

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 September 2025

Present:

Councillor Pole (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, K, Atkinson, Haigh, Harding, Hussain, Ketchin, Knott, Palmer, Wetenhall and Williams, M

Apologies:

Councillors Miller-Boam and Rolstone

Also present:

Strategic Director for Place, Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero, Net Zero Project Manager, Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Bialyk, Vizard, Wood and Wright

9 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2025 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

10 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

There one question submitted by a member of the public. The Chair invited Mr Cleasby to read his question:

“In view of the forthcoming transfer of local transport responsibilities to the County Combined Authority, does the Leader agree that only by creating an Exeter-centric unitary authority – which would be a full voting member of the CCA Board - will Exeter’s interests be properly represented in CCA transport decisions?”

The Leader responded that he agreed and that both budgets were kept separate for this year and amalgamated next year. The Leader also stated that he attends CCA meetings as a non-constituent member rather than a member with voting rights and that in order for Exeter to hold a seat it was necessary to become a unitary authority.

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

There had been two questions submitted by Councillor Wetenhall to the Portfolio Holder for City Management who was unable to attend therefore the questions were deferred until the next meeting of the committee.

13 Portfolio Holder report - Councillor Vizard

The Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities, Councillor Vizard presented his report drawing attention to the following points:

- the breadth of work being undertaken spanned directorates, the Council and outside bodies;
- the path to net zero included all aspects of council work;
- thanks were offered to Freya Branley who had now left the council but had been an excellent officer. Recruitment to the post was underway;
- the strategic vision of the council in the shape of the new corporate plan was in place and other opportunities with partners were being explored which was timely with regard to local government reorganisation and the need for Exeter to have a say in topics such as transport;
- the successful PSDS funding for Riverside Leisure Centre had now successfully procured and awarded contracts for the works; and
- electrification of the fleet was a key project but Riverside was top of the list.

Councillor Vizard and the Net Zero Project Manager responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- there would hopefully be more homes retrofitted with solar panels;
- two companies had been secured to provide design and project management for Riverside;
- teams would likely be happy to provide a report regarding joined up working on damp and mould issues although housing was a different portfolio;
- incorrect grants information listed should be sent to the Portfolio Holder and he would ask officers to review;
- next steps and timescales regarding PV feasibility study would be put to SMB in the near future and there would be a report to council seeking funding, from the public loans board, with a business case;
- with regard to the Regional Energy Strategic Plan recommendations of the net zero team the Portfolio Holder would respond outside the meeting;
- the cost of heating the civic centre was not optimum but he would press hard to reach optimum with any move and to meet some of the climate emergency challenges;
- heat pumps on council land was a good concept and funding would remain the issue as well as challenges around infrastructure, planning and connectivity;
- the timescale for retrofit was difficult as there was not definite funding due but 920 homes had been retrofitted to date which equated to approximately 20% of the stock and funding bids were being submitted;
- the number one priority was decarbonising housing and buildings in general;
- there was a hope that the district heat network would connect with residential homes in future;
- it was expected that there would be funding from Government to replace the PSDS and the Portfolio Holder would look for announcements; and
- the communities aspect of his portfolio reported to the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee but there was work through Safer Exeter Partnerships with Councillor Miller-Boam as Member Champion

reaching out to diverse communities in order to bring questions back to the council.

The Strategic Scrutiny Committee noted the report of the Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities.

14 **Exeter City Council's Costed Organisational Carbon Footprint Projections to 2030**

The Strategic Director for Place introduced the report and invited the Research Fellow to the table and made the following points:

- this was a powerful report with scenarios from across council services;
- this was the first report in the country to provide true costs to a council for their carbon reduction; and
- the report was ground-breaking and thanks were given to the Research Fellow and the team at South West Energy and Environment Group (SWEEG) for giving such rich information without charge.

The Research Fellow gave apologies from the author who was unable to be present, and presented the report making the following points:

- social housing was very important to footprint;
- the net present value was not included due to a short timescale;
- F gases often included but relatively small and bundled with buildings for the purposes of this report;
- Business as Usual(BAU) included those things which were already planned or committed to;
- the Max position would just get the council to net zero by 2030 and was the best case scenario;
- insulation was planned at the point of change of tenancy to avoid disruption to tenants;
- electricity usage was going down despite the increased use of devices;
- heating by heat pump was more efficient than electric heating;
- capital expenditure was needed for social housing;
- operational expenditure would decrease over time with non-domestic properties but there would be a spike in capital expenditure;
- transport required capital cost due to leasing of vehicles;
- renewable energy would be achieved by installing PV at greater rates on home with some non-domestic but the Max would be achieved by installing larger ground-mounted PV;
- land use change was limited to tree planting to increase canopy cover and the Max option would be 100% cover which would be unrealistic, however, planting new trees could also disturb carbon;
- net zero would not be achieved without addressing housing which was costly and not necessarily easy;
- electrification of traffic could happen quickly as the infrastructure was already in place; and
- BAU and Mid options would not achieve net zero by 2030, the Max option would but it was ambitious.

The research Fellow, Strategic Director for Place and Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the report was transparent on the sources used and methodology could also be seen with factors available from Government as they were those used by the Climate Change Committee;
- data was pooled with other authorities through SWEEG;
- Cornwall were look at a shared ground look;
- the amount of money needed for housing meant that supportive policies would be needed and direct incentives for people to move to heat pumps;
- there was a toolkit for householders, community groups and businesses on the council website;
- there was support for Exeter Community Energy;
- figures regarding housing were taken from discussion with the Housing Team and maybe based on the cost to the council rather than market value but he would look into this;
- 'current trajectory' rather than BAU would be taken back to the author and Cornwall used 'best outlook pathway'
- the author was a certified Passivhaus designer and it was a myth that Passivhaus' were hermetically sealed rather ventilation was managed and these home were better insulated to keep warm or cool when needed'
- the need to keep internal doors open or closed would depend on the way the individual house was set up and its individual sensors;
- it was important that those living in a Passivhaus understood the house and that they were given information about how the house worked otherwise energy bills would remain high;
- the Strategic Director would respond outside the meeting regarding leased out assets on page 25 and whether some of these could be in scope 1;
- it was an aspiration for all new houses to be built to Passivhaus standard and some had been with Vaughn Road as a great achievement;
- Passivhaus was one approach and design solution to achieve a high level of energy efficiency but there were others as well;
- as a stock owner and landlord the council must also consider costs to tenants and it was currently cheaper to heat with gas;
- the report was informative but wouldn't be used to make decisions; and
- all issues must be considered including but not limited to maintaining design excellence and carbon reduction.

Following a unanimous vote the Strategic Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

15 **Citywide Net Zero**

The Strategic Director for Place introduced the item and the Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero who presented the report making the following points:

- the report highlighted the collaborative efforts with partners, especially the university, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the city;

- there were many initiatives including sustainable travel and biodiversity;
- the new stakeholder group had been successful with good attendance and engagements from the public sector, businesses and community groups and there was a desire and enthusiasm to work together;
- priorities had been identified in March and in June it had been agreed to focus on active and sustainable travel and a meeting next week would focus on nature and biodiversity;
- links would be made with the county nature recovery strategy; and
- funding from GWR Customer and Community Improvement Fund had enabled a successful project improving signage and way finding to railway stations from the Green Circle.

The Strategic Director for Place and Programme Manager City Wide – Net Zero responded to Members' question in the following terms:

- the civic sustainable travel group was led by the university therefore questions regarding their minutes would need to be put to the university
- Exeter Partnership notes were shared on the council website but no minutes were taken;
- Phase 1 of the bike hubs project was focused on secure staff bike parking on a variety of council sites and some on council-owned housing;
- proactive work with others to place bike hubs was in the scope of the project but not in Phase 1 or 2;
- the planning pre-application service, for which there was a cost, could be utilised for those wishing to put in bike hubs;
- at present there wasn't a timescale for this work but a report would go to SMB and the Executive in due course;
- the new maps made it clear where the railway stations were and there were new maps available as well as maps at the railway stations showing how to get to the Green Circle;
- a response would be given outside the meeting as to whether the new electric double-decker buses were in service;
- the net zero team were working closely with the Live and Move team who were on the steering group delivering the Green Circle project;
- promoting to stakeholders was an important aspect of the project, an article had been included in the Citizen and there would be more activity towards the end of September;
- the new maps and way finding focused on the Green Circle areas adjacent to the stations of St David's, Marsh Barton and Polsloe Bridge;

The Chair stated that she had worked with a community group to put in a bike hub and the planning team had been amenable and explained the process.

Councillor Vizard, as Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities stated that his report to the committee explained the Phases of the bike hub project and that logistics and potential providers would be part of this work. Devon County Council had a role to play with regard to anything on the highways.

The Chair moved, seconded by Councillor Atkinson, the recommendation as set out in the report and following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

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

During discussion on the scrutiny work plan Councillor Knott proposed, seconded by Councillor Atkinson that an item on South West Water be added to the plan following referral from Council on 2 September and following a vote was unanimously CARRIED.

The Chair shared information regarding the Air Quality Action Plan from the Head of Service – Environment and Waste:

“we first have to consider the Air Quality Management Area and this has to be subject to consultation before it can be presented to Council to become an order. At the point the order has been approved by Council (likely to be March 2026) the Council then has 18 months to draw up and consult upon an Air Quality Action Plan based upon the new Air Quality Management Area.

The law requires us to conduct it in this way and to do it any other way would be pre-determining the consultation of the Air Quality Management Area.

The timetable in my forthcoming report has been presented to DEFRA who have accepted that this meets the requirements.”

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor Atkinson that the item be timetabled for scrutiny at the meeting in March 2026 which following a vote was unanimously CARRIED.

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

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.45 pm

Chair