

REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 25th September 2025

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Matt Vizard: Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change & Communities

Please note this report relates to the Communities part of the portfolio which reports to Customer Focus Scrutiny. The report relating to Climate and Ecological Change role was presented to the recent Strategic Scrutiny Committee.

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

The new Corporate Plan 2025-2028 has been published following approval by Executive and Council in July. Extensive consultation took place with residents to ensure that the Council's identified priorities match those of our residents and communities as well as those who visit or work in Exeter.

[Corporate Plan 2025-2028 - Introduction - Exeter City Council](#)

Local economy

Our community organisations continue to provide invaluable support across our city, contributing to our prosperity in the broadest sense. These are supported by the Council through our funding of Wellbeing Exeter, the Community Grants Programme and the Exeter Community Lottery.

People & Homes

Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCE)

There is currently no umbrella CVS (Council for Voluntary Services) forum or organisation in Exeter. Work is underway to help support and strengthen Exeter's VCE sector with plans for the Council to undertake a convening role to bring organisations together to ensure closer working relationships and improved outcomes.

This is at an early stage with further discussions to follow. Members will be updated in due course.

The Civil Society Agreement

A briefing has been shared with Senior Management Board (SMB) by the Head of Service - Customer & Communities, Customer & Communities. Further discussions will follow but in summary:

Launched on 17 July 2025, the Civil Society Covenant is a framework designed to reset and strengthen the relationship between the UK Government and civil society. It recognises civil society—including charities,

social enterprises, faith groups, unions, volunteers, and purpose-driven businesses—as integral to the national identity and a vital partner in addressing societal challenges. The Covenant promotes collaboration, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, aiming to embed these values across public service delivery and governance.

Core Principles

The Covenant is structured around four high-level principles:

1. Recognition and Value
 - Government respects civil society’s independence, right to campaign, and role in holding power to account.
 - Civil society acknowledges government’s democratic mandate.
 - Both sectors commit to valuing each other’s contributions and perspectives.
2. Partnership and Collaboration
 - Engagement should be early, regular, and ongoing.
 - Civil society is seen as a strategic partner in shaping policy and delivering services.
 - Government commits to flexible, outcome-focused commissioning and long-term funding.
 - Civil society commits to cross-sector collaboration and reducing delivery barriers.
3. Participation and Inclusion
 - Both sectors promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.
 - Citizens and communities are to be actively engaged in co-producing solutions.
 - Barriers to participation—such as access to volunteering and democratic engagement—are to be addressed jointly.
4. Transparency and Data
 - Communication must be open, honest, and respectful.
 - Both sectors commit to sharing data and evidence, supporting public debate, and improving data development practices.
 - Civil society is expected to be transparent about funding and impact.

Local Government Role and Expectations

While the Covenant is non-statutory, councils are encouraged to adopt and embed its principles. This includes:

- Publicly endorsing the Covenant.
- Integrating its values into governance, commissioning, and community engagement.
- Co-designing local agreements and reporting annually on progress.
- Participating in peer learning and DCMS-led initiatives.

Ukrainian community support

Work is being undertaken following the findings from the Devon County Council Refugee Employment Research Report and aligning with national guidance on Homes for Ukraine. Consideration of building on the existing roles and provision, in housing, outlining a coordinated delivery model to support Ukrainian guests in Exeter, integrating commissioned services, new roles, and a targeted grants programme.

Research Findings

The Refugee Employment Research Report 2 (2024-2025) conducted by Devon County Council highlights systemic barriers faced by migrants in Devon. Key findings include:

- High underemployment despite high qualifications, language barriers, lack of UK work experience, and limited access to career development support.
- 61.8% of migrants cite language as a primary barrier, and 91.4% express interest in work-focused English courses.
- Only 52% are currently employed
- 61.5% lack professional references.
- Housing instability and mental health challenges further hinder integration.

Many grants have been awarded through our Community Grants Scheme (both City and Ward Grants), and these and awards from the Exeter Community Lottery contribute significantly to culture and heritage across Exeter.

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

Council consultation and engagement work

Work is underway on an ECC consultation and engagement strategy for 2025-28 and plans for work on a customer service standards charter.

Annual Consultations

- **Resident Survey** 2025 survey results to be released shortly
- **Budget Consultation**
- **Parking Places Order Consultation**
- **Local Active Lives**

Other Consultations for 2025-2026

- **City Centre Strategy**
- **Consultation & Engagement Strategy**
- **Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**
- **Culture Strategy**
- **Council Tax Support Scheme**

In addition, officers have designed and are delivering a comprehensive engagement process for Local Government Reorganisation which includes an on-line survey, a representative sample survey, focus groups, webinars and stakeholder meeting

Wellbeing Exeter

1. **Financial Position and Contract Extension** The two-year extension of the Wellbeing Exeter delivery contract with CoLab Exeter has been formally agreed, covering 2025/26 and 2026/27. This follows confirmation of match funding from Sport England through to 2027. Cranbrook was removed from the project in April 2025.

The total cost of delivering the contract is:

- **£735,625** for 2025/26

- **£755,675** for 2026/27
These figures maintain the staffing model established in the contract renewal of 2024/25

The revised funding strategy for 2025/26 includes:

- **£309,000** from Sport England
- **£340,00** from Exeter City Council via Neighbourhood CIL
- **£88,320** from reserves

For 2026/27, the fundi strategy includes:

- **£206,000** from Sport England
- **£300,000** from ECC Neighbourhood CIL
- **£38,897** from reserves
- **£210,778** to be secured from external funding

Executive Office team are working in partnership with delivery lead partner to explore sustainable funding solutions.

2. Enhanced Services Update

The enhanced services programme, funded by Sport England for two years from April 2025, is designed to tackle health inequalities and improve community wellbeing, focused in particular areas. The total budget for the enhanced services is **£225,918** over 2 years

Getting Back into Work

- **Total Budget:** £35,000
- **Outcomes:** Enhanced employability and income for NEET young people; formal referral pathways with DWP and other agencies; improved wellbeing and reduced NEET rates in priority neighbourhoods.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

- **Total Budget:** £94,918
- **Outcomes:** Increased participation and wellbeing among residents with protected characteristics; stronger community cohesion and voice in local decision-making.

Leisure Partnership

- **Total Budget:** £30,000
- **Outcomes:** Increased access to and participation in Exeter Leisure by low-income residents; improved physical and mental health, and stronger community bonds.

Access to Walking and Cycling

- **Total Budget:** £66,000
- **Outcomes:** Increased use of the Green Circle and active travel routes; improved wellbeing and environmental awareness.

3. CIL Consultation Progress

- The Council's contribution to Wellbeing Exeter is currently funded through Neighbourhood CIL until March 2027.
- A public consultation on the future use of Neighbourhood CIL is scheduled to be undertaken by the end of the 2025/26 financial year.
- This consultation will inform future allocations and ensure alignment with community priorities and the Council's strategic objectives.

4. Governance Arrangements

- Strategic oversight of Wellbeing Exeter is embedded within the Head of Service role, ensuring alignment with the Council's wider community and wellbeing objectives.
- A governance paper was agreed in May 2025 to clarify roles and responsibilities across the partnership, including the relationship between the Council, CoLab Exeter, and delivery partners.
- The governance arrangements put in place a revised performance monitoring framework to track delivery against agreed outcomes.

- The governance model also includes a strategic steering group chaired by the Council, with representation from all core partners, including relevant portfolio holders, to ensure collaborative decision-making and accountability.

Exeter Community Lottery

Following member feedback, the website has been updated to clarify the breakdown of the proceeds that go to good causes and operating costs.

Overview & Purpose

- The Exeter Community Lottery launched in May 2023, managed by external operator Gatherwell, to raise funds for local causes and the City Council's Community Fund.
- The lottery operates under the Gambling Act 2005, with a Gambling Commission licence. Exeter City Council is responsible for lawful operation and is appointing Personal Management Licence holders as required.
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Participation & Funds Raised

- There are currently 131 active groups signed up.
- Estimated funds to causes and ECC 2024/25: £60,000

Legal & Compliance

- The lottery is fully compliant with the Gambling Act 2005 and Gambling Commission requirements.

Community Grants Programme

Our two community grants schemes continue apace with valuable input from councillors and community builders. These are funded from the Neighbourhood CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy).

City Grants

A £50k p.a. fund is provided with one-off grants awarded to a maximum of £2,500 by the grants panel which comprises cross-party members. The scheme supports groups and organisations to help run events, festivals and projects that aim to encourage community participation. This fund can also be used for a one-off purchase or repair of equipment. There is a focus on our priority neighbourhoods:

- Exwick
- Redhills
- St Thomas
- St David's
- City Centre
- Newtown
- Mincinglake
- Beacon Heath
- Whipton
- Wonford
- Countess Wear

The scheme operates over 3 rounds of funding during the financial year, with the panel meeting to discuss applications and collectively agree on awards. Applicants are asked to provide detailed supporting information and evidence of how their project meets the scheme's criteria. Post-award feedback is expected, monitored and reported back to the panel.

The panel has been a very collaborative experience, with members able to advocate, discuss and come to agreement in a non-party political and positive manner.

Round 1 for 2025/26 has been completed with the following awards made:

- Exeter Otters wheelchair basketball club £2,500.00
- Lightbear Lane £1,500.00
- Exeter Historic Buildings Trust £1,000.00
- Isca Community Enterprises £2,000.00
- Double Elephant Print Workshop £1,500.00
- Home-Start Exeter, East and Mid Devon £2,500.00
- Inclusive Exeter CIC £2,000.00
- Youth Arts and Health Trust £2,214.00
- Fabian's Film Community Interest Company £1,200.00
- Say Aphasia £670.00
- Total Awarded Across all 10 Projects: **£17,084.00**

Remaining funds carried forward to rounds 2 & 3 = £32,916.

Round 2

- Applications Opened on Wednesday 27 August 2025 and are now closed
- Panel Meeting Date: Tuesday 7 October 2025

Round 3

- Applications Open: December 2025 (date TBC)
- Application Closing Date: January 2026 (date TBC)
- Panel Meeting Date: February 2026 (date TBC)

Ward Grants

A £39k p.a. fund is provided with one-off grants awarded to a maximum of £350 by ward councillors to support a community projects. Applicants need to demonstrate that there is community support.

Members are encouraged to promote the scheme through their networks and communications, and to take ownership of their ward grant budgets and how these are spent, applying the criteria and terms and conditions.

Cumulative total for 2025/26 at time of publication:

- Alphington (2 awards/total awarded £525)
- Duryard & StJames (0)
- Exwick (2/£700)
- Heavitree (3/£1,050)
- Mincinglake & Whipton (1/£350)
- Newtown & St Leonards (4/£1,130)
- Pennsylvania (2/£700)
- Pinhoe (4/£1,400)
- Priory (3/£900)

- St Davids (5/£2,048)
- St Loyes (2/£600)
- St Thomas (4/£1,224)
- Topsham (3/£1,050)

Total for Year: 35/£11,678

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

None currently although further work on LGR will impact on officer capacity

4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered

None currently.

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

As Member Champion for Community Safety and Engagement, Cllr Mollie Miller-Boam has begun undertaking meetings with community groups across Exeter. This outreach work will help me and the Communities team to understand some of the issues and challenges, as well as the good work and activities going on. This in turn will help feed into the work described elsewhere in this document.

Exeter City Council and the City as a whole have had a long relationship with Fairtrade and continue to promote and support this good work.

Member Champion Cllr Mollie Miller-Boam and I have attended meetings of Exeter Fairtrade and supported their activities. The annual **Fairtrade Fortnight** takes place from 22nd September to 5th October. Among the events to mark this, there will be a tea tasting/coffee morning and a meal at the Exeter College restaurant.

As well as my regular formal and informal meetings and briefings with the Director and other key officers, I have attended meetings with the Safer Exeter Partnership, Inclusive Exeter, community associations and groups.