

## **EXECUTIVE**

Tuesday 3 February 2026

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

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

Apologies:

Councillor Foale

Also present:

Councillor Rees (as Chair of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee – for Minute No. 101 below);

Councillor Holland (as an opposition group Leader);

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

Councillor Moore (as an opposition group Leader).

Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Place, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director for People and Communities, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Head of Service - Finance, Head of Service - Customers and Communities and Democratic Services Officer (MD)

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### **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2025, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

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

No questions from members of the public were received.

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### **MATTERS REFERRED BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

Strategic Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 January 2026 - Minute No. 33 – Unauthorised Encampments

The Executive considered the recommendation from the Strategic Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 January 2026 on exploring the viability and impact of a Negotiated Stopping Policy.

The Leader advised that the Strategic Management Board (SMB) would be asked to provide views on requirements and implications of the recommendation and explore whether the existing policy could be reviewed and updated as needed to ensure it remained appropriate and current. He further advised that a report could be brought back to Members if required.

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

**RESOLVED** that the Executive Committee agreed to explore the viability and impact of a Negotiated Stopping Policy.

Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22 January 2026 - Minute No. 100 – Medium Term Financial Plan

The Executive considered the recommendations from the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22 January 2025. He welcomed Councillor Rees as Chair of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee to speak to the recommendations.

Councillor Rees provided context of the scrutiny process as follows:

- this was the first full year of a complete budget scrutiny cycle through the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee, following an evolving process over several years;
- the original intention was for the quarter 4 budget scrutiny to take place in November 2025, to align but due to unforeseen circumstances, the meeting was postponed to January 2026;
- the November period provided an earlier influence for scrutiny budget development, but the January reported provided more up-to-date financial information;
- budgets were living documents which could be adjusted during the year and Scrutiny recommendations were intended to support existing work, rather than introduce unexpected proposals; and
- Scrutiny was advised not to recommend specific figures or funding sources, as this was the responsibility of the Executive.

Councillor Rees explained the recommendations as follows:

- For the recommendation on the Peppercorn Rent - discussions were already underway, as confirmed by officers.
- The recommendation for the Community Asset Transfer, arose from cross-party discussions during the scrutiny work on Northbrook Pool. The aim was to improve supporting communities who wished to retain local assets and Officers had already begun making progress and improvements to processes.
- The recommendation for the Climate Action Plan was informed by a recent Government paper on global biodiversity Loss and ecosystem collapse. The purpose of which, would provide an opportunity to enhance the existing plan by incorporating climate adaptation strategies and community resilience measures.
- The recommendation for Parks and Green Spaces had been proposed by the Chair to address long-term reductions in council funding, following evidence that the service had been operating with minimal staffing. The ambition and income generation ideas had been shared with officers and within the context of a three-year budget, there may be opportunities to strengthen the service to realise its vision.

The Leader thanked Councillor Rees for attending and the work undertaken by the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee. He confirmed that:

- The Peppercorn rent issues were already being addressed.
- Parks and Green Spaces resourcing would be considered but highlighted that many departments were also facing operational pressures, which needed to be considered.

- The Resident survey results indicated there was already a high satisfaction with parks and open spaces.
- Regarding the Climate Action Plan, officers regularly reviewed Government publications and relevant policy implications were assessed by Directors and brought forward as appropriate.
- There was no intention to sell community assets and directors would review the asset transfer policy to ensure it was fit for purpose and advise on any potential improvements.
- the council was still making £1.1 million of budget changes and emphasised the need to consider proposals within the wider strategic and financial context.

He advised that the Strategic Management Board (SMB) would reflect on the scrutiny recommendations and discuss with the Chief Executive to advise on what was achievable within current priorities and resources. He reiterated his appreciation for the role of scrutiny and confirmed that Members would be kept informed as work progresses.

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

**RESOLVED** that the Executive Committee agreed to consider:

- (1) that a peppercorn rent continue for Citizens Advice Exeter;
- (2) whether more resources can be directed to the Parks and Green Spaces Team;
- (3) whether the Climate Action Plan could be strengthened by adding an Adaptation and Resilience plan; and
- (4) strengthening support for the community asset transfer.

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**EXETER PLAN: PROCESS FOR AUTHORISING PROPOSED CHANGES  
RESULTING FROM THE EXAMINATION**

The Executive received the report which outlined the process for agreeing proposed modifications to the Exeter Plan during the forthcoming examination. The Exeter Plan Examination Hearings would commence in March 2026 and scheduled to conclude by May 2026. The report was seeking Council approval to grant delegated authority to the Strategic Director for Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for City Development, to authorise modifications arising during the hearings.

Members were advised that the delegated authority would enable officers and the Portfolio Holder to:

- meet regularly during the hearings to consider and respond promptly to modifications tabled by the Planning Inspectors;
- support efficient progress of the plan and reduce the risk of delays to the examination process;
- all proposed modifications would be subject to further technical assessment and public consultation following the conclusion of the hearings; and
- any final modifications would require approval by Executive and Council after the Examination, prior to adoption of the Plan.

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

- clarification was sought on the schedule of proposed modifications, how it was compiled, whether it is an exhaustive list of all third-party representations, and what methodology officers used to determine it;

- the high level of public reach achieved during the prior consultation was highlighted; and
- what level of modifications are anticipated during examination and what factors would give rise to further modifications.

The Portfolio Holder for City Development highlighted the need for an efficient process due to the short time span and the importance of the Exeter Plan for the city's development. The plan had already undergone extensive consultation and redrafting and assurance was given that weekly meetings had been arranged with the team to review and discuss modifications as they arise.

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

- the schedule of proposed modifications listed were put forward informally by officers to assist the planning inspectors in considering evidence and representations from third parties;
- the modifications did not constitute formal modifications, and only the Inspectors could formally propose modifications during the Examination process;
- delegated authority was procedural and would apply once modifications were formally proposed by the Inspectors;
- the delegated authority would allow officers to consider the proposed modifications and undertake any technical assessment and public consultation without suspending the examination or having to seek approval from the executive and council for each modification;
- the officer suggested modifications were informed by a review of all representations submitted by third parties to the examination;
- the potential scale of modifications could range from minor terminology changes to more significant changes such as the inclusion or removal of development sites, or amendments to policy wording;
- the purpose of any modification, whether minor or significant, was to ensure the plan met the tests of soundness and legal requirements, allowing it to be adopted; and
- failure to introduce necessary modifications, risked the plan not being adoptable.

An opposition group leader raised the following points and questions:

- welcomed clarification on the status of contributions already submitted to the examination;
- expressed concern that one proposed amendment appeared to significantly alter the intent of the Plan notably the amendment affecting the status of Ludwell Valley Park and the Valley Parks Masterplan;
- the change appeared to remove or weaken the requirement to 'have regard to' the Masterplan, which was considered to substantially dilute the original wording; and
- it was enquired whether the Council intended to challenge any such proposed amendments and whether officers planned to accept them as presented to the Examination.

In response to question raised by the opposition Member, the Strategic Director for Place sought clarification on whether the question related to the officer proposed modifications or third-party representations, and received confirmation that the question was from the officer-proposed list.

The Leader advised that the matter was a specific and detailed query, which was not appropriate for a wider debate. He requested that the Opposition Leader email the full detail to the Strategic Director Place outside of the meeting to respond to.

The Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Community Safety and City Centre requested for future references to report items, that Members include specific reference numbers to help Members locate them within the large agenda documents. The Leader supported the request.

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

**RESOLVED** that the Executive notes the latest progress made on the Exeter Plan.

**RECOMMENDED** that Council grants delegated authority to the Strategic Director for Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for City Development, to authorise any proposed modifications that may arise during the Exeter Plan Examination to ensure the Plan is considered sound.

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### **GENERAL FUND ESTIMATES AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2026/27**

The Executive received the report on the General Fund revenue estimates for 2026/27 and to recommend the Band D level of Council Tax for 2026/27. The report also included the proposed Capital Programme for 2026/27 and future years.

Particular reference was made to:

- the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement had been received, with the final settlement expected in the next week;
- the business rates reset was anticipated, which would normally result in a significant reduction in council resources, but had been offset by a favourable outcome from the Government's funding formula review, largely neutralising the impact of the business rates reset for Exeter;
- Exeter fell within 5% of its previous funding level, and as such, the Council would receive support through a funding floor grant, resulting in a cash-flat settlement;
- the settlement would result in Exeter receiving the same level of core spending power for 2026–27 as it did in 2025–26;
- the Government had confirmed a three-year, multi-year settlement, projecting a cash-flat settlement across that period;
- the cash-flat settlement assumed Councils would increase their Council Tax by the maximum permitted level each year., which for Exeter was 2.99%, in line with referendum principles;
- the budget had therefore been prepared on the assumption of a 2.99% Council Tax increase, subject to Member approval at Council on 25 February 2026;
- the General Fund minimum balance was proposed at £3.010 million, which was a reduction from the previous year, based on the removal of business rate risk for 2026–27;
- the Government were now providing a guarantee of 100% business rates income, compared to the previous 92.5% threshold;
- a provision of £500,000 was included in the revenue budget to support the transitional work associated with the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR);
- a new Appendix 10 for a flexible use of Capital Receipts Strategy had been included which enabled the Council to apply to Government to use capital receipts for specific revenue-type expenditure; and

- the Capital Receipts Strategy was intended solely to support work related to local government reorganisation and was not required to balance the budget, which was already balanced within the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

In response to the Leader's clarification, it was confirmed that a 2.99% Council Tax increase equated to approximately £5 per year for a Band D property, or around 10.5p per week.

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

- referencing Appendix 3 of the report, it was noted that income over-performance within Parks and Green Spaces, included £10,000 additional income from events and £23,000 additional rental income;
- the strong performance within Waste Operations was highlighted, with an additional £100,000 in recycling income, contributing to keeping Council Tax low;
- the recycling income totalled approximately £1 million per annum, and the teams involved were commended for their performance;
- clarification was sought regarding a budget change of £510,740 on page 45 of the report shown against the Chief Executive line;
- the confirmation that future government funding was cost neutral, with no reduction in overall funding levels was welcomed;
- confirmation was sought that Exeter City Council only retained approximately 8% of the total Council Tax paid;
- finance officers were commended for achieving a balanced budget with minimal impact on frontline services; and
- the scale and effectiveness of the financial adjustments compared to previous years was highlighted.

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

- the £510,740 change in the Chief Executive's budget related to the provision for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) work, managed within the Executive Support team;
- the Council received approximately 8% of total Council Tax, with the remainder allocated to Devon County Council, the police, and fire services; and
- he commended the Operational Management and Finance teams for identifying budget adjustments to maintain a balanced budget despite inflationary pressures.

The Leader reminded Members that the 2026–27 budget was subject to Council approval on 25 February and that all Group Leaders had been contacted to provide input on other budget proposals or changes.

An opposition group leader made the following points and questions:

- clarification was sought on how the Executive intended to review the Community Asset Disposal Policy, particularly Part 3 on qualifying disposals and the objective of disposal;
- it was emphasised that including objectives such as improving community infrastructure allow assets to remain in community ownership or enable communities to bid or purchase assets, without necessarily giving them away for free;

- clarification was requested on the total expected LGR costs, referring to page 27 showing £27 million to 2029 and page 22 showing £500,000 revenue allocation in Chief Executive's budget; and
- the report also showed £1.5 million capital receipt, creating a total of £2 million for 2026–27 and request that the budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan should clearly identify total LGR costs, council contributions, and anticipated government funding.

In response to questions raised by opposition Members, the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources advised that:

- the proposed 2026–27 budget included £500,000 revenue for LGR work;
- to use the £1.55 million capital receipts, Council approval was needed for the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Policy and a successful application to central government;
- if approved by Council, a supplementary budget request would be submitted to add the £1.5 million to the LGR budget;
- currently there was no government approval or final strategy secured and the budget currently remained at £500,000; and
- for future years, transitional costs for any new unitary authority were expected to rise, and funding proposals would need to be identified.

The Leader advised that the cost for LGR would impact on all Councils, regardless of the option chosen by the Secretary of State.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that Council

- (1) approve the Council's overall revenue spending proposals in respect of the General Fund;
- (2) approve the Council's General Fund Capital Programme;
- (3) notes and considers the budget assessment by the Section 151 Officer as set out in Section 11 of the report, when agreeing the recommendations;
- (4) approve for the General Fund minimum Balance to be set at £3.010 million for 2026/27;
- (5) approve the Council Tax for each Band as set out in section 12 of the report, subject to Devon County Council, OPCC Devon and Cornwall and the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority confirming their Band D levels respectively; and
- (6) approve the Council's Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy, as set out in Appendix 10 of the report.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive agree that once the actual Council Tax amounts for Devon County Council, the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority are confirmed, the revised Council Tax levels be submitted to Council on 25 February 2026 for approval.

The Executive received the report which proposed the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2026-27, covering both the revenue account and capital programme.

Particular reference was made to:

- the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) being separated into its own report for clarity on proposed budgets and the capital programme;
- housing rent increases approved in December 2025 had been factored into the budget;
- there was no significant additional spending required this year and the budget was balanced; and
- the minimum level of reserves would remain the same as in 2025–26 and the HRA Capital Programme remained significant.

The Leader highlighted the importance of building more **council homes** to provide affordable housing in Exeter.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that Council:

- (1) approves the Council's overall spending proposals in respect of the HRA revenue;
- (2) approves the HRA Capital Programme;
- (3) notes and considers the budget assessment by the Section 151 Officer as set out in Section 10 of the report when agreeing the recommendations; and
- (4) sets the HRA minimum balance at £3.525 million for 2026/27.

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### **CAPITAL STRATEGY 2026-27**

The Executive received the report on the proposed 2026/27 Capital Strategy, which explained that the Capital Strategy was designed to ensure all elected members had a full understanding of the Council's long-term policy objectives, the associated capital requirements, governance arrangements, and the Council's risk appetite.

Particular reference was made to the statutory requirement for Council approval and that there were no significant changes from the previous year. A Capital Programme Board had also been established, chaired by the Chief Executive and attended by Strategic Directors, to oversee major projects and improve delivery.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve the Capital Strategy as set out in Appendix A of the report.

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### **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT 2026/27**

The Executive received the report on the Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27, which included the Annual Investment Strategy and updated Treasury Management Practices. The report advised that, in line with CIPFA and MHCLG guidance, the Council was required to approve a strategy for managing its financial investments each year. It further highlighted the need to manage risks associated with borrowing and investments, including potential losses and the impact of changing interest rates.

Particular reference was made to:

- there was a statutory requirement for annual Council approval and there were no significant changes from the previous year; and
- there was still a big disconnect between the base rates and the amount that local authorities were able to borrow, making borrowing for the capital programme still very expensive.

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

- that was the specific difference between borrowing rates and the base rate, and whether there was any projection on when they might realign;
- it was enquired about the plan for a £10 million debt maturing on 12 March 2026, which had a 4.87% rate, and how this would be refinanced; and
- the net interest payable on the council's total debt, was calculated to be well under 1% (approx. 0.7-0.8%).

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

- the £10 million debt was part of a short-term borrowing policy used as a cash flow management tool due to high PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) rates;
- it would likely be refinanced, but the decision depended on the Council's cash position at the time;
- a reduction in cash was expected by March 2026 as council tax and business rates were collected over 10 months;
- interest rates for local authority borrowing was significantly higher than the base rate;
- the PWLB 50-year loan for the HRA was 5.8%, the PWLB loan for General Fund was 6.02% and the Bank of England Base Rate was 3.75%; and
- the future of PWLB rates depended on the market's view of government borrowing rather than on the Bank of England's base rate.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve the adoption of the Treasury Management Strategy and Treasury Management Practices and the delegations contained therein.

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**THE PRUDENTIAL CODE FOR CAPITAL FINANCE IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES  
(INCORPORATING THE ANNUAL STATEMENT OF MINIMUM REVENUE  
PROVISION)**

The Executive received the report on the Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27, which included the Annual Investment Strategy and updated Treasury Management Practices. The report advised that, in line with CIPFA and MHCLG guidance, the Council was required to approve a strategy for managing its financial investments each year. It further highlighted the need to manage risks associated with borrowing and investments, including potential losses and the impact of changing interest rates.

Particular reference was made to:

- there was a statutory requirement for annual Council approval and there were no significant changes from the previous year; and

- there was still a big disconnect between the base rates and the amount that local authorities were able to borrow, making borrowing for the capital programme still very expensive.

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

- that was the specific difference between borrowing rates and the base rate, and whether there was any projection on when they might realign;
- it was enquired about the plan for a £10 million debt maturing on 12 March 2026, which had a 4.87% rate, and how this would be refinanced; and
- the net interest payable on the council's total debt, was calculated to be well under 1% (approx. 0.7-0.8%).

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

- the £10 million debt was part of a short-term borrowing policy used as a cash flow management tool due to high PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) rates;
- it would likely be refinanced, but the decision depended on the Council's cash position at the time;
- a reduction in cash was expected by March 2026 as council tax and business rates were collected over 10 months;
- interest rates for local authority borrowing was significantly higher than the base rate;
- the PWLB 50-year loan for the HRA was 5.8%, the PWLB loan for General Fund was 6.02% and the Bank of England Base Rate was 3.75%; and
- the future of PWLB rates depended on the market's view of government borrowing rather than on the Bank of England's base rate.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve the adoption of the Treasury Management Strategy and Treasury Management Practices and the delegations contained therein.

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### **LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2026/27**

The Executive received the report which sought Member's agreement on the Local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for working age residents for 2026-27, which Members were required to agree the working age scheme rules annually.

Particular reference was made to the annual report which was required for approval before the start of the next financial year. The scheme provided council tax reductions for care leavers and working age residents on low incomes and no changes were proposed to the scheme for the upcoming year, which would mirror the current structure.

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

- clarification was sought on whether the figure of 79 individuals referred to total individuals receiving support or specifically care leavers;

- £4.6 million had been provided to 4,300 households, which highlighted significant support given; and
- the migration of working-age claims to Universal Credit, which was due to be completed before April 2026; and
- clarification and details was sought on the 97% of the council's working age council tax support households who were now receiving Universal Credit.

In response to questions raised by Executive Members, the Head of Service Finance advised that:

- 79 individual care leavers had received support since the scheme change in April 2024, covering two financial years; and
- the migration of working-age claims to Universal Credit was nearly complete and had increased administrative workload, as complex means-tested assessments were required for claimants that had migrated to Universal Credit.

The Chair requested that questions relating to ongoing promotion of Pension Credit following last year's government threshold change and the interaction with the Winter Fuel Allowance be provided as a written response.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that Council agree that the scheme in place for the current year continue for 2026-27.

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### **CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Executive received the report on the Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2026–2028, which sought Council approval for its adoption. The report outlined feedback from the public and the VCSE sector on the draft strategy and the changes made in response.

Particular reference was made to:

- a typo in the recommendation was highlighted which should state that the Executive recommends to council **the** adoption of the consultation and engagement strategy;
- the strategy outlined the council's approach to consulting and engaging with communities to ensure diverse voices were integrated into decision-making; and
- the report included the draft strategy, stakeholder feedback, and resulting changes.

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

- the strategy and the process used for its consultation was commended;
- it was enquired how recent consultation successes had informed the strategy and how it would improve outreach to harder to reach groups;
- the team were commended for their work, particularly for using innovative, inclusive, and representative methods;
- it was noted that the representative approach was time intensive but had been beneficial compared to less structured consultation methods;

- it was asked if there would be a way to measure and publicly show how consultation results fed directly into decision-making to demonstrate the value of public engagement; and
- it was asked what ongoing feedback mechanisms with community groups would be in place for the strategy, which ran until 2028.

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

- a variety of consultation techniques and tools were needed rather than a one-size-fits all approach;
- traditional, homegrown surveys had been shown to be unrepresentative as they did not capture representative feedback from the community;
- the new strategy involved a constant cycle of testing, learning, evaluating, and reviewing different techniques to see what was successful;
- success would be measured by the reach of consultation and whether gathered feedback was useful for informing the council's decision-making; and
- the process of continuous evaluation was embedded within the strategy itself.

Opposition group leaders made the following points and questions:

- the work and the consultation results presented were commended;
- a question was raised about the Civil Society Covenant and whether it was solely a council commitment or required a response from the community/third sector;
- the importance of principles and accountability were highlighted, especially considering varied community interests;
- the next stage of work needed to clarify how data and feedback would be interpreted, including weighting of minority views for complex issues;
- there was a need for transparency in the use of AI for collating and presenting consultation data;
- community engagement strategies were important, particularly in the lead-up to local government reorganisation, and there was a need for a consistent approach that linked consultation to delivery;
- staff should be commended for establishing a clear consultation process;
- a review and update of the current Consultation Charter to reflect the new process was needed;
- there was a need for clarity on how consultations were initiated and whether they should take place; and
- the Charter should be refined as a policy document that clearly supported and worked in conjunction with the consultation process.

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

- the strategy aligned with principles set out in the Civil Society Covenant, and no further work was planned at this stage;
- representative resident surveys showed there was an increased trust in the council which identified groups seeking further engagement;
- the approach to consultation was to build a long-term evidence bank rather than relying on single, one-off exercises;
- all consultation data would be provided to members for interrogation and decision-making through comprehensive, objective reports;
- various methods would be used to engage underrepresented groups and capture both quantitative and qualitative feedback where relevant;

- resources were allocated proportionately, with decisions being made jointly with Portfolio Holders;
- within the Council, officers were using AI within Microsoft Co-Pilot, experimentally for internal reports, with transparency on its use;
- a formal AI use policy would be developed when feasible, but there were difficulties, given the constant changes and development with AI, officers continued to work with other authorities to learn and understand from others;
- the Consultation Charter was Member driven, and was based on principles set by Members, which underpinned the Consultation and Engagement Strategy. It was not intended to be a detailed procedural action plan for every consultation;
- the consultation gateway process ensured that officers held early discussions on possible methodologies with consultation experts so that they could tailor approaches to specific issues and target groups; and
- methodologies were customised per issue and audience, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all process and it was not possible to set out an action plan that covered every consultation eventuality.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve the adoption of the Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2025–2028.

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**AMENDMENT TO GRANTS PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE - UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY GRANTS**

The Executive received the report on the proposed amendments to the Exeter City Grants Programme Terms of Reference to allow the City Grants Panel to consider and approve grants for Ukrainian community activities. The report explained that this change would integrate the targeted Ukraine funding into the existing grants framework, maintaining transparency, accountability, and aligned with Council priorities.

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

- enquired how the proposed alignment complimented the previous processes of the Grants Panel and its effectiveness would compare;
- the initial support for Ukrainian refugees using government funds was done ad hoc and embedding a formal grant strategy for support was commended;
- the importance of specialised advisory input for grant creation while maintaining existing decision structures was highlighted; and
- the grants panel members and staff were thanked for their work.

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

- during the crisis, grant funds from central government were spent appropriately under exceptional circumstances; and
- that in the current steady state, all funding must be allocated transparently and in line with policy, which was why the recommendation was being made at the meeting.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that Council:

- (1) approves an amendment to the Grants Panel Terms of Reference to formally include authority for the Panel to make decisions on community grants allocated through the Ukrainian Refugee Support scheme, funded through the Homes for Ukraine tariff income. The Ukrainian community activity grants follow the same governance principles, decision making processes, transparency standards and evaluation requirements as those outlined for the City Grant Fund, with modest variations where required to meet the specialised needs of Ukrainian communities; and
- (2) grant delegated authority to the Director of People & Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Communities, to agree future minor amendments to the Grants Panel Terms of Reference where such amendments are administrative, support operational efficiency, or ensure continued alignment with national guidance or funding requirements for Ukrainian support.

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### **TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

The Executive received the report on the new Temporary Accommodation Allocations Policy, which was developed following an audit by the South West Audit Partnership in April 2025, who recommended the introduction of a formal policy for allocating temporary accommodation. The policy set out a clear, fair, and consistent approach to allocating temporary accommodation to eligible people who were homeless or facing homelessness and complied with relevant legislation.

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

- clarification was sought on why veterans were not explicitly mentioned in Appendix B, given the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant; and
- clarification was sought on the referral process for individuals at risk of homelessness following discharge from institutions like prisons and probation services, and how that linked with the Council's homelessness team.

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

- veterans were not explicitly listed in Appendix B because prioritisation was needs-based, rather than group based;
- a veteran's specific needs would already lead to their prioritisation under existing criteria. Legal duties for veterans were met through housing needs assessments which required the council to consider needs arising from their military service;
- care-experienced young people were the only group explicitly named due to specific legal duties under the Children's Act and the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities;
- there was no single, consistent referral process from institutions such as hospitals or prisons and some institutions followed agreed protocols well, while others did not;
- the council funded an outreach worker within the prison system, though compliance with protocols was inconsistent. The funding for the prison outreach post had been extended for a further year; and

- ongoing team restructuring aimed to improve integration with institutions discharging people at risk of homelessness and remained a work in progress, requiring continued partnership with other public sector bodies.

An opposition group leader made the following points and questions:

- the Equality Impact Assessment did not adequately address temporary accommodation needs of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers;
- concerns were raised on protections and specific requirements for victims of domestic violence which were not clearly reflected, including restrictions on placing survivors in B&B accommodation;
- enquired whether relevant regulations on domestic abuse were sufficiently embedded in the policy;
- highlighted concerns about criteria for moving between temporary accommodation, noting the lack of consideration for the needs of young children, bullying, intimidation, or other safeguarding issues; and
- real-life scenarios should inform how the policy is applied.

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

- the listed criteria related to prioritising moves between temporary accommodation, rather than limiting moves only for those reasons;
- moves would still be considered for other serious issues, such as bullying or safeguarding concerns involving children;
- the policy reflected current legal obligations temporary accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers was provided in exceptional emergency circumstances and this would be clarified outside of the meeting; and
- domestic violence considerations were addressed through legal duties and assessment processes rather than explicit policy wording and agreed to check and provide further clarification outside of the meeting.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve the adoption of the new Temporary Accommodation Policy.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.19 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 25 February 2026 and 3 March 2026.**