex toilets was dissatisfying and should be reconsidered by the Chief Executive;
- how could the Council plan for a future that they did not know about and could this leave the future authority with a financial burden;
- the meeting rooms should be big enough for the new authority;
- they were confident that following LGR a presence would be needed in the city centre for the new authority;
- County Hall was not practical for a number of reasons;
- delaying this decision would make it more expensive;
- there were lots of unknowns and that was uncomfortable;
- it was sensible to delay the decision by six months as there was little risk in doing so;
- moving to Senate Court met climate change and net zero objectives;
- officers had given clear reasons as to why this should be approved;
- residents would still need council services and it is unlikely that Exeter residents would be sent to other areas to deal with their issues;
- moving to Senate Court meant that residents would have access to accessible toilets when visiting the Council;
- the Civic Centre was not a healthy building to be in;
- the Civic Centre had poor accessibility and high CO2 emissions; and
- this was an opportunity to provide comfortable working conditions for all staff.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bialyk, made the following points in summing up:

- he was sure that the Council would ensure that relevant legislation regarding gender neutral toilets would be complied with;
- this was about the dignity and welfare of staff, and that needed to be remembered;
- doing nothing was not the better option and was not the answer;
- this needed to be done and there was a greater risk if it was not done;
- there had been no proposal about Belle Isle in the recommendations;
- moving to Senate Court made sense;
- the shadow authority would decide where they would want to base themselves, what this Council needed to do was to put themselves in a good position for moving forward; and
- the figures made sense and he hoped both recommendations would have support.

Councillor Moore raised a point of order under Standing Order 10 (15) and provided clarity on her previous comments:

- she wanted to defer the decision, rather than not make one; and
- asked for clarification from the Leader surrounding a nature and feasibility study for Belle Isle.

The Lord Mayor advised that she would be taking two votes on the recommendations, one for the Materials Reclamation Facility, and another on Senate Court.

Following a unanimous vote, recommendations 2.1 – 2.6 were CARRIED.

Councillor M Mitchell, called for a roll call vote on recommendations 2.7 – 2.10, and a named vote was recorded as follows:

Voting For:

Councillors Asvachin, Atkinson, Begley, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Foale, Harding, Hussain, Knott, Miller-Boam, Patrick, Pole, Rolstone, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Williams M, Williams R, Wood, and Wright (21 Members).

Voting Against:

Councillors Banyard, Bennett, Fullam, Haigh, Ketchin, K Mitchell, M Mitchell, Moore, Palmer, Payne, Read, Sheridan, and Wetenhall (13 Members).

Abstentions:

Councillors Holland and The Lord Mayor Councillor Jobson (2 Members).

Absent:

Councillors Hughes, Rees, and Parkhouse (3 Members).

Following a vote, recommendations 2.7 – 2.10 were CARRIED.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 8.46 pm)

Chair

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 February 2026

Present:

Councillor Catherine Rees (Chair)
Councillors Cookson, Begley, Fullam, Holland, Hussain, Payne, Pole, Read, Snow and Wardle

Also present:

Strategic Director for People and Communities and Democratic Services Manager

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Asvachin, Vizard and Williams, R.

100 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

The Chair advised that one question had been received from a member of the public, and invited Mr Paul Callan to ask his question:

“ECC complies with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 by publishing details of over £250 spending transactions quarterly. Devon County Council publishes their figures monthly. I request ECC does the same so that the electorate can make informed judgements about ECC’s Local Government Reorganisation proposals.”

Councillor Vizard, Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities, provided the following response on behalf of the Leader:

“The Council is fully compliant with the Transparency Code, which requires publication quarterly. As a District Council, we have a smaller staffing resource than the County Council and therefore cannot move to monthly publication”.

In a supplementary question, Mr Callan asked if the Council would comply with section 58 of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and go further than the minimum requirement. Councillor Vizard advised that he would take this away and would share the response with Mr Callan and the committee.

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

The Chair advised that no questions had been submitted in advance, and no questions were asked at the meeting.

103 **Portfolio Holder Report from Councillor Asvachin, Portfolio Holder for Housing Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services**

The report was taken as read and Councillor Asvachin and the Strategic Director People and Communities responded to Members questions in the following terms:

Customer Services

- concerns regarding digital exclusion had been taken into account and it was possible that AI could be used to handle simpler enquiries, allowing operators to speak with residents unable to use online services;

- many residents had created MyExeter accounts to manage garden waste collection;
- a MyExeter account was not needed to respond to consultations;
- MyExeter was currently in a one-year pilot and data would be analysed, including to see where people made more than one attempt to create an account;
- an increase in accounts was expected when Council Tax became available;
- residents were encouraged to sign up and would be supported to do so when making contact with the council;
- MyExeter was used to manage garden waste collection, and there was a 97% sign up rate;
- Exeter had a low digital exclusion rate, but it was important to continue to monitor access across all channels;
- an increase in residents using self-service for routine issues would create capacity for staff to better support those with more complex needs or those choosing not to use digital channels for whatever reason;
- they were not aware of any plans to make other processes compulsory to a MyExeter account;

Housing

- eligibility for social housing was part of the statutory homeless assessment process;
- each local authority in Devon sets its own allocation policy social housing;
- Devon Home Choice, was the way allocations are administered;
- the trend in the increase in social housing complaints had been seen nationally and was actually welcomed as it meant residents were engaging with the council which helped the council to continually learn and improve services to tenants;
- part of the increase locally was due to changes that had been made to the complaints process. In the past some issues raised by tenants had not been counted as complaints but they now were;
- the housing benchmark data in the documents shared by the portfolio holder included data from non-local authority social landlords which needed to be borne in mind when comparing outcomes;
- where the benchmarking data shows slightly higher costs for repairs for Exeter this reflects different delivery models, for example, in Exeter these services were contracted outside the organisation so there were no hidden costs in overall budgets that might mask the real costs in providers who undertook repairs “in house”;
- Contract monitoring continued to be a focus to ensure on-going value for money;
- going forward there would be an annual plan published which would show a programme of more regular and varied methods for engaging tenants and gaining satisfaction feedback which was in line with the new Corporate Consultation and Engagement Strategy;
- regarding variation in performance for regular inspections, it was explained that there was a cohort of tenants who refused to give access and rigorous protocols were in place to address this;
- in some cases, voids were for longer periods of time desired and due to some long-term tenants having been reluctant to allow improvement and repairs to their homes. Consequently, when the properties became vacant they required extensive refurbishment which was being addressed by the Tenancy Services team who were required to ensure that all properties were inspected on a regular basis and that refurbishment and updates took place to ensure homes were of the best standard and to continue to look after council assets;

- a representative sample had been targeted for the residents' survey which was carried out by a partner organisation and was benchmarked nationally;
- trends emerging from the residents' survey were being looked at;
- Heavitree Squilometre was a brilliant idea but would be difficult to start in other areas as it was not easy to get volunteers;
- if residents had not had a response from the council their Councillor could use the councillor enquiry system to follow up;
- suggested that councillors could be given real time data on reasonable response rates regarding repairs in the future and that information about service standards could be made clearer. This would allow councillors to reassure council tenants' that their communication of repairs had been received. It was confirmed that it was not possible for Councillors to have access to individual residents' accounts for confidentiality and data protection reasons;
- the member enquiry process could be used if residents were contacting councillors regarding a perceived lack of response from the council;
- Many tenants currently preferred to telephone to report repairs but this took longer and often created long waiting times for customers. There was a quick access route via the tenant portal and work was underway to better understand why tenants use of the portal was low with the aim of improving overall response times;
- Stock condition surveys were undertaken and sanctions imposed where tenants have not looked after their property in line with their tenancy agreement; and
- the Head of Service Customer and Communities was undertaking a corporate project around complaint handling which would include automation, labelling and reporting.

During discussion a councillor stated that a 19 day turn around for repairs was very good especially given that contractors were difficult to source. He also stated that the Council Housing Development Advisory Board had seen data which had showed that compliance levels were excellent.

He also noted that any properties would be passed on in a good condition, but those which were not may have extensive damage.

104 **Six-monthly update on Homelessness Strategy**

The Strategic Director People and Communities presented the report making the following points:

- the government had published its long-awaited Plan to End Homelessness in December 2025 and its goals aligned with those established locally following the Council's own review work;
- a strategic data review was undertaken early in 2025 which identified systemic issues set out in the presentations but also offered potential solutions;
- historically homelessness funding streams from the government had been sporadic and short-term, which had hindered long-term strategic planning;
- issues seen in Exeter were reflected nationally, although the city had a notable population of younger, single people who were in a cycle of repeat homeless found Exeter a relatively safe place to be street-attached;
- the Council was not the only commissioner of supported housing in the city, the NHS, Social Services and criminal justice agencies also commissioned accommodation-based services;
- when the Council had greater control of funding in previous years, homelessness prevention outcomes were stronger;

- there was a lack of relationship with the private rental sector;
- phase one of the team restructure had been completed, and the remainder would be completed by the end of April;
- staff feedback suggested that a single casework service was desired;
- the ring-fenced homeless prevention grant was £750,000 less than modelled, however, the overall funding formula was generous;
- the budget proposal would show a wish to allocate an appropriate amount of funding to homelessness prevention;
- staff head count would be increased, with fewer senior managers and more frontline housing officers; and
- new burdens funding must be spent on staffing.

The Strategic Director People and Communities responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- our transformation plans were evidenced based and it was envisaged that any future authority would want to continue this work;
- new legislation would enable more engagement with private sector landlords and tenants, with the council now mandated to undertake a mediation role to sustain and prevent breakdown of relationships and tenancies between private sector landlords and their tenants;
- there were new national outcome frameworks coming forward with specific metrics that reflected the stated outcomes our local plans were aiming to achieve such as the national target to reduce rough sleeping, by eradicating one-night rough sleeping and focus on long term rough sleepers who were usually individuals with complex needs;
- the new service would reduce fragmentation and stabilise staffing as it would have all case management workers together in one team on substantive contracts as opposed to the short and fixed term contracts the historic short-term funding had necessitated;
- service providers would be invited to provide feedback on the new service specifications and framework agreements prior to the commencement of the formal procurement process;
- providers could bid to join the framework which set quality standards and pricing providing a more cost effective and flexible approach for the council as commissioner as money would not get tied into block contracts and a provider not meeting the quality standards would not get any replacement frameworks. This had not been used in this area of work before in Exeter and the Council were following best practice used by other councils;
- in relation to question about money advice services it was explained that a new crisis resilience service would be commissioned with new funding from the government created from the remodelling of the National Household Support Grant which would come via Devon County Council. A specification for this new service would go out for procurement in due course;
- reducing the number of evictions for temporary accommodation and putting mechanisms in place to prevent the most vulnerable being put on the street would be addressed through ongoing casework support which would continue when someone was sustainably housed. Providers on the new framework would have additional responsibilities and incentives to mitigate evictions;
- there was an extract on page 35 of the report that calculated the cost of tolerating homelessness nationally;
- the belief that the homeless in Exeter were predominantly from other areas was incorrect, most had a connection with Exeter, if not, Devon. People came to Exeter from other areas in Devon as the city had excellent services and charities supporting vulnerable people;

- the prison early release scheme caused problems in the autumn as there was short notice and a high volume of releases;
- it may be beneficial for scrutiny to look at what other agencies within the city were doing; and
- a new national target which would be monitored was to reduce entrenched rough sleeping by 50%.

The Chair proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Payne to the recommendations in the following terms:

- recommendation 2.1 be removed and that progress be noted in September instead;
- 2.2 - remove “note the need to revisit” and replace with “contribute to the development of”; and
- 2.3 – replace “note” with “support”, with addition of “and the systemic issues and barriers to reducing homelessness and rough sleeping in Exeter.”

Following a unanimous vote, the recommendations as amended were **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED that the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee:

- Contribute to the development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy during 2026 in response to the National Plan to End Homelessness (2005) and new legislation; and
- Support the organisational and commissioning work already underway to start to address the new requirements and the systemic issues and barriers to reducing homelessness and rough sleeping in Exeter.

105 **Scrutiny Work Plan and Proposals Received**

The meeting was adjourned for a break at 7:26pm and resumed at 7:28pm.

The Chair proposed, to the approval of the Committee, that:

- Councillor Cookson contact Councillor Darling regarding the Eton Walk bin petition organiser;
- Public Surveys be brought to the June meeting;
- Little Exeter petition be brought to the March meeting if possible but the Democratic Services Manager would schedule accordingly after seeking advice from the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources;
- Community Safety Partnership report be brought to the September meeting;
- six-monthly Homeless Strategy be renamed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy; and
- Tenants Energy Review of our Passivhaus Council Homes be deferred to September.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.40 pm

Chair

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PLANNING COMMITTEE

Monday 9 February 2026

Present:-

Councillor Knott (Chair)

Councillors Rolstone, Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Hussain, Ketchin, Mitchell, M, Pole and Williams, M.

Apologies

Councillor Hughes.

Councillors in attendance under Standing Order No. 44
Councillor Wetenhall speaking on item 5 (Minute No. 60)

Also Present

Strategic Director for Place, Planning Solicitor, Principal Project Manager - Development Management and Democratic Services Officer.

Also in Attendance

Ben Sunderland (Devon County Council Highways).

58

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2026 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

59

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

60

PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 25/1082/FUL - CLARENDON HOUSE

The Chair invited Councillor Wetenhall to speak under Standing Order No. 44, who made reference to:

- submitting a formal objection to the application relating to massing, design, and impacts on streets in Newtown;
- supported the RSPB request for 24 swift boxes instead of 6, and described as an easy improvement;
- expressed strong concerns that the applicant and Devon County Council had failed to present a clear and honest picture of transport impacts in the area;
- Garden Lane was attractive in principle, but its design was pedestrian-only, which was unrealistic;
- Garden Lane would likely become a desired line for cyclists, creating conflicts and the Police Designing Out Crime Officer comments acknowledges pedestrians needed protection from cyclists;
- Garden Lane had been assumed to operate as a shared pedestrian–cyclist route, despite not being designed for dual use, and would require reconsideration if the application were approved;
- the application provided a misleading and simplistic picture for the walking and cycling connectivity, relying on limited extracts from the Exeter Cycling Plan, lacking real world experiences;
- the Paris Street and Western Way roundabout was described as extremely

unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists and concerns had been raised, supported by written evidence and previous surveys, had not been addressed;

- Heavitree Road was unsafe for cyclists, especially uphill towards Waitrose;
- using Active Travel England's Route Check or Area Route Check tool was recommended to assess safety against national criteria;
- introducing a large student population could put students at risk without further assessment;
- recent PBSA (Purpose Built Student Accommodation) briefings indicated a decline in student numbers, current PBSA provisions being sufficient and an excessive concentration in the city centre;
- the site was suitable for high-quality residential flats, not just PBSA; and
- urged the Planning committee to challenge the assumption that the site was only suitable for PBSA and to consider alternative residential use.

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

- there was no formal cycle route in the area, with cyclists currently using the carriageway and main approaches such as Heavitree Road lacking marked cycle lanes;
- the existing gap between Triangle and Western Way was already used by both cyclists and pedestrians, and any new design created by the development would also attract cycle use;
- the pedestrian crossing being moved to align with Garden Lane, would encourage greater pedestrian and cyclist movement in that direction; and
- cyclists using the alternative route would technically need to dismount and push the bikes, which did always happen.

The Chair invited Mr Keith Lewis, to speak for five minutes, against the application, who made the following points:

- the Exeter Civic Society had submitted two letters of objection, including one following an assessment against the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Historic England guidance, and impacts on heritage views;
- the applicant and officers had failed to comply with NPPF paragraphs 200 and 202, which required harm to heritage assets to be avoided or minimised;
- the design prioritised maximising height and room numbers, rather than reducing harm to Exeter's heritage;
- harm was described as being avoidable, and therefore not justified under the NPPF;
- referred to the Urban Design Officer's view that a maximum height of six storeys would preserve key cathedral views and advised that a less harmful design option existed, making the current proposal unjustified;
- accepting avoidable harm would contribute to incremental erosion of Exeter's heritage and townscape;
- raised concerns that the applicant and officers had not properly assessed the cumulative loss of the Cathedral views, including impacts from recent and proposed nearby developments and that views of the cathedral from the north could be lost;
- Historic England recognised the Cathedral as a landmark with largely unchallenged views and referred to previous committee decisions where building heights were reduced to protect the Cathedral views;
- the applicant's CGI images showed the development to be overbearing when viewed from Newtown St Leonard's, Eaton House, and Grade II listed Eaton Place Terrace;
- the development would overshadow surrounding residential neighbourhoods

and conflict with the established character and the building should step down toward Newtown, not step up;

- there were concerns about the accuracy of the CGI views, noting errors in submitted images showing the building in incorrect locations and questioned whether other views and heights could be relied upon;
- that student studio rooms lacked communal cooking facilities, requiring residents to cook and eat alone which contradicted the reasoning in the Heavitree Road PBSA approval;
- the claim that harm is outweighed by public benefit was challenged as the scheme did not deliver homes needed to meet the identified housing requirement;
- the only benefit appeared to be the green lane, despite an existing public route to Western Way;
- the claims about PBSA freeing up HMOs for family housing was questioned, noting the continued approval of HMO applications; and
- highlighted recent committee decisions where poor PBSA and Co-living schemes had been deferred or refused and urged the Planning Committee to refuse the application due to its scale, design, and massing, and the resulting harm to the city.

Mr Lewis responded to a question from a Members as follows:

- the steps to Russell Street were poor, but would remain in place regardless of the proposal, with only potential minor improvements possible;
- the existing pathway between the church and the hotel was reasonably wide and provided a direct route from the top of the car park, which many pedestrians already used and
- the walking distance to the existing or relocated crossing would not be significantly longer and while the proposed Garden Lane would provide a pleasant, greener route, it was not a major improvement over existing options.

The Chair invited Mr Matthew Roe, to speak for five minutes to speak in support of the application, who made the following points:

- he was speaking on behalf of the applicant and thanked the Principal Project Manager - Development Management and officers for their engagement, and Members for feedback at Planning Member Working Group presentations;
- there had been an extensive pre-application engagement since 2023;
- the scheme had significantly evolved, notably with significant changes to scale, height and detailed designs through the process;
- the scheme was considered to be a high-quality architectural response, making optimal use of land and contributing positively to city centre housing targets and the public realm;
- both adopted and emerging local plan policies supported student housing in well-connected city centre locations;
- supported the officer report that the scheme would not unbalance the city centre or harm its mix of uses;
- there was no policy test for student need and the assessments indicated over 10,000 students currently live in HMOs;
- the local plan target to accommodate 75% of additional students in PBSA was a minimum, and the scheme contributed toward this and existing unmet need was not captured by policy figures;
- there were changing trends for student accommodation, with more second – third year and postgraduate students choosing PBSA options;
- PBSA provision was helping to free up family housing, with reductions in student council tax exemptions in general housing stock and there was no

- substantive evidence that student numbers would continue to decline;
- major operators had commented on Exeter having a strong PBSA market;
- the maximum height had been reduced through negotiation during pre-application discussions and the final ten-storey height was considered to be appropriate;
- the height aligned with national policy, the council strategy, and was a gateway city centre location and positioned in the emerging Eastgate site;
- the site had a low topography and was separated from the historic core of the city centre with independent local plan evidence identifying the site as suitable for ten storeys;
- there were significant adverse impacts identified in relation to daylight, wind, or amenities;
- heritage impacts were considered to be at the lowest level of less than substantial harm;
- key views from Dunsford Road demonstrated that the development would sit below the cathedral nave ridge line and would not obscure the tower;
- key views from Clifton Hill indicated that the view affected was incidental in nature and therefore carried reduced weight;
- any harm to the Cathedral and Belmont Conservation Area was considered to be minimal and the Council's urban design officer identified a less than substantial harm of moderate scale;
- Historic England had acknowledged some harm but stated it should be balanced against public benefits;
- public benefits included redeveloping partly underutilised 1960s office building to provide 297 student bed spaces, equivalent to 202 homes;
- benefits also included delivery of commercial and community space and the creation of a new public realm through the garden lane and enhanced pedestrian crossings;
- there would be nearly £1 million in Section 106 contributions and 139% biodiversity net gain; and
- any identified heritage harm was more than outweighed by public benefits and supported granting planning permission.

Mr Roe responded to Members' questions as follows:

- there had been engagement with the University who supported the principle of city centre PBSA but did not endorse individual schemes;
- local market research indicated that there was a continued demand, including increasing interest from second and third-year students due to all-inclusive costs;
- national evidence showed that up to 35% of first-year students sought to remain in PBSA;
- the verified views had been re-checked given the objection outlined by Exeter Civic Society, but the design team was satisfied that they were accurate;
- consultants had re-checked the two disputed views and confirmed they were taken from correct locations;
- a wind assessment had been completed for ground-level and rooftop areas, and all conditions met required guidance - no operator would accept a scheme with significant wind issues;
- Garden Lane would improve pedestrian access and remove reliance on the existing unsafe informal crossing area;
- 160 cycle spaces would be provided and students would exit onto the existing road network, with cyclists able to walk their bikes through Garden Lane if needed;
- existing routes would remain available and Devon County Council had stated that the design prioritised safety, with the intention to make the route as safe

- as possible, but not preventing cyclists from using Garden Lane;
- the relevant six-storey element related only to the Clifton Hill view, which was a secondary cathedral view and a six-storey scheme would under-develop the site; and
- it was acknowledged that there would be some inevitable heritage harm for a city-centre development, but it was assessed as **less-than-substantial** and was outweighed by public benefits, consistent with national policy and was accepted by Historic England.

The Principal Project Manager (Development Management) [presented the application](#) for the demolition of an existing commercial building at Clarendon House, Western Way, and redevelopment of the site comprising student accommodation with associated amenity space (Sui Generis), flexible commercial floorspace (Use Class E) and/or community floorspace (Use Class F1/F2), public realm and landscaping works, cycle parking, refuse storage, access and servicing, and other associated works.

Members received a presentation which included the following information:

Explanation of the site and immediate area

- the application site included land not wholly owned by the applicant, which included the area with three trees and the land behind the advertising hoardings and bank structure;
- the additional areas of land were owned by ECC and had been incorporated following stakeholder feedback to allow for public realm improvements and delivery of the Garden Lane pedestrian route;
- the site was adjacent to the leisure centre, Vue cinema, hotel and church;
- an existing pedestrian route ran from Triangle Car Park to the city centre, with a pedestrian crossing slightly misaligned to the route and a separate cycle phase at traffic lights further north at the junction between Western Way and Summerland Street;
- a publicly accessible flight of steps also connected Heavitree Road down into the site area;
- the area included the remnants of the historic alignment of Paris Street, which was altered through post-war redevelopment and road realignment;
- the site sat at the lowest topographical point in the area, which was relevant to flood risk considerations;
- the existing building was a post-war structure of limited architectural quality, which was described as unattractive and no longer contributing positively to the townscape;
- there was a car parking beneath the building and service areas and the area also included underused leftover spaces;
- there was a currently a heavily used uncontrolled pedestrian crossing over Western Way which was noted as being difficult to cross due to high traffic volume;
- existing routes lacked clear prioritisation for pedestrians and cyclists and the area experienced high pedestrian movement between the car park and city centre;
- nearby heritage assets included a historic Grade II listed terrace on Heavitree Road, locally listed properties and some Grade II listed buildings as well as several Conservation Areas near the site; and
- the location was visible from key approaches including Denmark Road.

Explanation of the proposed development

- the proposed re-development would demolish the existing buildings to build Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA);
- the development included 297 student bed spaces, 134 studios and 163 bedrooms within 29 cluster flats (4–7 bedrooms each);
- there would be communal facilities and outdoor amenity spaces, cycle parking for 160+ cycles, and plant and servicing areas;
- the ground floor would include a 210 sqm commercial / community unit, designed to be a flexible lock-up unit, accessible from Heavitree Road;
- the development was up to 10 storeys in height and included new public realm through the 'Garden Lane' and associated off-site highway works;
- the building arrangement was two east–west blocks (northern block and southern block) linked by a lower connecting element with a roof terrace, forming a C- shape;
- the site had complex level changes, resulting in lower ground floor being below ground at the northern end and at street level at the southern end;
- the lower ground floor level would cater for refuse and recycling stores, plant rooms, laundry, staff facilities and cycle parking;
- a high-quality cycle access point was being provided which was equivalent in status to the pedestrian access, allowing cyclists to access the site from Garden Lane, adjacent to the main entrance;
- provisions would be made for shallow stairs and wheel ramps to allow bikes access to the ground level. Other provisions including lift access for cargo and non-standard bikes;
- ground floor student facilities included a reception area, staff office, quiet study spaces, dining and games rooms;
- the mezzanine and upper floor levels provided an additional floor of student accommodation in the southern part of the building and aligned with upper floors above the mezzanine level;
- studio units were indicated as dark orange on the plan and cluster flats were indicated as lighter orange;
- cluster flats were located at the south-eastern end of the building and included a communal kitchen-diner with windows overlooking Russell St (former Paris St) to the south east; this layout was replicated on floors 01-05
- communal kitchen-diners to the cluster flats also occupy the key corner locations facing the roundabout and main approaches ;
- communal spaces provided active frontages, surveillance, and lighting;
- cluster kitchens positioned at the building corners and ends and encouraged activity and lighting;
- glazing and activity was being provided over six storeys in key locations;
- the scheme includes four staircases, with two in each block, which reflected enhanced fire safety requirements for tall buildings classed as high-risk buildings;
- the development was subject to the Building Safety Act gateway process overseen by the Health and Safety Executive;
- fire safety requirements also necessitated having a large diesel backup generator on the ground floor level to provide emergency power for life-critical safety systems in the event of an incident;
- there would be 11 accessible studio units on the upper floors, with two per floor (floors 01-05) and one accessible unit on level 6;
- at level 6, the building begins to step back at the ends and with non-accessible green roofs;
- level 7 included a roof terrace, accessible from both north and south blocks;
- level 8 included additional bedrooms where terrace access was not required
- level 9 only contained accommodation within the northern block;
- there would be significant solar PV installation on the roof level, achieving a

capacity of 45 kwp, which was a 41% improvement over Part L Building Regulations;

- the proposal also included a connection to the Exeter District Energy Network as a condition requirement;
- the North elevation faced Garden Lane and showed the main entrance and cycle entrance points and promoted visibility for staircases and lifts to integrate cycling with the public realm;
- the East elevation faced the Triangle Car Park and included a secure courtyard garden at ground floor level elevated above Russell Street, with controlled access to ensure residents and the public were separated;
- windows on the East elevation provided natural surveillance over the car park;
- the materials would contain darker brickwork at lower levels, coloured reinforced concrete at mid-levels and lighter brickwork at upper levels;
- the South elevation facing Heavitree Road appeared more complex on the drawing due the road geometry;
- the ground levels dropped on this elevation towards the east while the plinth level remained consistent;
- the mezzanine accommodation would be located within the plinth and ground floor design as for commercial/community use;
- the west elevation faced the roundabout with the central section of the building designed distinctively to link the two tower elements;
- the window design and ventilation panels reinforced the perception of two volumes connected by a link, and high levels of glazing provided strong engagement with the public realm; and
- a condition was proposed to control the application of vinyl graphics to the windows to maintain transparency and activity.

Consultation responses and public representations:

- the update sheet advised that there were no objections from the Tree Manager and reaffirmed the objection from the Exeter Civic Society;
- a total of 21 representations across two consultation rounds had been received, which were 20 objections and one neutral representation; and
- of the 20 objections, three were from a Ward Councillor (Councillor Wetenhall), the Devon Buildings Group and Devon Archaeological Society. As such only 17 objections were received from the public.

Planning Assessment – Key Issues

- a key planning issue raised was on its principle use and the loss of the existing office and drop-in centre. Officers accepted that the building could be converted to residential under permitted development rights and an application was already before the LPA which was considered acceptable;
- conversion of the existing building would only result in 31 apartments, retention of the 40-space car park and no improvement to building appearance, which is an inefficient use of a key brownfield site;
- the proposal would align better with the Liveable Exeter principles and high-density development;
- officers considered the PBSA appropriate and acceptable for the site, which was at the edge of the city centre, near St. Luke's Campus with a public transport arrangements;
- although student numbers had declined in the last three years, and the 75% target for accommodating additional students in PBSA had been exceeded officers considered the 75% target as a minimum, rather than a cap and there was no policy requirement to demonstrate the need for PBSA, which was market led;

- students would be housed within a managed environment with on-site management during the day, out-of-hours security and access to a 24/7 help desk;
- Section 106 obligations would also restrict student car ownership and ensure there was suitable refuse storage;
- on-site facilities supported student wellbeing and pastoral care and there would be minimal impact on neighbouring residents;
- based on the government housing test methodology of 2.4 students per dwelling), housing 297 students would need 100+ general housing units and therefore PBSA supported the reduction in HMO use;
- the scheme would be adaptable should student demand change to convert rooms into alternative residential units – a condition on the application was recommended to ensure adaptability;
- officers considered the commercial and community use of the site to be acceptable in principle and the proposed permission provided greater flexibility for a range of commercial uses to maximise occupation potential;
- analysis reported on the update sheet confirmed that the site was not suitable for retail shops and a proposed condition would allow commercial use with the exception for retail shops;
- the site was affected by heritage constraints, which included the Grade I Cathedral, numerous listed buildings, locally listed buildings and conservation areas;
- any impact on views of the Cathedral could be considered a heritage as well as townscape harm;
- a key element of the townscape analyses was to consider other landmarks in the area such as church spires;
- special regard was needed to statutory duties under Sections 16, 66 & 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act and case law required considerable importance and weight be given to heritage harm in decision-making;
- the site was located in a topographical dip, reducing townscape impacts;
- the proposed 10-storey building had been reduced from 20-storeys following analysis and the presentation highlighted the comparable heights with other buildings including the Depot and the Cathedral, and highlighted that the proposal was more than 10m lower than the John Lewis building;
- the presentation outlined the zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) analysis undertaken;
- the Townscape and Heritage Visual Impact Assessment had assessed more than 16 views, but only three of these views necessitate detailed study as a result of landscape and townscape harm. These were Clifton Hill, Dunsford Road and Barley Mow Nature Reserve;
- views from Clifton Hill impact on the view from outside Grade II listed buildings and were within the Belmont conservation area;
- details of the summer and winter views had been undertaken, and officers commented on the degree to which trees and one-way traffic should be taken into account. Officers had concluded there would be some heritage harm, but was less than substantial harm;
- to preserve the Clifton Hill view of the Cathedral, the building would need to be reduced by approximately four storeys and significant height reduction would conflict with city centre gateway and living in the city principles;
- the view from the Barley Valley Nature Reserve was identified as a landscape rather than a heritage impact and the Urban design and landscape officer identified it as having a very minor landscape impact (due to a slight erosion of the strength of the band of trees);
- the Dunsford Road view was one of the four most important approaches to the city and a historically significant route into Exeter;

- the views showed the Cathedral silhouette remaining visually dominant albeit that the proposed building was visible in a limited area of the skyline;
- Historic England had raised a concern about coalescence with the Cathedral silhouette;
- material changes had been explored to increase visual distinction but had been rejected as they would potentially cause greater harm elsewhere;
- officers considered that the distance between the two building and differing their orientation reduced the risk of visual merging/coalescence as they would reflect light differently. However, officers acknowledged some minor harm to the Cathedral setting which was assessed as less than substantial;
- the view from the Heavitree Road Approach showed that the Cathedral view was not affected and the building would be partly screened by vegetation;
- some minor harm to the setting of adjacent listed buildings was acknowledged due to the change in scale but was considered less than substantial harm;
- the view from Paris Street showed the building did not appear out of character in scale and was comparable to other taller nearby buildings;
- the scheme had been subject to three sessions with the Exeter Design Review Panel (as clarified on update sheet) and extensive engagement with officers, Historic England, and the Planning Member Working Group;
- through design review by officers and the EDRP, the design had evolved to reflect Exeter's local distinctiveness and architects had provided clear rationale for design decisions;
- the design approach & architectural principles responded to verticality and rhythm of historic streets and varied historic plot widths;
- brick tones had been selected following analysis of local materials, city walls, and stone;
- there would be lighter brick tone on the upper levels and decorative brickwork inspired by local precedents, and the use of off-site manufactured brick-faced concrete panels for the majority of façade panels would ensure quality control;
- all final materials and detailing were subject to planning conditions;
- aerial views demonstrated the material tones and how they related to surrounding areas, including Newtown;
- material tones had been selected to reflect colours found across the city;
- Historic England had suggested using darker top-floor materials, however, officers concluded lighter brick for those upper levels was preferable;
- following officer and RSPB advice, swift boxes had increased from 6 to 24 and was secured by a condition;
- two bat boxes would be integrated at lower façade level
- proposed additional planting included a pavement level planting strip along the frontage, planting in Garden Lane, green roofs and terrace planting;
- the development would achieve a 139% biodiversity net gain (as clarified on the update sheet);
- no concerns had been raised from officers regarding student welfare or amenity;
- the smallest studio rooms would be 18sqm, access to communal areas and the regular bedrooms would be 13sqm, with full access shared kitchen facilities, but unit sizes would vary by cluster size;
- ground floor communal spaces included study areas, a gym, pastoral care rooms and spaces for external support services;
- there would be access controls throughout building, which would be secured in the management plan as well as through a condition;
- the ground floor courtyard would include an outdoor gym, table tennis, seating, and planting areas;
- the roof terrace would provide city views, social and quiet seating areas;
- the roof terrace was expected to receive more sunlight than the courtyard with

access managed through the management plan, with no proposed time restrictions on use;

- the Garden Lane landscape and public realm was proposed to be managed privately with a management plan requirement as a condition of the S106;
- the shared surface design intended to manage pedestrian/cycle interaction and included retaining one existing tree, planting three additional trees, and providing a defined pedestrian route;
- cyclists would be expected to use the space considerably due to the layout but the nearby alternative signed cycle route would still be available;
- external improvements included visitor cycle parking and a space for a future e-bike city rental scheme safeguarded through the S106 agreement;
- proposed public realm enhancements included high-quality landscaping, planters, and alignment with a new pedestrian crossing, which were considered to be a major public benefit of the scheme;
- there was a proposal to remove the existing council-owned advertising hoarding, on the opposite side of the building, which would be secured by a condition;
- the removal would reveal the existing mural on the listed terrace and improve visual activity and landscaping;
- there was also a proposal to plant two trees in the footway, subject to highway authority agreement;
- the site was at risk of surface water flooding, due to being at the lowest point in the area;
- surface water could pool up to 4m in depth if the upstream drainage system were overwhelmed;
- proposed conditions would secure flood protection measures for the ground floor plant areas, flood resilience measures for the commercial unit and a flood evacuation plan for residents;
- transport and pedestrian improvements included a proposal to relocate the existing signalised pedestrian crossing over Western Way, and narrowing the two traffic lanes on the Cheeke Street arm of the roundabout into one lane and enlarging the central island for safer pedestrian crossing;
- the new crossing to improve pedestrian safety would support the Council's active travel priorities;
- a transport assessment indicated that without mitigation the changes would create 1–1.5 minute additional delay at morning peak (southbound on Western Way) but with the lane priority changes, the delay would be reduced to under 30 seconds, which was considered acceptable;
- it was acknowledged there were some negative impacts alongside significant benefits, but the heritage assessment confirmed there was less than substantial harm, which was agreed by consultees and Historic England);
- under NPPF provisions, harm needed to be weighed against public benefits;
- the heritage harm and outlined the public benefits to be weighed against it as follows:
 - the scheme would give rise to less than substantial harm to the setting of the Cathedral and Eaton Place; and to the character and appearance of the Lower Summerland's and Belmont conservation areas (all consultees had agreed that the harm was less than substantial);
- public benefits associated with the proposed use included:
 - 297 purpose-built student bed spaces, including 11 accessible studios;
 - the potential to reduce pressure on HMOs and release housing back to general/family use;
 - contribute towards the housing supply target;

- providing commercial and community floorspace for economic and community benefits;
- increased city centre footfall and spending; and
- creation of operational and construction jobs.
- public benefits associated with regeneration & public realm included:
 - replacing an existing poor quality building with a high quality design reflecting local materials and detailing;
 - an enhanced city centre gateway;
 - the creation of Garden Lane as new public route and space;
 - removing the billboard, and revealing the mural to improve heritage setting;
 - providing a direct pedestrian route from the Triangle car park to city centre;
 - footpath upgrades;
 - improved pedestrian crossings; and
 - contributions toward Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plan.
- public benefits associated with environmental and technical aspects of the development included:
 - reducing surface water runoff to greenfield rates,
 - replacing the existing building with a new one meeting BREEAM excellent standards and including a connection to the district heat network,
 - 139% biodiversity net gain;
- with reference to the update sheet, that although there would be financial contributions to green space, primary healthcare and other services, as these are necessary to mitigate the development's impacts, they should not be weighed as public benefits against heritage harm.

Planning Assessment – Heritage and Planning Balance

- having weighed the public benefits against the identified heritage harm in accordance with paragraph 215 of the NPPF, officers conclude that the public benefits outweigh the identified heritage harm, and as such officers recommend approval; and
- in addition, although officers do not consider their recommendation to rely on this, the council cannot currently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply and the development would contribute the equivalent of 202 homes towards the Council's housing supply target.

Recommendation

- the officer recommendation was to approve subject to completion of Section 106 agreement and planning conditions and if the Section 106 was not completed within six months, to give delegated authority to refuse permission;

The Principal Project Manager - Development Management, Strategic Director for Place and the Devon County Council Highways Officer responded to Member questions and clarification points as follows:-

- the modern design approach for the Garden Lane would influence behaviour through its layout and design rather than require signs for cyclists - it was expected that the space would naturally reduce speed and encourage considerate cycling, but discreet signage could be incorporated if the committee requested it (similar dismount signage was already used in other locations);

- all heritage consultees including Historic England had agreed that harm was less than substantial;
- for less than substantial harm, the NPPF (paragraph 215) required balancing exercise to weigh public benefits against identified harm;
- the test of wholly exceptional benefits applied only where harm is substantial or where there would be a total loss/demolition of a heritage asset (NPPF paragraph 213);
- Historic England had been involved throughout the process and although they had raised concerns they had not raised any formal objection to the application, indicating the harm was not considered substantial;
- officers and technical experts had concluded the harm was minimal (less than substantial), not excessive and was outweighed by public benefits the application offered;
- condition 25 required details of e-bike charging facilities be included as part of cycle parking provisions, and had been agreed with applicant;
- the current crossing of Western Way adjacent the site was uncontrolled and closer to the roundabout exit, creating unpredictable stopping issues;
- the proposed crossing would provide control and would be moved 20m further back with a reduced crossing width from three lanes to two, improving safety and traffic flow;
- transport assessment modelling showed queuing would be within acceptable limits and the Highways Authority had raised no objections;
- the controlled crossing would improve safety compared to current uncontrolled arrangement and by moving the crossing further back from the roundabout exit, driver visibility and reaction time will be greatly improved;
- the reduction to two lanes and reinstating full kerb heights in the position of the existing uncontrolled crossing would also discourage informal crossings by students;
- currently the property was used as an office with 40 parking spaces which could lawfully generate a substantial number of peak vehicle trips if fully occupied;
- the proposed development provided no general car parking with only two off-site disabled spaces, which would reduce the number of potential vehicle trips compared to its current use;
- the inspector's comments made as part of the Heavitree police station application appeal were site-specific, but officers agreed as part of the recent application that the Police station site should not be treated as a City Centre gateway; however, the Clarendon House site was considered the appropriate gateway location to the city centre (and the emerging Local Plan Eastgate policy identifies it as such);
- the term gateway did not necessarily mean tall buildings as prominence can be achieved through materials and design as it is for St Sidwell's Point Leisure Centre; however, the height and massing was considered appropriate in this case;
- the application was the first Eastgate allocation application and future proposals would be assessed in the context of any approved schemes (cumulative impacts from other sites would be considered as future applications came forward);
- it was very important that the Planning Committee did not try to second-guess market demand (for student accommodation), which was a commercial matter for the developer only rather than Councillors;
- planning decisions should only focus on impact of the land use, such as concentration, imbalance and amenities;
- the site was in the city centre, where student accommodation was considered appropriate and as such was not creating imbalance;
- university growth plans could support future demand, but demand itself was

not a material planning consideration and if the developer misjudged the demand, that would be their commercial risk;

- there was no significant overshadowing or loss of light impacts identified on the adjacent buildings;
- there were limited nearby residential properties in locations that could be subject to overshadowing,
- the roof terrace would ensure good sunlight/amenity for residents;
- the primary assessments had focused on cathedral views, but there was a minor secondary impact noted on the tree belt in distant view from Barley Valley Nature Reserve;
- officers had no concerns about impacts on strategic skyline views or important long-distance views from the city centre outwards to the countryside, and the site being in a dip, limited its wider visual impacts;
- Western Way acted as a feeder route to Exeter Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) routes which included E3 and E9 routes;
- improved crossings would support access to those strategic routes and students were likely to travel toward university campuses, using existing routes;
- off-site highways works would be delivered directly by developer (controlled by relevant agreements under the Highways Act which they would first need to secure), with an additional financial contribution secured via S106 to fund wider LCWIP improvements across the network;
- the image on page 36 of the presentation showing the cyclist crossing the end of Western Way was a future illustrative design view rather than the existing infrastructure – officers confirmed that cyclists are not currently able to cross at this location due to the guard rails;
- the purpose of the parapet around the top of the two towers was intended to help the building meet the skyline appropriately - it would be an open structure, which visually lightens the roofline to avoid an abrupt finish to the building;
- the overall position on housing land supply will fluctuate – whilst the granting of new planning permissions would increase this, other unimplemented permissions may also lapse. The Heavitree police station scheme had not yet been formally consented pending the Section 106, so it may not yet count fully toward supply at the current time;
- the proposed building height was almost identical to depot with about a 3cm difference between them, but the roofscapes would appear effectively level;
- the detailed design elements presented reflected the intended final outcome;
- there was a higher level of architectural detailing compared to some nearby buildings and the materials would be carefully controlled to secure quality finish;
- officers were confident the scheme would deliver a richer, more articulated façade rather than a plain building;
- the layout for Garden Lane formed part of the drawings for approval. Officers considered the current design to be strong and well considered; amendments could be explored if the Planning Committee considered them necessary, but officers did not currently identify any issues;
- architects had looked at including a ramp at the Paris Street steps but any compliant ramp was likely to need to be very long resulting in a large and potentially unattractive structure - the option had been explored with applicant, but with the delivery of Garden Lane, a step-free alternative route would be available nearby; officers considered retaining the steps to be acceptable given the proposed alternative accessible route;
- officers' assessments concluded that the roof terrace would receive meaningful sunlight, particularly in the mornings and during summer when sun is higher; some overshadowing issues were acknowledged, but it wouldn't be to the extent that space would be unattractive; wind assessments had been

undertaken and findings indicated that the wind conditions would be acceptable;

- condition 17 required the submission of a detailed hard and soft landscaping scheme and additional wording could be included to the reason for this condition to ensure the design addresses safe pedestrian and cycle movements (no amendment was required to the resolution for this minor change).

The meeting was briefly adjourned at 20:14 and resumed at 20:22.

During debate, Members expressed the following views:-

- benefits of the scheme included improved movement around the site, which was important due to the gateway location and use by cars, pedestrians, and cyclists;
- other benefits included the creations of jobs and housing, but those weren't unique to this scheme;
- concerns included heritage impacts and building massing, notably on the immediate streetscape;
- comparisons were made with the nearby Depot building, notably being imposing, blocky, and being pressed against the street;
- this scheme had some merits, including better detailing than early designs, but could benefit from more sensitive massing and enhanced heritage-sensitive design;
- the creation of Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) would help reduce HMOs for residential use;
- adaptable units allowed potential future reconfiguration for other uses;
- the scheme aligned with the Eastgate City Centre Gateway design policies;
- the improvements to pedestrian crossings, green amenity space, cycling provision, and CIL/S106 contributions were commended;
- heritage harms appeared to be limited due to building being in a dip with only short sections of Clifton Hill views affected;
- the building connecting to the district heat network would help achieve green sustainability standards;
- the scheme being commercial was noted and the gateway location and longer term impacts were highlighted, given the building would be present for a generation;
- concerns were raised about massing and density relative to the site and junction capacity;
- the area was in an Article 4 area for HMOs which already had a high student concentration and the community balance argument was now largely lost;
- despite peripheral gains for the crossings and amenity improvements there were subsidiary issues relating to massing and density;
- the developers response to Planning Member Working Group feedback was commended;
- the scheme was significantly improved from the originally submitted plans;
- planners could adjust Garden Lane as required without adding any additional conditions to do so;
- the design was considered sensitive for its size, and reflected the surrounding brickwork and building curvature;
- despite being tall and high-density, there were no material reasons to refuse;
- despite concerns about potential oversupply of PBSA, officer advice was accepted that this was not material;
- heritage concerns were less significant after viewing images from various sites;
- crossing improvements were welcomed, though some reservations remained

- about roundabout capacity;
- the massing appeared large and a potential reduction of one or two floors was suggested;
- design improvements since the first submission were commended, notably the reduction in size from 20 storeys;
- the curvature and design reflected the surrounding area;
- the Garden Lane access, if implemented properly would remove the need for any cycling signs;
- the current massing is the best that could be achieved and further reductions were unlikely;
- despite acknowledging improvements over earlier design, this was an opportunity to get the building right, especially given the site is a gateway; and
- the current building was lower than the proposed central block and that the proposed scheme would be significantly larger.

In responding to a Members enquiry, the Principal Project Manager - Development Management, advised in relation to archaeology and wartime munitions concerns that risk of unexploded ordnance (UXO) was minimal due to existing basement construction and archaeology focused on the former burial site, which evidence suggested has already been deconsecrated. The UXO matter would be best addressed through a developer informative, rather than formal conditions.

The Strategic Director for Place made the following concluding points:

- the site was a strategically important gateway in the city centre, part of the Grecian Quarter in the emerging City Centre strategy;
- as a gateway, it required a substantial building to mark the location and make a statement;
- the site was part of the Eastgate allocation in the draft Exeter Plan as part of the Eastgate Liveable Exeter site which aimed to regenerate a tired city area into a high-quality, low-car neighbourhood;
- a building height study for the local plan identified the site as being suitable for a tall building, up to 10 storeys;
- approving shorter buildings, such as 6 storeys could conflict with the Local Plan objectives and limit regeneration opportunities;
- the site topography allowed the building to be memorable without overwhelming nearby structures;
- the team had been working collaboratively with architects since 2023, with the scheme undergoing extensive revisions and consultation;
- engagement included: two rounds of public consultation, three Design Review Panel reviews, three Planning Member Working Group reviews and input from Historic England;
- significant design changes included a reduction in height from 20 storeys to 10 and similar reductions elsewhere;
- the design process demonstrated care, technical precision, and responsiveness to heritage concerns;
- there had been a low number of objections, and notably Historic England had not objected though they had raised minor concerns;
- the heritage impact was a key determining factor and expert consensus was that the overall harm was less than substantial;
- officers described the harm as being generally minor, affecting only two views: at Dunsford Road (historically significant) and Clifton Hill (not historically significant);
- limiting the building height to less than 6 storeys, would undermine regeneration and viability;

- approving the scheme supported tall building ambitions in the city centre and refusal could set a restrictive precedent, hindering future development;
- benefits of the scheme included:
 - transforming a poor-quality site into a high-quality student accommodation, minimising impacts on the existing community;
 - the creation of a new street, linking into the city centre and the Newtown scheme;
 - high-quality landscaping and public realm improvements, including Garden Lane linking Triangle Car Park to city centre and the relocated signalised pedestrian crossing improving safety;
 - design quality which enhances the cityscape and provides a positive gateway impression; and
 - supports local plan housing targets and regeneration objectives;
- there was a potential risk of appeal if refused, reinforcing the importance of the tilted balanced;
- the development counted towards the Exeter Plan housing numbers, which was important given the forthcoming Local Plan hearings;
- student accommodation was appropriately located in the city centre and overconcentration was not considered a concern;
- future market demand for PBSA was not a relevant planning consideration;
- officers had presented compelling reasons to support the scheme, which had been carefully designed and technically assessed; and
- the development was expected to provide significant benefits for Exeter if approved.

The Chair moved, and Councillor Rolstone seconded the recommendation

It was proposed by Councillor Atkinson and seconded by Councillor Mitchell that the following amendment be made to the motion as follows:

- to defer the application to allow further discussions with the developer regarding reducing height and massing.

The Strategic Director of Place advised Members that the proposal constituted an amendment and required a vote. If carried, the application would be deferred and if not, the Planning committee would return to the original officer recommendation. He highlighted that each application must be considered on its own merits.

The Principal Project Manager - Development Management, advised Members that the application was currently beyond the target determination period and that while cooperation with the applicant had been positive, there was a risk of non-determination if it was deferred.

During the debate on the amendment, the following points were made:

- extensive design review process had already been undertaken and there was no material planning grounds to justify deferral;
- the Planning committee should not delay unnecessarily;
- previous major applications were referenced where refusal or deferral had occurred;
- it was important for the Planning Committee to get the decision right for a major gateway development;
- the committee's role was to represent community concerns; and
- deferral would provide an opportunity to address outstanding issues, even if

developer ultimately pursued non-determination.

Councillor Atkinson as the mover of the amendment made the following points:

- additional issues raised during debate, particularly relating to cycling and other design matters were noted;
- the developer's presentation was positive and responsive; however, some questions were not fully answered; and
- a deferral would provide an opportunity for further discussion with the developer to clarify outstanding matters and return with fuller responses.

On being put to the vote, the amendment to defer the motion was NOT CARRIED (4 in favour, 5 against and 1 abstention).

The Chair returned to the substantive motion to approve the application as recommended and on being put to the vote, was CARRIED (6 in favour, 3 against and 1 abstention).

RESOLVED to delegate to the Head of Service (City Development) to GRANT permission subject to completion of a legal agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to secure the obligations and conditions as set out in the Planning Committee report and update sheet.

RESOLVED to REFUSE permission if the legal agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) is not completed within six months of the date of the meeting, or such extended time as agreed in writing by the Head of Service (City Development).

61

LIST OF DECISIONS MADE AND WITHDRAWN APPLICATIONS

The meeting was briefly adjourned at 21:01 and resumed at 21:03.

Chair invited questions or comments but none were raised.

The report of the Strategic Director for Place was noted.

62

APPEALS REPORT

A Member enquired whether the number of appeals listed was unusually high and asked if there had been a recent increase compared to typical levels?

The Strategic Director for Place advised he did not have the data to confirm but could review whether a pattern existed.

A Member clarified that many of the appeals related to the similar BT applications to remove phone boxes and install illuminated advertising panels. They had submitted separately due to different locations. The Strategic Director for Place advised that he was aware of these proposals and that they do need to be given careful consideration due to their size and prominence.

No further questions were raised and the report of the Strategic Director for Place was noted.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 9.07 pm)

Chair

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 11 February 2026

Present:-

Councillor Wardle (Chair)

Councillors Moore, Atkinson, Banyard, Begley, Holland, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, M, Palmer and Williams, M

Also Present

Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Head of Service - Finance, Head of Service - Customers and Communities and Democratic Services Officer

94

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the Chief Executive.

95

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 27 November 2025 were taken as read, approved, and signed by the Chair as correct.

Councillor Moore requested that the presentation on the Corporate Governance Risk Register given by Zurich on the 17th November be appended to the minutes.

96

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

97

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

The Head of Service – Customer and Communities presented the report, making the following points:

- these were all the complaints seen by the ombudsman in 2024/25;
- the Council had received eight complaints during that period, five were closed after inquiry, two were deemed not for the ombudsman and one was upheld; and
- the upheld complaint was regarding a fault in a planning report and it was concluded that the committee was not misled.

Councillor Knott, as the Chair of the Planning Committee provided clarification on the difference between gross and net hectarage.

The Head of Service – Customer and Communities and the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the results compared to previous years would be circulated after the meeting;
- after complaints are made there is liaison with the Heads of Service and any trends are highlighted;

- officers would look into the recording of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests;
- the internal auditors are aware of all complaints received via the council;
- complaints were generally referred to the ombudsman when the outcome is disagreed with; and
- the internal auditor took a very thorough approach to areas of non-compliance and Members would have the opportunity to review and challenge.

The Audit and Governance Committee noted the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review of Complaints.

98

EXTERNAL AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2024/25

The Audit Manager, Grant Thornton, presented the report, making the following points:

- work had been concluded and the audit opinion would be issued after the meeting;
- the 25/26 audit internal deadline was the end of November;
- there was nothing left outstanding that would prevent the issuing of the audit opinion;
- three super-user accounts had been identified with the ability to add and remove entries from the general ledger, it is recognised in a small authority that access may be necessary, but ideally it should be performed by the IT Department
- A journal authorisation threshold of £5,000 is in place, which is highlighted as a minor risk but with mitigating controls in place
- a significant amount of work was undertaken on the valuation of land and buildings;
- St Sidwell's Point had been revalued from £28.6 million to £40.6 million;
- The bus station valuation required a correction to the Gross Internal Area (GIA), resulting in a £3 million adjustment;
- there had been a £15 million adjustment overall in PPE;
- the pension fund estimation variance of £53 million equated to £1.4 million for the council and was below materiality, so was comfortable;
- for IFRS 16, issues identified were disclosure-related only, and had been corrected by management, there were no valuation concerns noted; and
- the red rating on page 50 was relating to the assessment of the draft accounts, which had been fully addressed in the final accounts and had been updated accordingly.

The Audit Manager, and the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the valuation of council dwellings was done by an external valuer, any increase in value would be included in the valuation;
- re-evaluation work had been carried out by Bruton Knowles and taken into account;
- all journals should be reviewed, but the council had a reasonable limit to not do so;
- solar panels were put up as part of the capital program, they had been borrowed for but there was not a physical loan;
- the solar panels had been given a 50-year warranty, but this needed adjusting as solar panels did not have a 50-year life span;
- there were 2 dwellings that did not have a beacon assigned;
- materiality was based on risk;
- LGR was considered as part of planning and was considered in audit plan

- for 25/26;
- the contract with Bruton Knowles was being overseen by the Estates Team;
- the council had a range of policies which could be challenged by the committee; and
- the worth per square meter of St Sidwell's Point was increased due to the Passivhaus status which made a huge difference in value.

The Audit and Governance Committee noted the External Audit Findings Report.

99

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2024/25

The Accountancy Services Manager presented the report making the following points:

- there had been changes to the account to reflect the value of bus station and St Sidwells' Point;
- the statement of accounts was to be approved by the Audit and Governance committee and the electronic signature of both the Chair, and the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources be added; and
- the Letter of Representation was required to be issued to the auditors.

The Strategic Director of Corporate Resources proposed an amendment to the recommendations, "It is recommended that the Audit and Governance Committee approve the Statement of Accounts 24/25 and grant approval for the use of the relevant electronic signatures."

The Strategic Director of Corporate Resources and the Head of Finance responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- a loan had been taken out for £36 million but this was for both St Sidwell's Point, and other capital investments
- the terminology used in relation to related parties could not be changed as prescribed by the accounting code of practice; and
- it was based on the code of practice and supported by international reporting standards and their statutory guidance.

Following a unanimous vote, the amended recommendations were CARRIED.

100

MANAGEMENT LETTER OF REPRESENTATION

The Accountancy Services Manager had already presented this item to the Committee when introducing the previous item.

The Chair agreed to signed the Management Letter of Presentation.

The Strategic Director of Corporate Resources thanked the Finance Team and the officers that had supported them, as well as Grant Thornton for the extraordinary effort from both parties, and the Committee endorsed this.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.22 pm)

Chair

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LICENSING COMMITTEE

26 February 2026

Present:

Councillor Martyn Snow (Chair)
Councillors Bennett, Darling, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Mitchell, K and Williams, R, and Wood.

Apologies:

Councillors Begley, Banyard and Parkhouse

Also present:

Head of Service - Environment and Waste, Legal Advisor, Apprentice Solicitor, Principal Licensing Officer, Licensing Officer and Democratic Services Officer

13 **Apologies**

Apologies had been received from Councillors Begley, Banyard, and Parkhouse.

Councillor Wood was present as a substitute for Councillor Begley.

14 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2026 were taken as read, approved, and signed by the Chair as correct following the correction of a spelling mistake.

15 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT 1982

16 **Application for the Renewal of a Sex Shop Licence**

The Chair introduced the Officers and Members to the Applicant.

The Legal Advisor introduced the proceedings and outlined the procedure for the meeting.

The Legal Advisor advised Members that a late representation had been received and it was necessary to determine if this would be accepted.

The Applicant confirmed there was no objection to submitting the late representation and following a unanimous vote, it was confirmed that the late representation could be considered when determining the application.

The Principal Licensing Officer presented the report making the following points:

- the Council had adopted the current Sex Establishments Licensing Policy in 2013;
- the policy set out that Sidwell Street and Fore Street were the only locations a sex shop licence could be considered;
- there was a slight variation with the opening hours, with an intention to open an hour later in the morning;

- adverts had been placed on the shop front and within the newspaper;
- four objections had been received within the statutory 28 day period, with 2 being rescinded;
- compliance visits to the premises had found it to be well-managed and fully compliant with the conditions of the current licence; and
- the policy was in the report.

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

- 'Prowler' were a well-known brand name in the gay community;
- the EQIA indicated a positive impact on sex and gender as the presence of a sex shop in the area was empowering to its users; and
- Simply Pleasure had had their licence in the current location for 19 years, and in Verney Street before that.

The Applicant spoke on behalf of their application making the following points:

- they had complied with been doing the licence renewal process for almost 20 years;
- they were committed to working to the conditions of their licence and Officers had never had any cause to raise concern;
- local people were employed in the shop;
- the sales assistants were exceptional and often gave advice to customers coming to shop in-store;
- there had been no considerable change to the local area in the last 12 months;
- a strict challenge 25 policy was in place, and they only accepted recognised identification documents;
- this was the only sex shop in this area;
- the majority of residents in this area university students over the age of 18;
- there was no involvement with nightclubs and the doors closed at 18:00;
- the statistics raised on the representation had no correlation with the store;
- they had not joined the SWAN (Safety of Women at Night) Charter, as the store closed at 18:00; and
- they had never had a licence renewal refused.

In response to Members questions the Applicant responded in the following terms:

- the only reported incidents at the premises related to shoplifting and refusal of entry for people that did not have ID;
- incidents were recorded in a shared file to enable the identification of patterns across stores;
- other Simply Pleasure stores advertised the Prowler brand as well as their being stand-alone Prowler stores; and
- this application had been picked up by a local newspaper and despite having over 200 comments, there were no negative comments regarding this application.

The Head of Service – Environment and Waste advised Members that he had been overseeing licensing since 2013 and there had never been an issue with this premises. He had only attended once following an issue with the bin.

The Licensing Officers had always had a good response to applications with timely dialogue. The last time Simply Pleasure had appeared at committee was regarding the window display.

RESOLVED that the sex shop licence be renewed subject to the existing conditions as specified on the Licence and set out in the Council's Sex Establishment Policy. The Chair noted that the licence had been renewed because the premises was professionally operated in compliance with the licence conditions and whilst representations had been made there was insufficient evidence to make the Licensing Committee consider refusing or adding any additional conditions to the Licence.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.28 pm

Chair

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STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 March 2026

Present:

Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, K, Atkinson, Haigh, Harding, Miller-Boam, Moore, Payne, Rolstone and Wetenhall

Apologies:

Councillors Williams, M

Also present:

Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero, Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero and Democratic Services Manager

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Vizard, Wood and Williams, R.

36 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2026 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

Queries were raised regarding follow-up not yet received to supplementary questions on Minute No. 30. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to follow this up. The Chair clarified that the person offering a response would be responsible for providing such.

37 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

There were no questions submitted by the public.

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

There were no questions submitted by Members of the Council.

40 **Portfolio Holder report - Councillor Wood**

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services and Healthy Living, Councillor Wood, presented his report drawing attention to the following points:

- statistics showed that leisure services were delivering to expectations; and
- indications of the sort of work being carried out and wider projects being delivered were contained within the report, including extending active travel opportunities.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the live link to Live and Move gave further detail and there were filter options on the landing page where data could be interrogated by area as well as other factors;

- physical activity hadn't recovered from the pandemic drop;
- the number of visits to St Sidwell's Point was 1.8million since it opened and 200,000 transactions in the cafe;
- he agreed that there was an error on page 19 in that the path in Newtown *would* be altered as there would be a change of desire line with new buildings planned;
- the City Sisters project was related to the This Girl Can national programme which recognised girls as statistically a group who required to be engaged with around physical activity and this was based at the Wonford centre but could be spread across other projects as demand had outstripped capacity;
- with regard to the timeline for Riverside solar panel installations, it was necessary to manage impact on users of works being carried out. The building was in three modules with two parts having already had roofs replaced and this work would complete the project. Careful plans were being put in place to minimise impact on centre users;
- work on Governance arrangements for the Wonford Hub were ongoing but he was not involved directly. There had been discussions regarding involvement of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector as well as community leadership and associated capacity. Regarding clarity around the commitment required for the Wonford Hub the councillor could email him and he would raise with the appropriate officer. Planning permission had been gained and more detail would be available in due course;
- his understanding was that once capital spend was committed it would continue through the LGR process. There wasn't a contractor on-site at Wonford yet as funding wasn't entirely secured. The project may not be completed whilst Exeter City Council existed but it would be underway;
- recruitment was challenging but rates of pay and terms and conditions were favourable at the council but there was a limited pool of staff and often students took on roles and they may not remain in the city once their studies were complete;
- the steering group for King George V had the football foundation involved who had presented explanations of the difficulties with some types of infill;
- Exeter City Community Trust(ECCT) would be taking on the Council's role of managing the site, overseeing current use and managing use during the works;
- ECCT would not have sole use, licensing of the space meant that teams would know what would be available to them when they booked;
- Playzones were Football Foundation funded programmes which provided new and outdoor mini-pitches for football and outdoor multi-use areas for activities;
- statistics had been collected when Northbrook was open and all of the user organisations had been successfully moved into either St Sidwell's Point or Riverside.

The Chair clarified that the Live and Move report coming to the committee in June would be better placed to give details of the timeline and fundraising situation for the Wonford Hub and that this was a high-level Portfolio Holder report rather than a detailed operational report.

The moved, seconded by Councillor Miller-Boam, that the committee note the report which following a unanimous vote was **CARRIED**.

41 **City Wide Net Zero**

The Head of Service City Centre and Net Zero and Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero presented the report drawing attention to:

- the greenhouse gas inventory from the university which was appended;
- the Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero had undertaken stakeholder engagement across the city which focussed on nature and biodiversity as well as energy. There would be further engagement later in the month, focussing on circular economy, waste and recycling;
- an application had been submitted for Nature Towns and Cities accreditation;
- a survey called Wild Exeter was live and she encouraged members' to share this widely;
- GWR funding had supported travel by train and use of the Green Circle;
- there was ongoing work with Exeter Community Energy;
- she was the main contact for heat network;
- the staff travel survey had consistent questions in order to benchmark in future;
- work was ongoing with Devon County Council on residential EV charging;
- Stagecoach electric buses would be rolled out soon as the infrastructure was installed; and
- there was a focus on three main emissions sectors for carbon reduction, buildings, transport and power.

The Head of Service City Centre and Net Zero and Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- grid decarbonisation had the biggest impact nationally which was not the Council's input;
- the biggest impact would be in changes around transport and buildings;
- she would speak to Devon County Council about what other activities they had planned;
- the 6 solar sites were not included as they were corporate, which would be discussed at Executive next week;
- some of the planned sites required enabling works such as resurfacing of a car park;
- had met Exeter Community Energy (ECO) and brainstormed, further information would be included in the next report;
- the Civic University Agreement was a university-led group therefore the university would need to be approached with the request for minutes;
- the council now had direct officer links to the national grid to discuss capacity. there were continued discussion about what improvements were required and there had been no issues connecting recently; and
- residents should use the email on social media with regard to the Great British Spring Clean.

The Portfolio Holder Climate, Ecological Change & Communities responded to Members' question in the following terms:

- the department for Transport had announced a £73.2million across the UK for electrification of buses and £7.53million would come to Devon and 100% would be buses in Exeter;
- HATOC was the best place to feed in information from residents and he invited the Chair to put information in writing and he would take to the Devon Bus Forum which he sat on;
- at Water Lane, for example, a district heat network was a possibility;
- discussions had taken place about doughnut economics and he was open to hearing more but had no particular expectation at present;
- from a tour of the Viridor plant run by Devon County Council showed keenness; and

- the district heat network was not a city council-led scheme but there was a further planning application to come forward for redesign of the energy centre but any concerns could be sent to him to discuss with officers.

The Portfolio Holder for City Management, Councillor Ruth Williams, was invited to the table by the Chair to respond to questions regarding waste, greenhouse gas emission and the incinerator.

Councillor Williams responded making the following points:

- DCC was the responsible waste disposal authority;
- the incinerator had a community liaison group where she had asked what plans there were for carbon capture;
- when separating recycling a proportion was lost and “leave loose” education continued to be given;
- investment in a new plant would increase efficiency in capture and acceptance meaning less incinerating in future;
- Denis was excellent and the envy of other districts but there was more could be done. Food waste had now been rolled out;
- there was a contamination issue with separate on-street litter bins but these would be trialled at the Quay;
- Viridor seemed positive at a previous Strategic Waste Committee meeting.

The Chair moved the recommendations as set out in the report, seconded by Councillor Payne, and it was agreed that the words “and officers note discussion this evening and request that further detail on impact and outcomes be considered” be added and following a unanimous vote was **CARRIED**.

42 **Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan**

Members commented on the work plan.

The Chair stated that the Air Quality item would be added to the plan for June 2026.

Members noted the Council’s Forward Plan and draft Scrutiny Work Plan.

Following a unanimous vote the draft Scrutiny Work Plan as amended was **AGREED**.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.15 pm

Chair

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 17 March 2026

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

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

Also present:

Councillor Haigh (as an opposition group Leader);

Councillor Holland (as an opposition group Leader);

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

Councillor Moore (as an opposition group Leader); and

Councillor Payne (as an opposition group Leader).

Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Place, Head of Service - Finance, Head of Service - HR, Workforce Planning and Organisational Development, Benefits & Welfare Lead, Head of Service - Customers and Communities, Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer

112

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2025, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

113

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

114

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 19

No questions from members of the public were received.

115

MATTERS REFERRED BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were no matters referred from the Scrutiny Committees for this meeting.

116

LORD MAYORALTY

The Leader proposed, and Councillor Wright seconded, that Councillor Gemma Rolstone be nominated as Lord Mayor Elect for the 2026/27 Municipal Council year, and that Councillor Lucy Haigh be nominated as the Deputy Lord Mayor Elect for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED that Councillor Gemma Rolstone be nominated as Lord Mayor Elect for the 2026/27 Municipal Year and that Councillor Lucy Haigh be nominated as the Deputy Lord Mayor Elect for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

117

EXETER CITY COUNCIL'S CARBON REDUCTION PLAN

The Executive received the report which summarised the Council's response to research undertaken by the University of Exeter, which for the first time estimated

the full cost of carbon emissions across its services. Using this, the Council had developed a carbon reduction plan. Particular points raised included:

- the plan showed positive current trajectory measures in line with the recommendations and included business as usual measures to reduce greenhouse emissions which had been built into all service delivery plans for all Council services;
- known costs, were included and each action had performance metrics for monitoring progress;
- additional mid-term and maximum scenario measures had been incorporated;
- some projects were currently unfunded but had been included to demonstrate ambitions, if funding became available;
- there were funding constraints highlighted as a key challenge to delivery;
- there were seven service areas covered, with housing, buildings, and transport identified as having the highest impact;
- the Carbon Action Plan would be a live document, which would be reviewed and updated every six months, with regular progress reports submitted to the Strategic Scrutiny Committee every six months, starting in June 2026; and
- numerous projects had already been completed or were underway, with a full list included in the report and appendix.

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

- the high-quality work undertaken was commended;
- the contribution of the South West Energy and Environment Group and partnerships with other local authorities was important;
- the report was pioneering in estimating Council-wide carbon impacts;
- the service-wide approach and inclusion of measurable metrics to track progress was welcomed;
- the range of projects underway, included the Riverside initiatives and retrofitting of Council properties were highlighted;
- the overall direction of travel, showed how the Council was on a positive trajectory;
- additional funding would be required to go further;
- further detail from Strategic Directors and Service Leads on funding challenges would be required for future projects;
- the Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities indicated his intention to engage with the local MP's and government ministers regarding funding opportunities, which would be carried forward as an action arising from the report;
- the report helped bridge the gap between ambition and delivery, providing a clear roadmap and outlined challenges;
- the Council had set a challenging target and was working towards it;
- the Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services & Healthy Living highlighted the progress made within the leisure portfolio, including St. Sidwell's Point which demonstrated strong carbon reduction performance;
- improvements at Riverside leisure centre, included energy efficiency works and an ongoing funded roof project and further opportunities, including heat recovery and solar panels were highlighted;
- upcoming works at Wonford were referenced and clarification was sought on associated environmental benefits and carbon savings;
- the Isca Centre was noted as a site with potential for future carbon reduction improvements;

- the report was clear, accessible, and a helpful summary of current and future actions;
- some items marked red including procurement data investigation could be reclassified as amber to better reflect progress;
- the impact assessment was commended for clearly highlighting positive benefits for residents and communities; and
- the importance of the plan's real-world benefits was highlighted, including reduced fuel bills, improved wellbeing, and better health outcomes for residents.

The Leader noted importance of wider assets and referenced risks seen elsewhere, such as Councils considering museum closures. He highlighted the alignment with the corporate plan and planning policy, particularly around housing retrofitting and welcomed the local development of 92 homes with 35% affordable housing using heat source systems instead of gas.

In response to questions raised by Executive Members, the Strategic Director for Place advised that:

- an example of a cost challenge would be in fully converting all Council homes from gas boilers to air source heat pumps (maximum scenario) would cost approximately £51 million;
- this transition would significantly reduce carbon emissions but could increase short-term energy costs for residents;
- the long-term ambition was for more sustainable and ultimately cost-effective heating solutions;
- the benefits of external funding, citing Riverside as an example was where government funding enabled roof replacement and installation of solar panels;
- the importance of identifying and bidding for available funding opportunities was highlighted;
- the carbon reduction measures would be considered in all future capital projects, including Wonford, with further details coming in a forthcoming Council report;
- he clarified that "red" ratings in the action plan indicated areas where work had not yet started, rather than severity or cost; and
- explained the RAG colour coding system: Red = not yet started, Amber = in progress, and Green = completed.

An opposition group leader raised the following points and questions:

- welcomed the report as helpful and informative but highlighted concern that RAG ratings may not reflect actual carbon reduction outcomes;
- highlighted the importance of procurement data in driving genuine environmental change;
- raised awareness of methane emissions from landfill sites as a relevant issue and the report may be missing consideration of greenhouse gas sources like methane;
- requested clarification on whether the RAG rating measures showed progress of KPI implementation or actual impact on greenhouse gas reduction;
- enquired how procurement data reporting linked to meaningful carbon reduction if responses did not reflect real change;
- enquired on the shift from electric vehicles to Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO) fuel for fleet, including reasons and environmental implications; and
- asked why methane emissions were not included in the report.

In response to questions raised by opposition Members, the Strategic Director for Place advised:

- the RAG ratings reflected progress of individual projects or initiatives, rather than their overall impact on carbon reduction;
- ratings were based on delivery status such as the number of homes retrofitted;
- measuring the actual carbon reduction impact would require a separate analysis;
- further detail on the shift to HVO fuel for vehicles would be provided at a later date but advised that electric vehicle transition remained a success, supported by solar-generated electricity; and
- HVO was being explored as an additional measure to further reduce emissions, with trials already underway.

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

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the Carbon Reduction Plan, as set out in Appendix A, be approved; and
- (2) the work undertaken to incorporate Positive Current Trajectory measures into Service Plans, and to align these with Corporate Plan outcomes and the Corporate Performance Dashboard, be noted.

118

ADOPTION OF REVISED NON-INFRASTRUCTURE HABITAT MITIGATION (SAMM) CONTRIBUTIONS

The Executive received the report which sought approval to adopt a revised non-infrastructure habitat mitigation contributions (Strategic Access Management and Monitoring – SAMM) for residential development within the designated habitat mitigation zone. Particular reference was made to:

- the report presented measures to mitigate the impact of new housing developments in Exeter on sensitive wildlife habitats, with a focus on protecting the Exe Estuary and Pebblebed Heaths from increased recreational pressure;
- there were a range of measures, described as “non-infrastructure”, which included warden services and biodiversity monitoring;
- these actions formed part of a wider toolkit to preserve and manage habitats;
- partnership working with neighbouring District Councils, Devon County Council, and Devon Wildlife Trust was important in helping to preserve habitats;
- funding was collected via Section 106 agreements and was pooled across authorities through a shared governance structure; and
- there were many benefits for a coordinated, cross-boundary approach to habitat protection and highlighted the urgency to adopt the updated rates, as all other districts had done so, with implementation required by 1 April 2026.

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

- the importance of allowing public access to green spaces for wellbeing while ensuring environmental protection was highlighted;
- index-linked contributions to maintain funding stability without frequent revisions was supported;

- there was a need for collaboration with other Councils for planning, maintenance, and protection of natural environments and in safeguarding those habitats for current and future generations;
- funding administration was undertaken through the Habitat Regulations Executive Committee, represented by Exeter, East Devon, and Teignbridge Councils;
- the current model had been recognised by Natural England as good practice; and
- the Southeast Devon Wildlife Joint Habitat Site Mitigation Strategy 2024 was highlighted which detailed protections for the Exe Estuary, Dawlish Warren, and East Devon Pebblebed Heath.

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

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the revised Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) contributions be adopted for all qualifying residential planning applications received on or after 1 April 2026; and
- (2) delegated authority be granted to the Head of City Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to apply annual index-linking and publish updated contribution rates.

119

DEVON LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report regarding the publication of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for the geographical area covering Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, which was a legal requirement led by Devon County Council, with Exeter City Council acting as a supporting authority. Particular reference was made to:

- the recommendation sought agreement for the strategy to be published;
- the strategy mapped important habitats, species, and provided opportunities for biodiversity enhancement across Devon, including Exeter's valley parks;
- a public consultation was undertaken by Devon County Council and was considered positive;
- an interactive online GIS mapping platform had been developed to allow easy public access and exploration of biodiversity assets;
- the significance of Exeter's urban contributions to county-wide biodiversity and potential for biodiversity net gain (BNG) was highlighted;
- an all Member briefing had previously been held which showcased the website and explained its use with guidance from the county ecologist; and
- the strategy was an example of successful cross-council collaboration across Devon.

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

- it was enquired how the public would access the interactive Local Nature Recovery Strategy website and whether a link could be provided via the City Council website or directly to Devon's site; and
- what was the officer involvement in the working group and had they been engaged throughout the strategy's development?

The Leader having sought confirmation, advised that Exeter City Council could not make changes to the Strategy itself and was only in a position to endorse its publication.

An opposition group leader raised the following points and questions:

- raised concern over significant local nature depletion, both on land and in water and what was being done about this;
- identifying sites for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) locally was important to improve nature in Exeter rather than elsewhere;
- highlighted the need for a connected network of habitats, not just isolated units, to enable wildlife to thrive;
- the reliance on developer contributions alone was insufficient and local biodiversity strategy needed to be developed, with clear, proactive actions involving the community; and
- the mapping tool was welcomed, but there was a need to translate priorities into actions to protect wildlife species.

The Leader clarified that the report was endorsing publication only and did not require the Council to take further action at this stage. He emphasised that the Council was not being asked to decide what it should be doing locally regarding biodiversity. Other processes existed for addressing the actions and concerns raised, and those should be directed to the Portfolio Holders Strategic Directors.

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

RECOMMENDED that Council confirm its agreement, as a Supporting Authority, for Devon County Council, as the Responsible Authority, to publish the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

120

CRISIS AND RESILIENCE FUND: HOUSING PAYMENTS AND CRISIS PAYMENTS

The Executive received the report which sought agreement on the proposed policy for Housing Payments under the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) as part of the local government finance settlement. Particular reference was made to:

- the CRF had two objectives: providing financial support to those in crisis and helping residents build long-term financial resilience;
- the report focused on the first objective, which would deliver support through housing payments or crisis payments;
- it was intended to be put into effect from April 2026;
- the new housing payments policy was a rebranded version of the existing discretionary housing payment scheme, which maintained the current eligibility criteria;
- funding for housing payments would come directly to the Council and the crisis payment funding would be received from Devon County Council, pending confirmation of allocation;
- a recommendation sought to grant delegated powers to the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, in consultation with the Leader, to approve the final Crisis Payment scheme once the funding allocation and agreement from Devon County Council had been confirmed;
- the new scheme was replacing the previous Household Support Fund arrangements, but with a greater focus on emergency crisis payments; and

- a recent Government announcement advised that additional £50 million funding was being made available to support families using oil for home heating, which would be incorporated into the crisis payment policy.

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

- the team was thanked for their work on bringing the report forward;
- enquired on the number of local homes using oil heating and the potential impact on Crisis and Resilience Fund allocations, noting the particular issue in rural areas;
- clarification was sought on the red indicators in the crisis payment application criteria, questioning whether there were different tiers of considerations;
- confirmation was sought on the additional government funding for households using oil would be included under the current recommendations and not require a separate approval; and
- did the Council now know the exact funding allocation from Devon County Council, noting uncertainty had complicated the policy development.

The Leader observed the impact of rising heating oil costs, noting prices had increased several times in a short period, potentially pushing households into crisis. He noted that many affected residents may not normally meet eligibility criteria for support, but sudden cost spikes created financial emergencies.

In response to questions raised by Executive Members, the Head of Service – Finance and the Benefits and Welfare Lead advised that:

- the £50 million government funding for households using oil would largely address rural areas, with limited impact in Exeter;
- census data from 2021 showed that 135 households in Exeter relied on heating oil, compared with 6,000 in East Devon and 4,500 in Teignbridge. This information would determine how Devon County allocated the £1.3 million for the region;
- the red indicators in the crisis payment policy reflected that the draft policy was still being finalised, which the delegated powers being sought would complete it;
- the recent government announcement on oil payments would be factored into the final Crisis Payment scheme and therefore covered under the current recommendations and would be incorporated into the final scheme through delegated powers, with no further committee approval required; and
- final applications for the crisis payment scheme totalled around £586,000, similar to previous Household Support Fund allocations, with an additional £50,000 suggested for the oil top-up element, pending confirmation.

The Leader noted that the report would go to the April Council meeting for approval and could include updated funding allocation information at that time.

Opposition group leaders raised the following points and questions:

- enquired whether the eligibility criteria for the scheme required receipt of benefits;
- enquired about any learnings or trends from the seven previous Household Support Schemes and how the Council and partner organisations could improve preventative measures to reduce emergencies and crises, within current system limitations;

- enquired about the financing changes to a consolidated grant instead of the previous refund mechanism for the DHP and whether any unspent funds could be carried forward to the following year; and
- enquired if oversubscribed funds could be drawn into the next year's allocation in advance?

In response to questions raised by opposition Members, the Benefits and Welfare Lead advised that:

- the Crisis Payment scheme targeted low-income households, but eligibility was not restricted to benefit recipients;
- low income was assessed based on individual circumstances, using benefits as a benchmark;
- the Household Support Fund previously focused on short-term cost-of-living payments with little wraparound support. The new scheme highlighted resilience, combining financial help with support services, advice, and signposting to reduce future crises;
- payments were now delivered through grant funding rather than a reimbursement system, providing a use or lose budget for the year;
- flexibility existed to move funds between different strands locally and across Devon, allowing reallocation if some areas were overspending while others were underspending; and
- the new scheme was responsive and adaptive, to uncertain demand and adjustments would be made throughout the year and in future iterations based on experience.

The Leader requested a Councillor briefing on the fund to provide an overview of its operation, eligibility, trends, and learning points and to provide guidance to Members on how Councillors could assist residents, including signposting and support.

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

RECOMMENDED that Council:

- (1) adopt the draft Crisis and Resilience Fund: Housing Payments policy; and
- (2) grant delegated authority to the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention & Customer Services, to agree the scheme for disbursing Crisis and Resilience Fund: Crisis Payments.

121

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Executive received the report to approve the revised Corporate Complaints Policy, which set out a single, consistent framework for managing all non-housing complaints received by the Council. Particular reference was made to:

- the policy introduced a single, consistent corporate complaints policy for all areas outside housing ombudsman cases;
- it aligned with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's new complaint handling code which would be effective from April 2026 and the Housing Ombudsman code;

- the policy updates included clearer standards, aligned weight scales, stronger oversight, and improved definitions and would provide greater consistency for customers and clearer expectations for staff;
- the policy also enhanced transparency and accountability through annual self-assessment and reporting on all complaints, not just those referred to the Ombudsman;
- the policy established a cross-council complaints learning group to use complaints to drive service improvement and organisational learning; and
- Member responsibility for corporate complaints would be formalised which would strengthen oversight.

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

- the alignment between housing and non-housing complaint processes with ombudsman codes was commended;
- it was enquired whether all customer issues were now treated as stage one complaints or if some could be handled as concerns before entering the formal complaint process;
- what was the role of Councillors when residents approached them, including how to explain the process and how issues raised through the Councillor portal were treated;
- a concern was raised about complaints being closed if residents did not respond to emails and whether there was a process to ensure communications reached residents if emails were missing;
- the policy was clear, clean, and easier to understand and the update/status box was commended; and
- clarification was sought on the term partners in section 2.1 of the policy and how it differed from contractors.

In response to questions raised by Executive Members, the Head of Service - Customer & Communities advised that:

- the policy clarified the distinction between service requests and complaints, and it was confirmed that stage one complaints would still be recorded and treated as such, while encouraging resolution at the first point of contact where possible;
- Member enquiries were generally managed through the member inquiry process but Councillors may submit complaints on behalf of constituents with their consent;
- when closing complaints, the preferred contact method was used, and investigations were concluded with a solution even if a complainant did not respond, which was in line with Ombudsman guidance;
- partners were included in the policy only where formal agreements existed; and
- complaints relating to partner delivered programs were handled under the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaints code.

An opposition group leader raised the following points and questions:

- concerns were raised regarding the member enquiry portal, noting that it remained a work in progress and was not currently considered fit for purpose by the Member.
- concerns were raised about the member enquiry portal, noting it was still a work in progress and was not currently considered by the Member fit for purpose;

- there was a need for a clear mechanism for Councillors to raise complaints on behalf of residents;
- the policy lacked explicit consideration of vulnerability, despite Ombudsman guidance recommending that complexity and vulnerability be factored into complaint handling; and
- it was enquired whether the process included direct engagement with complainants, noting that residents may only receive an email without dialogue or reassurance, and how could this be handled better.

In response to questions raised by opposition Members, the Head of Service - Customer & Communities

- complaints from vulnerable individuals would receive tailored support, with adaptations made to the handling process to reflect their needs;
- all adjustments and support provided would be recorded and anonymised, with annual reporting on those measures; and
- regardless of vulnerability, further clarification would be sought from complainants when needed, and any extensions to complaint timelines would be clearly communicated with reasons provided.

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

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the revised Corporate Complaints Policy.

122

GENDER PAY GAP REPORT

The Executive considered the report which outlined the statutory requirement under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 for local authorities employing more than 250 staff to publish annual gender pay gap information. Particular reference was made to:

- Exeter City Council demonstrated a strong gender balance, with no structural disadvantage for women, with women earning more than men on both mean and median hourly rates (gender pay gap of - 6.68%);
- women were well represented in senior roles, particularly in the upper-middle quartile (62.3% women), showing a strong progression pipeline;
- the lower quartile showed an under representation of women, largely in operational roles such as waste and recycling, reflecting job family composition rather than inequality;
- Exeter City Council had no bonus payments and a transparent, consistent pay and grading framework, which supported equitable outcomes; and
- efforts were being made to reduce the gender pay gap, with a focus on removing barriers rather than overcorrection, with the negative gap reflecting workforce composition rather than unfair pay practices.

The Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Community Safety and City Centre noted positively that women in the workforce were encouraged and supported to progress to higher responsibility and pay levels, and this achievement was commended.

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

RESOLVED that Executive note:

- (1) the findings of the Gender Pay Gap analysis, including:
 - a) the average rate of pay for females remains higher than for males;
 - b) the mean gender pay difference has increased from 5.07% to 6.68%;
 - c) the median gender pay difference has decreased from 14.03% to 11.85%;
and
 - d) there are nearly three times more males than females in the lowest earnings quartile.
- (2) that the Council would publish its Gender Pay Gap Report on the Exeter City Council website and on the national gov.uk database; and
- (3) that the report would be reviewed annually to track the relationship between female and male earnings.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.48 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 7 April 2026.

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REPORT TO Council

Date of meeting: Tuesday 7 April 2026

Report of: Strategic Director Corporate Resources

Title: St Nicholas Priory.

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 The Report provides Members with information about essential roof repairs at St Nicholas Priory and requests approval of additional funding of £75,000 for essential roof repairs.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That Council approves additional funding of £75,000 towards the cost of essential roof repairs at St Nicholas Priory, bringing the total budget to £163,120.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- 3.1 Historic England have declined an application by the tenant of St Nicholas Priory for the funding of required roof repairs. The works have been value engineered to only include essential repairs, but the cost of these essential repairs exceeds the tenant's liability cap (£10,000) and the Council's previously agreed funding of £88,120.
- 3.2 The lease of the building includes a right for the tenant to serve notice to terminate the lease. It is very likely that the tenant will seek to terminate their lease due to lack of funds if the Council does not increase their funding contribution to the essential works.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources:

- 4.1 £75,000 of grant funding in addition to the £88,120 already approved together with officer time managing the tenant and the release of funds throughout the works period.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

- 5.1 The funding request allows the Council to meet its obligations to protect a Grade 1 listed building in its ownership. Borrowing costs equate to approximately £5,000 a year (interest and repayment).

6. What are the legal aspects?

- 6.1 The Council is the freehold owner of St Nicholas Priory, The Mint, Exeter, EX4 3BL ('the Premises'). The Council granted Exeter Historic Buildings Trust a lease of the Premises registered under title number DN702901. The key details of the lease are set out in paragraph 10 below. The Lease requires the Exeter Historic Buildings Trust to use reasonable endeavours to obtain grant funding to enable it to comply with the lease covenants.
- 6.2 A formal agreement between the Council and the recipient of financial assistance should be completed to ensure the funds are allocated to the agreed use and any unspent funds are returned to the Council.
- 6.3 It is not considered that this funding constitutes a subsidy under the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

7. Monitoring Officer's comment

- 7.1 The Monitoring Officer has no additional comments.

8. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

- 8.1 In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because it is a request for grant funding to preserve a Grade 1 listed building that is ultimately the Council's responsibility.

9. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) implications:

- 9.1 No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

10. Report details:

- 10.1 Exeter Historic Building Trust (EHBT) were granted a 99-year Lease of St Nicholas Priory commencing from 7th September 2018.
- 10.2 The Lease requires EHBT to keep the demised premises including the structure in as good as repair and condition as they are in at the date of the Lease. However, the lease recognises EHBT is a charity and caps its liability for repairs at £10,000.
- It is intended the Trust £10,000 contribution will be used in the preparation of a specification, Listed Buildings consents and the tender process.
- 10.3 St Nicholas Priory requires essential roof repairs primarily to deal with water ingress. An initial estimate for the repairs was obtained at a cost of £360,000 inclusive of VAT.

- 10.4 Exeter Historic Buildings Trust were encouraged to apply to Historic England for a grant funding contribution towards the roof which was initially submitted as replacement of the whole roof.
- 10.5 In July 2024, Exeter City Council agreed to make a financial contribution of £88,120 towards the roof repairs.
- 10.6 Historic England subsequently required EHBT to revise the project to critical repairs and following a grant application on this basis, Historic England have themselves been subject to a funding review and have declined EHBT's grant application.
- 10.7 Consequently, EHBT have obtained estimates assessed by a Quantity Surveyor to undertake essential works only to prevent the water ingress costing around £150,000.
- 10.8 There is, therefore, a financial shortfall between the estimated cost of repairs and the approved grant from Exeter City Council.
- 10.9 The Lease incorporates a break option every 5th year and at any time in the event the Lessee can reasonably demonstrate the budgeted repair and maintenance costs exceed the sum of the net income and grants available to fulfil its obligations under the Lease.

11. How does the decision contribute to the Councils Corporate Plan?

- 11.1 St Nicholas Priory is the oldest standing building in Exeter contributing to the leisure and cultural offer within the city, EHBT host guided tours, school visits, weddings, and special events like ghost hunts or theatre evenings. It therefore contributes to the People corporate priority.

12. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

- 12.1 Due to the cap on EHBT's repair liability if the Council does not agree to fund the funding shortfall, it is very likely that EHBT will seek to operate the break clause within the lease due to lack of funds and hand the building back to the Council. The Council has no alternative occupier for these premises, nor the budget to maintain these historic premises.
- 12.2 There is a risk that once the works are tendered, the cost is greater than the approved budget. This has been mitigated as best as possible using a quantity surveyor.

13. Are there any other options?

- 13.1 There are no other options.

Director: Dave Hodgson, Strategic Director for Resources

Author: Ben Colman, Head of Commercial Assets

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SEATING IN THE GUILDHALL

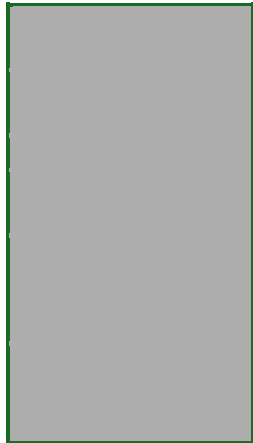
Chaplain	S151 Officer	Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Rolstone (L)	Lord Mayor Councillor Jobson (C)	Chief Executive	Monitoring Officer	Democratic Services
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Democratic Services



Strategic Directors

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>
Darling (L)	Miller-Boam (L)	Bialyk (L)
Atkinson (L)	Snow (L)	Wright (L)
	Hussain (L)	Wood (L)
Harding (L)	Parkhouse (L)	Williams, R (L)
Cookson (L)	Pole (L)	Vizard (L)
Williams, M (L)	Knott (L)	Foale (L)



<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>
Moore (G)	Holland (C)
Banyard (G)	Mitchell, M (LD)
Read (G)	Palmer (LD)
Rees (G)	Fullam (LD)
Wetenhall (G)	Mitchell, K (LD)
Ketchin (G)	

Begley (L)	Wardle (L)	Patrick (L)
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Asvachin (L)	Sheridan (R)	Payne (R)
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	Haigh (I) **	Hughes (I) **
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L:	Labour:	22	<u>Portfolio Holders</u>	Portfolio Holder for
G:	Green:	6	Bialyk:	Leader
LD:	Liberal Democrat	4	Wright	Deputy Leader and Corporate Services, Community & City Centre
C:	Conservative:	2	Vizard	Climate, Ecological Change and Communities
I:	Independent	2 **	Williams, R	City Management
R:	Reform	2	Asvachin	Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services
			Wood	Leisure Services & Healthy Living
			Foale	Arts, Culture & Tourism
			Patrick	City Development
**	Known as the Equity Independent Group		<u>Member Champions</u>	Member Champion for
			Miller-Boam	Community Safety & Engagement
			Darling	Culture & City Centre