

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 June 2025

Present:

Councillor Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, K, Harding, Hussain, Ketchin, Miller-Boam, Knott, Palmer, Wetenhall and Williams, M

Apologies:

Councillors Atkinson, Haigh and Rolstone

Also present:

Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director for Place, Legal Advisor, Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Bialyk, Vizard, Wood and Wright

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2025 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the amendment that in Minute 64 the addition of the words 'the necessity for a' were added before "15 year commitment to keep the building open".

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Miller-Boam declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Minute 5 Markets & Street Trading in Exeter and withdrew from the room whilst the item was heard.

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

In accordance with Standing Order No. 19, the following question was submitted by Mr Cleasby who was present at the meeting:

"Given its aim to make Exeter a healthy city, does the Council consider it doing enough to control junk food outlets?"

The Leader, Councillor Bialyk responded as follows:

"The Council shares the concern regarding the potential impact of an over-concentration of hot food takeaway outlets on community health, particularly in areas close to schools and where healthier food options may be limited.

At present, there is no legislative basis within environmental health licensing to restrict takeaway outlets on public health grounds. However, the planning system does offer a means through which such matters can be considered.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages local planning authorities to support healthy communities and specifically calls for planning policies and decisions to promote healthier lifestyles (paragraph 92). This includes ensuring access to healthier food environments.

In terms of local policy, the current Exeter Local Plan includes only one location-specific restriction on takeaway outlets (in Cathedral Yard) and does not address broader health-related impacts or proliferation citywide.

However, this is being addressed through the emerging Exeter Plan 2021–2041, which includes proposed policy wording to:

“Avoid an over-concentration of hot food takeaways, particularly along routes to schools.”

This provision is located within the ‘Healthy Communities’ section of the draft plan. This reflects growing recognition of the link between planning, food environments, and public health.

In summary, while current planning powers are limited, the emerging Exeter Plan will provide a more robust framework to manage the distribution of takeaway outlets and support public health objectives. In the meantime, planning applications are assessed case-by-case, with material consideration given to location, amenity, and cumulative impact.”

Mr Cleasby asked a supplementary question asking that the Leader look at the new report on town and Country planning which included a section on Restricting the Appeal of Junk Food in England and consider the role of Local Authorities and encourage the LGA to lobby Government. The Leader responded that he would look into this and that he would also investigate other avenues politically and that he did not believe the Government would be against this.

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

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions were submitted by Councillors Wetenhall in relation to the Portfolio of Councillor Bialyk who attended the meeting. The questions were circulated at the meeting to Members of the Committee. The responses of the Leader are set out below:

Question

“School Streets action by Council

On December 17th 2024, Council passed a Motion which included the resolutions to:

“1. Call on Devon County Council to work with schools and communities to increase the number of School Streets in Exeter, where schools are willing to explore this option.

2. Provide a progress report on this activity to the ECC Transport Member Working Group in six months’ time.”

Has Exeter City Council followed up the resolution by approaching Devon County Council yet and if not, when will this be done?

Can Cllr Bialyk provide an update to this committee on any action taken in relation to contacting Devon County Council since the Motion was passed and if no action taken, when he expects Executive to consider an action?”

Response from the Leader, Councillor Bialyk

“Officers from the Council’s Live and Move team are engaged with Devon County Council sustainable transport team regarding active travel and school streets in particular. DCC maintains an active school streets application process that is open to all schools and we are aware that DCC have recently commissioned a project to support a number of Exeter Schools with Travel Plan measures. We will report back

on progress and any specific school applications/projects at the next Exeter Transport Steering Group meeting.”

Supplementary Question and Response

Councillor Wetenhall asked if DCC had been formally approached in compliance with the motion and whether this had been a direct written request, by whom and when. The Leader responded that he would request information from officers but that there was no formal channel for the council to communicate with DCC but it would be good to have one and he would seek better channels of communication for district councils to bring things to the attention of DCC.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions were submitted by Councillors Wetenhall in relation to the Portfolio of Councillor Wood who attended the meeting. The questions were circulated at the meeting to Members of the Committee and the responses of the Portfolio Holder are set out below:

Question

“Regarding the proposed closure of Northbrook pool, actioned at the February budget council meeting, has the administration assessed the potential legal costs of a challenge under the Equality Act or other legislation, or the risk of compensatory claims from those affected?”

Response from the Portfolio Holder for leisure services and healthy living, Councillor Wood

In June, the Executive will be asked to consider a recommendation to close the pool, based on key income and expenditure data and information gathered following public consultation. This information will be included in the report along with the comprehensive EQIA.

The council is obliged to formally consult with those affected when there is a substantive potential change to the provision of a service. This legal obligation has been met.

Supplementary Question and Response

Councillor Wetenhall asked if the Council was put at risk by the EQIA not having been carried out when the closure was proposed in February? Councillor Wood responded stating that he could not comment on the law but that a decision to close had not been made when the budget was agreed and an EQIA had been carried since.

Question

If schools that currently use Northbrook Pool for swimming are forced to transfer classes to St Sidwell's Point, can the council guarantee there will be the timetable availability for those schools, and that they can bring their own swimming teachers?

Response

The potential closure of Northbrook Swimming Pool may impact vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, or people with disabilities. The Council has taken time to consider the impact of closure on these groups and is confident that if the Council decides to close the pool, alternative provision within our other centres can be offered, providing a suitable, safe environment.

Supplementary Question and Response

Councillor Wetenhall asked if there was availability at other pools? Councillor Wood responded in the affirmative that should a decision be made to close the pool Exeter

Leisure would ensure availability at St Sidwells Point of Riverside and that current terms and conditions would remain in place.

Question from Councillor Moore for Councillor Wood

“Given the Council occupies Northbrook swimming pool under a 99-year lease that commenced on 18th March 1996 and expires on 17th March 2095 - so there’s just under 70 years remaining. Why did the Council decline to commit to running the pool for the 15 years which would have released investment from funders?”

Response

Councillor Wood stated that Directors would respond outside of the meeting.

Supplementary Question and Response

In a supplementary question Councillor Moore asked given how long the lease was should the Council pursue grants and committee to the 15 years required? Councillor Wood responded stating that the capital costs and annual deficit would be available in a report to the Executive in the near future and that he couldn’t answer without knowing where all the funding would come from rather than one grant in isolation.

Other questions:

Councillor Palmer asked if schools would travel to Riverside to swim given the additional time and the cost of a coach? Councillor Wood responded stating that he had attended a schools festival and spoke to teachers and would look to mitigate the impact on schools.

Councillor Palmer asked a supplementary question was regular data received from Devon County Council on rates of deprivation in the city? The Strategic Director for Place advised the Member to put this in writing in order that it be properly researched. Councillor Mitchell asked that any responses be forwarded to all members of the Committee.

5 Markets & Street Trading in Exeter

Councillor Miller-Boam withdrew from the room whilst the item was heard.

The Strategic Director for Place presented the report making the following points:

- that the running of both markets was at no cost to the council; and
- Matford provided a valuable source of income.

The Strategic Directors for Place and Corporate Resources responded to Members questions in the following terms:

- Section 5 set out the differences between street trading and markets;
- there were no resources available to provide or support further markets;
- a Briefing Paper had been requested at the previous committee;
- there were no officer resources available to investigate markets further at this time;
- the Markets Team dealt with the livestock market and street licenses but it was unlikely that a team would hold information concerning private markets within the city;
- consent from the City Council was not required to hold a market on private land with no more than 4 stalls;

- Visit Exeter website held a list of current markets including the farmers market, Exeter Potters market, Matford Sunday market and car boot sale and Topsham Saturday market.

Councillor Knott stated that this had been a good discussion of the matter and that the question now be put.

The Chair proposed and Councillor Knott seconded that the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee note the report on Markets and Street Trading in Exeter and following a vote was CARRIED.

Councillor Miller-Boam rejoined the committee.

6 Progress Report Shared Prosperity Fund - Update

The Strategic Director for Place presented the report making the following points:

- this report was a six-monthly updated as requested by the committee and would be presented in January and September 2026;
- the three year programme had ended and transition funding was concentrating on continuing existing projects, in effect providing a one year extension;
- the total award was £360,000 which was less than the three year allocation of approximately £1 million;
- grant funding had been allocated;
- the key difference were that the funds were allocated to Devon and Torbay CCA who would project manage; and
- there was an overview of proposals and funding detailed in the report.

It was noted that there was a factual error in 4.2 as the actual spend was 99.5% rather than 100% as a last-minute refund had been issued.

The Strategic Directors for Place and Corporate Resources and the Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- Parklets had been provided through grant funding run by InExeter and where they were placed had been considered and one had been moved since which time no concerns or complaints had been received;
- there was a full appraisal framework and annual returns to Government based on their criteria which were more about the metrics set rather than success or failure.
- joint commissioning arrangements had been requested for business support and the winning company did not achieve all of their outcomes therefore not spending all of the allocated funds, which resulted in a small amount of grant funding being handed back to Government;
- some of the costs to repair broken cameras would be covered by the new transition funding;
- a review was underway of the costs of maintaining current camera stock and replacing the remaining analogue cameras with digital CCTV cameras;
- there had been two consultations on what might go into a city centre strategy, one with stakeholders and then one with Members and the next would be with the public;

- following consultation a draft city centre strategy would be written and consulted upon with a view to Council considering the strategy early in 2026. Meanwhile the city would continue to improve and bring vitality. A temporary car park would be considered but would not affect long term strategic approach to the city centre;
- the walkway between Rougemont Gardens and Northernhay had been closed for safety reasons and there were a number of areas of the city wall which required repair. Work was currently underway near the City Gate. Repair work had been out to tender twice as the first was over £1 million and the second £500,000 but had increased to £680,000 and the Assets Team were working on all sections which were at risk.

Councillor Kevin Mitchell proposed the recommendations that:

- Members note the impact of UKSPF in Exeter and the plans for transition funding for 2025-26.
- The Head of Service City Centre & Net Zero provide a further update to Strategic Scrutiny on the delivery and management of the UKSPF transition funding, the next being January and June 2026, when UKSPF has come to an end.

Councillor Knott seconded the proposal and following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

7 **Scrutiny Annual Report**

Councillor Matthew Williams presented the report of the Scrutiny Programme Board making the following points:

- the report was now in line with the municipal year which explained why two had been presented close together;
- there was a new format for which he thanked officers for improvements which meant that the report went beyond a list of issues which had been considered and began to look at the impact of scrutiny; and
- the Scrutiny Programme Board would look to make further improvements.

During discussion Members asked questions and made the following points:

- had the suggestion to offer family membership been progressed?
- it appeared that nothing had happened with regard to active travel for those with a disability; and
- Transport Member Working Group minutes had not been received and were requested.

Councillor Williams moved the recommendations as set out in the report, seconded by Councillor K Mitchell which following a vote were CARRIED.

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

The Chair invited Councillor Moore to speak under Standing Order no. 44. Councillor Moore expressed disappointment that that Citywide work on climate change had not been given due priority but understood that the item would be heard in September and that time for scrutiny of the devolution proposal ought to be scheduled despite the vote taken at the previous meeting of the committee. In response the Chair stated that the climate item had been heard in December 2024 and would be again in

September but the Councillor could contact her should there be further issues to resolve.

The Chair stated that there was a Stagecoach item to timetable and scope and suggested that the Portfolio Holder report on what was heard at Transport Working Group. There was a discussion regarding possible Stagecoach scrutiny:

- what services Stagecoach receive public funding for;
- are there existing customer focus groups to hear views of the public directly such as Devon Bus Forum;
- to hear unheard voices including those with disabilities and those on lower incomes;
- to hear from InExeter with regard to the extent to which transport in the city was important to commercial success;

Having received officer advice, Councillor Kevin Mitchell proposed and Councillor Miller-Boam seconded a motion that the Stagecoach item be timetabled for November and the Scrutiny Programme board be asked to scope, and following a vote was CARRIED.

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

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.11 pm

Chair

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