

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 March 2026

Present:

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

Apologies:

Councillor Hussain

Also present:

Strategic Director for Place, Head of Service Operations, Head of Service - Environment and Waste, Resource Recovery Manager and Democratic Services Manager

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Asvachin, Bialyk, Foale, Williams, R. and Wright

106 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2026 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

107 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

There were no questions submitted by the public.

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

The Chair invited Councillor Haigh to the table to ask her question of the Portfolio Holder for City Management, as detailed below.

“I would like to ask the Portfolio Holder regarding Heavitree Pleasure Grounds Play Area for a clear explanation for residents on the current position.

In particular, could the Portfolio Holder clarify:

1. Why did the tender process receive no bids from contractors?
2. What does this mean in practice for delivery timescales given how long Heavitree residents have been waiting and that most equipment is no longer fit for purpose.
3. Will Heavitree Ward Councillors be kept proactively briefed of developments, rather than relying on informal conversations or committee papers?
4. Will the Council commit to issuing a clear public update setting out the current status of the play area renovations and the next steps?

I welcome the progress on the Heavitree splash pools and the commitment to keeping facilities open this year, but there is growing frustration locally, and clear communication will be essential in maintaining residents' confidence.”

The Portfolio Holder for City Management, Councillor Ruth Williams responded that she would undertake to keep ward councillors informed and that an update would

include the park and pools as one tender was complete and the other outcome was awaited. In response to part 4, the Portfolio Holder stated that a clear update would be issued and that the Head of Service Operations may be able to give a more detailed response.

The Head of Service – Operations explained that in response to there being no applicants to the tender the responses had been that this was not due to price but organisations having no capacity to bid as they were undertaking works for other local authorities. The Head of Service understood the frustration but the process must comply with procurement rules and go through a competitive process. The team were in the process of identifying a strategy to minimise the procurement timeframe in order to provide for residents with a resolution.

110 **Eton Walk Refuse Bin - Petition**

The Chair explained to the committee that that petition organiser was not present and invited the Democratic Services Manager to detail the variety of methods used to make contact, which included email, letter and through a ward councillor.

The Head of Service Operations explained that the bin had been moved at residents request, after the petition submission. There had been no change in litter levels and therefore no change to the recommendation. The residents clearly took pride in their green space.

During discussion it was proposed that officers were thanked for responding to residents in moving the bin and for work undertaken on the report and that residents were thanked for upkeep of the area.

The Chair confirmed that there were other processes available to address individual bin issues.

The Chair moved the recommendation as amended, seconded by Councillor Cookson which following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

111 **Portfolio Holder Update - Cllr Foale**

The Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture and Tourism presented his report which was taken as read and responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- RAMM had been a constant source of change and when an officer had left a team had been put in place but this had not been as effective as expected. The independent review had given a way forward and he had been consulted, as Portfolio Holder, on the chosen way forward;
- there were people employed at the museum with great skills and the curator was a huge loss but he had had individual conversations with staff;
- benchmarking of 'staying spend' was vital and Cambridge, Chester and Norwich were comparable. 79% were satisfied with the museum and other attractions. He would discuss with the Strategic Director, whether any other areas had increased their staying spend, where the Council may be able to learn;
- there had been an extensive public survey which informed the City of Culture expression of interest. 600 artists and others had responded to the Council however the 14 January deadline to apply had been a quick turnaround;
- it was disappointing not to make the long list, he hoped it was not home counties centric and would learn from the process and look to apply again in future; and

- the best event he had attended in the last year was an archaeological dig in Princesshay. 2-300 children were able to enjoy this experience and he was aware that the museum outreach team would go into primary schools which he encouraged having worked in primary education. He hoped that this would attract children to the museum and broaden horizons.

The Strategic Director for Place responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the independent review had been carried out by an expert in museums and had been commissioned with a broad scope of looking at the museum function and one recommendation was to review the leadership structure. The cost of the study had been £25,000 excluding VAT and was a fixed fee;
- an organisational change process had been undertaken by the Council. The Culture Service restructure was considered, including all cultural assets. The process had taken several months and detailed consultations had taken place with staff across all cultural assets, in accordance with the organisational change process. As part of that process all staff were consulted, including management within the RAMM and decisions were made by the Strategic Management Board and the Portfolio Holder was aware and unions had been involved in the process; and
- the criteria for judging City of Culture applications did not include consultation therefore Exeter had been in a good position to express interest given that a review of the Cultural Strategy was already underway.

During discussion the following points were made:

- a member believed that museum staff had ideas for cost-cutting which they felt had not been given able to be shared within the process'
- it was sad not to make the long list for City of Culture;
- Exeter had a lot of interesting cultural projects around slavery as well as a great outreach team at the RAMM, linking with community-builder programme. Outreach officers could do pop-up engagement activities at community events;
- it was positive read the impact of the Grayson Perry exhibition and the uptick at the Custom House; and
- retail income generation was impressive.

112 **Update on Street Cleansing**

The Chair thanked the Head of Service – Operations for her report, which was taken as read.

The Head of Service – Operations responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- there was a clear process around dog fouling whereby there would be increased site visits where an issue was reported. Education and/or signage or stencilling could be utilised so that residents were aware that the authority was aware of the issue. There were no Public Space Protection Orders to allow fixed penalty notices therefore an education approach must be taken;
- there was no feedback loop for reports of dog fouling, on firmstep at present but this was being worked on as it was in place for graffiti;
- on the subject of weeds there were 4 mechanical sweepers with one being an HGV and the others able to be used on pavements where parking allowed. There was often detritus on the kerb line which was inaccessible but every street was on a 4-8 week rotational schedule. Where vehicles had an off-road instance this timescale could extend. These were large hoovers which did

breakdown often but a maintenance contract was now in place which included replacing vehicles where there were substantive periods off-road. Weed removal was not the primary focus. There were new brushes in place which were designed to pull up weed growth. Arterial route clearance would be the focus. Reports of areas with a significant problem with weeds would be welcome. The brushes were designed for areas where the deep-clean teams could not make impact. The public could use the Contact Us form and councillors the Member Enquiry Process;

- the report recognised that there had been a shortage of team leaders during the year and they were responsible for carrying out inspections. The statistics provided related to the inspection programme issues rather than an endemic issue in an area;
- the team had very good working relationships with the university, who had fantastic litter wardens. There were historic issues but there was now a good working relationship with students as well as the university;
- potholes did not cause issue to team vehicles as these travelled at 10mph or less in sweeping mode;
- there was an holistic 3-pronged programme in place of enforcement, operation and education but resource levels dictated the level of educational delivery. Community Builder's were encouraged to educate where possible;
- recruitment had improved this year and there were only 2 vacancies currently which were advertised and expected to be filled. It wasn't possible to achieve full budgetary spend due to vacancies. New recruitment approaches had not been utilised as they had not been required;
- the litter bin request process was manual and team leaders collated and monitored but there could be gaps. If members were roads which required inspection they could alert the Head of Service; and
- Recycling on the Go contents would still be delivered to the MRF and be sorted at source. The predominant capacity was paper and card but it was often so contaminated that it couldn't be recycled.

During discussion members' made the following comments:

- the contractor spraying tarmac could be informed that removal of weeds was required before spraying;
- percentages on table 6.3 would be useful; and
- the year-on-year comparison was helpful.

The Portfolio Holder for City Management informed the committee that Princesshay had recycling bins which were separated and a blue-lining for a glass bin. She stated that there had been separated bins outside John Lewis but it was not possible to identify what each was for. She also stated that the Great British Spring Clean was a great opportunity for residents to get out litter-picking and to involve children as they can and did educate their parents. Don't Let Devon go to Waste had many resources for teachers and also ran events.

113 **Portfolio Holder Update - Cllr R Williams**

The Portfolio Holder for City Management presented her report which was taken as read and responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- teams monitored the number of food waste bins presented each week;
- certain parts of Exeter were more difficult with students and HMOs requiring annual educations given the change of residents and she had personally visited many. Some students came from areas where food waste was not collected;

- the Devon Strategic Waste Committee had heard from Teignbridge District Council that they had run a pilot scheme where waste operatives had smart-watches to log where bins weren't presented;
- she and officers continued to work closely with the university to see how they encouraged students to deal with waste and also worked with housing officers to enable tenants to participate;
- she thanked officers who had worked extremely hard to roll out food waste collection in the face of a number of challenges;
- she would look to the minutes of the Strategic Waste Committee and report back on what else could be done to encourage more participation in food waste recycling but home composting was acknowledged as a reason for some households not participating;
- there were a number of areas with flats where adjustments would be considered;
- the Devon Strategic Waste authority would lead any studies and had last carried out a bin analysis in 2023 which showed that 40% of waste in black bins was food waste, before the roll out of collections. Of this. One third had been opened but was still edible, one third hadn't been opened and the remainder included vegetable peelings which were appalling findings but interesting to see;
- Denis the Dustcart could remain anonymous; and
- there had been teething problems with food waste collection such as residents thinking that the same crew would collect at the same time and also dark mornings making it difficult for crews to spot the small bins. Mitigation had been put in place with more reflective stickers being provided to residents.

The Head of Service – Environment and Waste responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the methodology for food waste collection was different from that of the green and black bins. People had become conscious of food waste but changes of habit and purchasing were required;
- for food waste to be collected in the same way as other waste would require 9 extra staff and 3 extra vehicles therefore the approach taken had been to get the collections rolled out and the next stage would be to look at what Teignbridge had piloted, as they used the same software as the Council;
- it has been a logistical challenge to deliver all the food waste caddies;
- where there were believed to be properties that had not received food waste caddies, Members should submit a through the Member Enquiry Process as this could be an error to be addressed;
- compostable bags cost money and reusing bags kept costs down. The plastic would be taken out at the plant. Compostable bags did not breakdown easily in the anaerobic digester therefore plastic was better. There had been teething problems as expected with any new system but this was a large project with 15 new staff and a lot of behaviour change required from residents;
- it was fine to use poo bags for food waste;
- plastic bags were separated from food waste at the anaerobic digestion plant with a splitter and sifter.

The meeting adjourned at 7.20pm and resumed at 7.30pm.

114 **Presentation Update on Waste and Recycling**

The Head of Service – Environment and Waste and the Resource Recovery Manager gave a presentation, slides attached, making the following points:

- this was the most high-risk area for local authorities, having vehicles, manual handling, waste itself as well as the MRF team sorting items;
- the team were out in all weather and temperatures and achieving 99.88% success rate with collections;
- there had been an increase in garden waste customers;
- the Resource Recovery Manager ensured the best return for the city for the waste and was always looking at new opportunities to sell to the market;
- Exeter was one of the lowest in the country for waste production and the service topped the satisfaction chart at 79% in the residents' survey;
- this was the only service other than Royal Mail to visit every property once a week and now this was increased to twice a week meaning it had a visible presence in the city;
- the recycling rate in the city was increasing but packaging was getting lighter and garden waste had been impacted by the weather;
- introduction of food waste collection meant the biggest behaviour change in 25 years for the service which was a challenge to deliver;
- agreed significant investment in a new MRF and proposed envirohub was welcomed and an aspirational date for the new operation to be commissioned would be July 2027;
- this was a dangerous industry and fires did occur but the team acted professionally to deal with these and the fire service had attended in less than 5 minutes when called recently. Lithium batteries were a risk and were in many household items and a simple mitigation had been put in place at the depot with fire sand buckets available in a number of areas; and
- the A-Z of recycling was always being updated and members' should direct residents to it - [A - Z of recycling, waste and materials - Introduction - Exeter City Council](#)

The Head of Service – Environment and Waste and the Resource Recovery Manager responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- an officer had spent a lot of time liaising with external organisation regarding road works and proactive works but much was sub-contracted which made this difficult. A banner had been placed on the Council website but this was a particularly difficult time due to the amount of works currently being undertaken in the city; and
- vapes were not the only risk, greetings cards and wearable technology also contained lithium batteries which were a major safety issue and HSE were looking at the issues. These items were in homes not just the waste industry and ethical purchasing was required as global slavery was utilised in producing some items.

During discussions the following points were made:

- an online solution where roadworks were planned could be to enable communities to share messages about where to put bins;
- re-purposing was great, for example, seats at the football club and sea waste being made into kayaks; and
- Exeter Canal and Quay Trust were organising a sustainable seas festival in June.

The Portfolio Holder for City Management stated that the new MRF would have an over 90% capture rate which would improve the city's recycling rate and it was appropriate to note the message of the waste hierarchy of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

115 **Scrutiny Work Plan and Proposals Received**

The Chair explained that the items in blue on the work plan were the proposed timings for recurring items.

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

A vote of thanks to the Chair was made, thanking her for her service as well as to Councillors Read and Holland, whose last Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee meeting this was.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.17 pm

Chair

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Waste and Recycling

**Simon Lane – Head of Environment
and Waste**

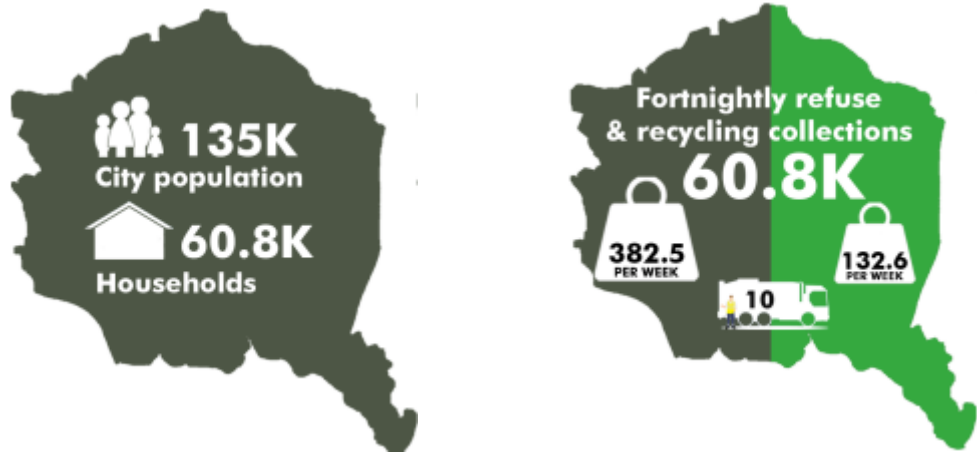
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**Matt Hulland – Resource Recovery
Manager**



Minute Item 114

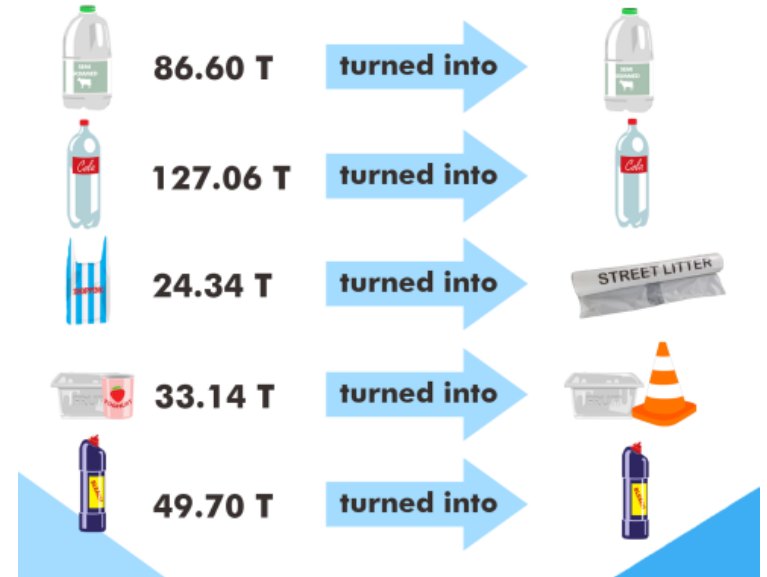
Key Service Statistics



Miles walked by each crew member per day **5-8**



Plastics sold directly from our MRF in 2024/25:



99.88 % of successful collections

Number of items sorted by each of our MRF pickers in one year*

5,382,000

*Observed average picking rate of 50 items per minute

Operational Setup

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday



Food Waste

- Now rolled out across the city



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Food Waste



Comparison of Waste Collected

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Year		2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 to Dec
Residential	Dry recyclables -MRF (T)	3272.71	3467.13	3296.56	2710.99
	Garden waste (T)	2607.02	3337.7	3309.1	2444.3
	Food waste (T)	316.42	1436.28	1527.31	1743.72
	Glass-bring banks (T)	2157.8	2118.85	1908.29	1346.7
	Residual waste (T) (including MRF rejects, sweeping, domestic refuse and Schedule 2)	27175.299	26189.305	25662.103	17812.409
	Recycling rate	24.50%	29.01%	29.00%	32.80%

Breakdown of waste collected



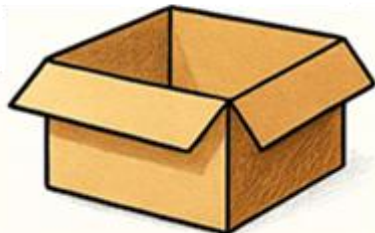
Paper
3.8%

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Plastics
1.81%

Cardboard
4%



Cartons
0.3%



Textiles
0.45%



Aluminium Cans
0.4%

Steels
0.8%



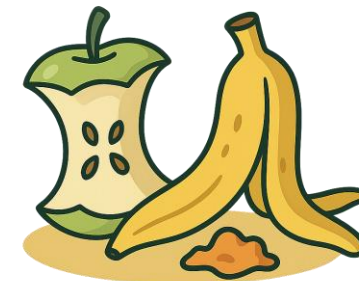
Glass
5.17%



Garden Waste
9.38%



6.69%

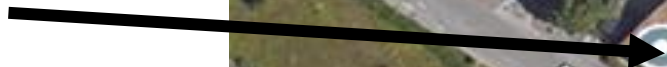


Residual Waste
67.2%



Exton Road Depot Hub

Oakwood House Building



Envirohub Building



Current MRF Building

An opportunity has arisen to purchase the Envirohub Building from DCW Polymers, which is a current licensed waste facility that is located directly across the road from the existing MRF Facility on Exton Road.

Depot Hub Project



- Process to purchase going well
- Project management team scope reworked
- Procurement of equipment about to commence
- New MRF operational July 2027

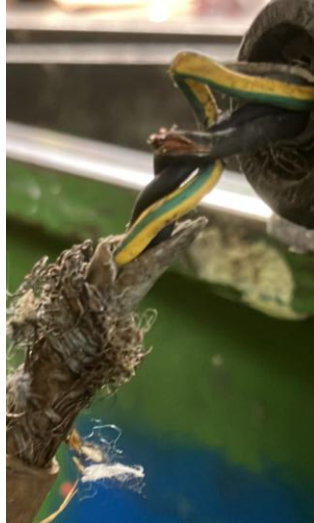
Fires



MRF Recent issues



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MRF projects and wider working



Community Litter Pick
 Sunday 23rd November at 11am -12.00pm
 Meet at Devonshire Place Orchard with local neighbours to keep St James tidy. All litter pickers, gloves and bag are provided. Everyone is welcome - bring family and friends.
 Contact: 01789 517894 | natalie.smith@eci.org.uk | Natalie Smith - St James
 www.wellbeingexeter.org.uk



HIGH-IMPACT SUMMIT 11-12 NOVEMBER 2025
PROJECT ONE WAVE
 SCOTLAND THE SOCIAL HUB GLASGOW

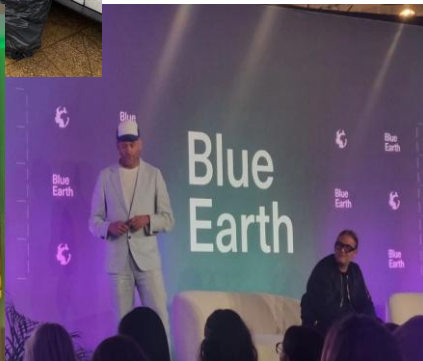


CHARITY CHRISTMAS TREE COLLECTION
 SCAN THE QR TO BOOK NOW!
 ARRANGE COLLECTION OF NATURAL CHRISTMAS TREES ON 5th, 6th & 7th JANUARY 2024
 DELIVERED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH Exeter City Council
 £10 DONATION PER TREE
 EVERY DONATION COLLECTED CONTRIBUTES TO OUR SUPPORTED HOUSING SCHEME, HELPING TO END THE CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS FOR THOSE AT RISK IN OUR COMMUNITY.
 REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1111394



SPEAKERS

Catherine Gemmell Simpson LITTERAL LITTER - PROJECT FIGHTS AGAINST OVERPACKAGING ON FOODS AND REDUCING LITTER	Vicki Last	Matt Hulland LIFEBOAT INITIATIVE - THE JOURNEY TO FISH	Mariel Ten Doeschate LAKING BACKPACKS - A WIDE RANGE OF PLASTIC WASTE OCCUR HEALTHY PREVENTION OF CONTAMINATION BY RESIDUES
Lauren Smith PLASTIC PARTNERSHIP AND PLASTIC - SAFEGUARDING THE SHIPPAR COAST	Caitlin Marie A COMMUNITY BECOMES A SOCIETY - BRINGING TOGETHER TOGETHER TO FIND PLASTIC WASTE WITH NEW LOCAL TRENDS	Francesca Busca TALKING THROUGH LIFE AS A PASTORAL CHURCH	Tyrone & Carrie PROCESSED PRODUCTION OF WASTE - FROM PLASTIC WASTE TO NEW WAYS OF FUNCTIONAL DESIGN FOR PRODUCTS
		Josh Beech FROM IDEAS TO REALITY - PLASTIC DESIGN FOR RECYCLING	



ONE EXETER
 ONE COUNCIL • ONE TEAM



Education Campaign

Month	Theme
April	Easter recycling
May	Safe disposal of vapes, batteries and BBQ waste
June	City recycling hub locations
July	Food waste reduction
August	Back-to-school reuse and recycling of clothing and books
September	New residents' guide to waste and recycling
October	What to do with pumpkins and windfall apples
November	Final garden waste collections
December	Christmas recycling campaign and collection schedule
January	Christmas tree and food waste collections
February	Garden waste season
March	Spring cleaning: reuse, recycling and bulky waste services

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Exeter City Council MyExeter

Access issues for bin collections
Roadworks are currently restricting access for some bin collections. If this affects your street, leave your bins beyond the roadworks the evening before collection so crews can reach them safely.

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A - Z of recycling, waste and materials

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1. Introduction

A-Z of materials for recycling and disposal.

The following pages contain a list of items and materials and what you should do with them if you live in Exeter.

If you notice anything you think we should add to this list, please get in touch via our [Contact Us form](#).

You can also ask our recycling Facebook page, [Denis the Dustcart](#) (opens in new tab).

[Next >](#)



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