

REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 11 September 2025

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Councillor Matt Vizard – Portfolio Holder Climate, Ecological Change and Communities

1. Issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities

Local Economy

A new City Centre Vision & Strategy is being developed, which primarily sits with Cllr Laura Wright. The new Vision & Strategy will have a focus on connectivity, supporting active and sustainable transport to the City Centre; enabling residents, shoppers, visitors and workers to access the city sustainably. It will also have a focus on city centre living, supporting new homes in the city centre, reducing the dependency on car ownership.

People

- Intended Outcomes:
 - Communities will be more resilient
 - A safe and thriving city with great things to see and do for everyone

The Net Zero team attend the Devon, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Climate Impacts Group, where adaptation measures and progress are discussed. The Net Zero Risk Register has been expanded to cover adaptation measures to support service delivery and to protect our communities in Exeter.

Homes

- Intended Outcomes
 - Better quality, energy efficient and more affordable homes to buy or rent
 - New housing developments that are well integrated into existing communities
 - Fewer people will be homeless or in temporary housing
 - The number of people on the social housing waiting list will reduce

The City Council continues to focus on retrofitting our homes, with 920 homes retrofitted to date. The new 3 year Retrofit Contract to be signed shortly will continue to target the achievement of the government 2030/2035 targets for Energy Performance in our properties, whilst also identifying properties that have historic issues with damp and mould along with components that have exceeded their lifecycle regardless of the current EPC to maximise all opportunities to proactively reduce the risk of damp and mould and reduce the carbon footprint of our assets.

The Draft Exeter Plan and its housing related policies [The New Local Plan – the Exeter Plan - About the Exeter Plan - Exeter City Council](#) have a focus on large, brownfield sites located close to the city centre and key transport hubs.

Sustainable Environment

- Intended Outcomes
 - A city taking action to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change
 - A Net Zero Carbon City
 - Well-maintained parks, open spaces and biodiversity across the city

A comprehensive update is provided below in Section 2.

2. Update or commentary on any major ongoing programmes of work

Making Exeter City Council operations Net Zero by 2030

Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS)

As previously reported to Strategic Scrutiny, a £3.5M bid for the PSDS Phase 4 fund was successful for the Riverside Leisure Centre. The three-year project includes replacement of the outdated boiler and heating system with air-source heat pumps, a heat recovery system, and upgraded roof deck to boost thermal efficiency whilst accommodating the new roof-mounted heat pumps. The project represents the greatest potential for decarbonisation of any of the Council's Leisure sites and will provide a long term sustainable and efficient building for years to come. Work underway includes a full detailed design before procurement of the installation and building work in 2026.

South West Energy and Environment Group (SWEEG)

The City Council continues to be a full member of the SWEEG. SWEEG is a collaborative research partnership of South West public organisations and provides the City Council access to detailed technical work by academics from the University of Exeter's Centre for Energy and Environment. Numerous studies have supported the Planning team, with studies and research in developing the draft Exeter Plan. SWEEG provide the annual GHG inventory for Exeter, the City Council, and more recently a full study to establish the financial cost of achieving Net Zero for the City Council by 2030.

Costed Organisation Carbon Footprint Report

The Costed Organisational Carbon Footprint Projections report provides three scenarios to establish the financial cost of reducing GHG emissions across five sectors of the City Council's operations. The Study was reported to Executive July 2024 and is to be presented at September's Strategic Scrutiny Committee, together with a presentation by Andrew Rowson, a Senior Research Fellow at SWEEG. Following Strategic Scrutiny, a further report will be considered at Executive to identify options for how carbon reduction measures can be incorporated into Annual Service Plans to enable prioritisation of service led GHG emission reduction measures.

Photo Voltaic (PV) Feasibility Study

The City Council secured £100k from the South West Net Zero Hub, which was created to support South West Local Authorities to support net zero opportunities, unlock barriers and get stalled projects moving. The City Council utilised the fund to carry out a full PV feasibility exercise to evaluate solar opportunities across suitable City Council buildings. The final business case for sites where solar PV is viable will be presented to SMB. New PV installations will support decarbonisation of City Council owned buildings, provide protection against energy price increases and long-term savings.

PV Solar

The City Council's solar estate of 3.4MW is a sizable solar estate, located on the roofs of key [City Council sites](#). Work has been ongoing to implement increased maintenance and cleansing to address the needs of an ageing solar installation. This has involved working with industry experts to find solutions, the council being an early adopter of Solar PV.

Regional Energy Strategic Plan

The Net Zero team and Planning Officers recently facilitated a visit to the innovative and pioneering Water Lane Smart Grid and Storage Project by the Regional Energy Strategic Plan (RESP). RESP will deliver accountability and coordination for strategic planning of the distribution system, as part of the independent National Energy System Operator (NESO). They will convene regional stakeholders around a common view of how the energy system will develop to support local planning and development priorities (the Exeter Plan) as well as delivering national goals. During the visit the team were able to share hurdles the City Council had to overcome to make the Water Lane project happen. The Net Zero team highlighted that there is a need for a more joined up approach to network and infrastructure planning so that projects are able to connect in a timely fashion.

Carbon Literacy

The Net Zero Team have delivered Carbon Literacy training to 307 members of staff, including members of the Strategic Management Board, Organisational Management Board and Councillors. 154 Councillors and staff are certified as being Carbon Literate, which secures Carbon Literate Organisational Bronze Status for the City Council. The team have a rolling programme of monthly training courses planned for the next 6 months, which staff can sign up to via a Microsoft booking form on the intranet.

There is a plan to offer Carbon Literacy training to external organisations, this will require additional officers with the Net Zero team to be certified to deliver the training due to the Net Zero Data Officer recently leaving the organisation. A Business Case was approved by SMB to deliver Carbon Literacy training externally, to outside organisations, community groups and residents. After the recruitment and training of the post of Net Zero Support Officer, this will be progressed with and promoted locally.

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding

The City Council is currently working with Devon County Council and other Devon District Councils to secure Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding. The fund from government was allocated Devon County Council to support the expansion of on street residential and off street electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure. The City Council has provided a full schedule of sites to install new EV charging facilities on City Council owned car parks (off-street) in line with the Council's EV Infrastructure Plan, which was reported in the Councillors Information Bulletin April 2025.

Housing warm home grants

The new Housing Warm Home grants scheme is to be distributed by Devon CC and will be open from autumn 2025 and run for three years.

Healthy Homes grants are also administered by ECC for occupants that qualify, and the Private Sector Housing Team work alongside Exeter Community Energy (ECOE).

Exeter City Council administer Warm Up grants; this is a top up grant and last year ECC paid out £12,000 to help people improve the warmth of their homes.

Working across the City to implement the Net Zero Road Map 2030

A Climate and Nature Group has been established as part of The Exeter Partnership, bringing together representatives from organisations, businesses and community groups, to work collaboratively together to deliver the Exeter Net Zero 2030 Plan. This group meets virtually on a quarterly basis with a rotating chair. Members of this group represent organisations, businesses and communities across the city. The first meeting of Climate and Nature Group took place in March 2025 with a focus on attendees introducing themselves and their organisations, followed by a discussion to explore priorities, challenges and areas/themes for this group to address at future meetings. The second meeting took place in June 2025 with a focus on sustainable travel as transport emissions were the source of 23% of Exeter's greenhouse gas emissions in 2022.

CUA Sustainability Advisory Group continues to meet to discuss areas of joint opportunities, activities and collaboration, group is chaired by Exeter City Council. The group has had a focus on sustainable transport and active travel and agreed to set up a CUA Sustainable Travel Group to focus on sharing travel plans, travel to work approaches/learning, data and best practice.

GWR/Green Circle project: Thanks to a successful bid for funding by the City Council from the GWR Customer and Community Improvement Fund, this project (with additional funding from DCC and the University of Exeter) is connecting and promoting city centre train stations and their proximity to Exeter's Green Circle walking route.

Nature Towns and Cities accreditation is a new scheme (from the National Trust, Natural England, and the Heritage Lottery Fund) that Exeter City Council together with partners and communities across the city could apply for. Further discussions are taking place internally and with external partners in the coming months to ascertain whether to apply for accreditation

Promoting support across the city in combating the ecological & climate change

A number of multi-stakeholder groups convene around habitat mitigation, SANG's, biodiversity and green infrastructure management, which sit under City Development.

Transport

City Council Travel Survey

The 2025 Staff Travel Survey has recently closed. Data from the survey will be analysed and compared to data from the 2024 survey (first year undertaken).

The City Council's Green Travel Plan is currently being reviewed by the Strategic Director for People and will be presented to the next Transport Working Group. Data from 2024 &

2025 Staff Travel Survey will inform the revised Green Travel Plan. Once reviewed, delivery of the Green Travel Plan will form part of the work of the Net Zero team.

Transport Working Group

Members of the Net Zero team attend the quarterly Transport Working Group, chaired by Cllr Vizard. The Transport Working Group uses levers available to the Council to support a positive change across the city, including planning, City Council Green Travel Plan, influencing Devon County Council as the Transport & Highway Authority, lobby public transport providers and government, apply for relevant funding where appropriate.

Recent presentations have included Stagecoach and Devon County Council, focusing on the bus network across the city and the electrification of the fleet.

The Net Zero team are working on a number of projects and business cases that have a transport element to them, including the GWR/Green Circle project (mentioned above) and how we support staff and residents to travel across the city by Bike.

Newtown Community Active Travel Project

After extensive engagement with the residents and stakeholders, a scheme to make it easier and safer to get around and improve access to green spaces for everyone, has been recently approved by ECC and DCC HATOC. The project will commence this year and will:

- Make green spaces more useful and attractive for residents – for instance, by creating small parks and increasing the amount of green space
- Making it easier and safer for people to walk, wheel and cycle around and through Newtown
- Make it easier for people walking, wheeling and cycling to find their way around in Newtown and to destinations beyond

District Heating Networks

The proposed Energy Centre for the city centre District Heat Network has been approved by the Planning Committee. The Strategic Director for Place is the Senior Responsible Officer for City Council touchpoints with 1Energy, with the Head of Service for City Centre & Net Zero supporting the Director. An open space disposal consultation has commenced and officers anticipate securing authority to dispose of part of Grace Road Fields at Executive November 2025.

An internal officer working group is held once a month to discuss touchpoints, with an additional meeting held with 1Energy representatives to update on the energy centre and the development of the district heat network. 1Energy are undertaking groundwork investigations on Grace Road site, with the necessary licences being sought from the City Council. 1Energy continue to work closely with Devon County Council, as the Highway Authority, in finalising the route across the city, minimising works on the public highway.

The University of Exeter, Exeter College, the Royal Devon University Hospital and Devon Partnership Trust have all received PSDS 4 grant funding to connect to the DHN to decarbonise buildings. Global City Futures has been supporting these four City Institutions in developing their outline and final business case.

Community Engagement

Part of my Portfolio Holder covers Communities, i attend Safer Exeter, the Community Safety Partnership, Executive meetings. Data to develop the 2026 annual Action Plan will shortly be received from Safer Devon, which will enable priorities and Operational Sub-Groups to be re-evaluated.

3. Issues that may impact service delivery/financial performance/future budget requirements

Government recently announced there will be no further rounds of PSDS funding, which supports the decarbonisation of public sector buildings. The City Council awaits further announcements on grant opportunities to decarbonise buildings owned and occupied by the City Council.

Over the next 12 months, the City Council will be reviewing which buildings to connect to the City Centre District Heat Network.

As highlighted in Section 2, the Net Zero team have been working across the organisation on a *PV Feasibility Study*. *For buildings that are viable, there would be a future ask*

The revenue budget for the delivery of net zero for both City Council and city wide activity continues to be funded from earmarked reserves.

4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered

Three roles within the Net Zero Team were temporary, and from next year will be funded from car park income; the posts have recently been made permanent. Net Zero budget that would have previously been earmarked to cover salaries will now be directed towards projects, research and delivery of activity.

The Net Zero Data Officer recently left the Council in July to take promotion at another Local Authority in the South West. This role is an integral part of the team in supporting services to reduce GHG emissions, they also deliver the City Council's Carbon Literacy training programme. The role has recently been advertised, with significant interest received which will provide for a positive recruitment process.

Over the next 12 months, the City Council will be reviewing which buildings to connect to the City Centre District Heat Network.

5. Other matters the Portfolio Holder wishes to raise with the Scrutiny Committee

From the work to reduce GHG emissions both within the City Council and across the wider city, there are additional wider societal benefits including:

- reduced pollution
- healthier homes and buildings that are cheaper to heat and run
- cleaner working practices for officers

- biodiversity enhancement
- local green jobs
- innovation
- local leadership