

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

REPORT TO STRATEGIC and CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Date of Meetings:

Customer Focus Scrutiny: Thursday 25th September 2025

Strategic Scrutiny: Thursday 20th November 2025

Report of COUNCILLOR Laura Wright, Lead Councillor for Corporate Services (including Digital Transformation and HR) & City Centre Strategy.

Council Committees: Executive and Council

Board member/Trustee (council appointments): InExeter, Exeter Canal and Quay Trust, Exeter Business Centre

Member of: Devon and Cornwall Police & Crime Commissioner's Panel

Member of: Exeter Community Safety Partnership including working groups; ASB and Gender Safety

Devon & Cornwall Police Cllr Advocate

Relevant training and CPD undertaken this year;
LGA Conference, Liverpool, July 2025

ECC online certified training; County Lines, Domestic Abuse, Equality Diversity and Inclusion, GDPR, Introduction to Safeguarding Thematics, Misogyny and Incel subculture, Risk Assessment, Serious violence and Knife Crime, FGM.

Other relevant training: Level 2 Safeguarding, Prevent, ECC's EDI training.

1. Delivering our strategic priorities: as per our published Corporate Plan 2025-28

Local Economy

City Centre Strategy

The consultations involving business, elected members and residents have now concluded. All responses are being considered in the next stage of the development of a new vision, strategy and action plan. The action plan will be owned by key stakeholders and partners as well as ECC and will have measurable and timed outcomes.

The development of the vision and strategy is underway and will come back to myself, the Director and Head of Service early November. The final vision and strategy will come to Council for adoption Spring '26.

As the strategy work progresses, we will be in a strong position to work at national and regional levels to bring forward investment and encourage economic growth to Exeter.

There is a business, economy and growth sub-group of the Exeter Partnership which will sense check draft documents as and when received.

I continue to sit on the board of InExeter which provides feedback from city centre businesses and their priorities.

People *A safe and thriving city with great things to do for everyone*

Community Safety & Anti-Social behaviour

The Exeter City Centre PSPO was renewed this year and includes the St Thomas area of the Exe Bridges retail park and Cowick Street precinct. This Order gives police powers to remove alcohol from anyone displaying anti-social behaviours. Specific powers have also now been given to the Community Safety Team following their CSAS training and accreditation.

The 4 Community Safety Team (CST) officers (jointly funded by ECC, InExeter and the Police & Crime Commissioner) to patrol the city centre and PSPO area, supporting D&C Police in their hotspot policing initiative and undertaking various other duties. The team also address stray dogs and encampments across the rest of Exeter.

The main purpose of the CST is to contribute to community safety and to combat crime and disorder, public nuisance and other forms of antisocial behaviour in co-operation with the police through their Hotspot policing initiative. The areas covered include; Sidwell Street, High Street, Cathedral Yard, Queen Street, South Street and Mary Arches Street.

The CST also undertake business engagement to provide reassurance to the City Centre business community. Since the introduction of the CST, there has been 563 business engagements.

From data submitted by the CST to D&C Police, the following outputs have been achieved as part of the Hotspot policing initiative.

Hotspot Outputs (01/04/2024 - 30/10/2025)	
Foot patrol hours delivered	2968
Interactions with members of the public	8717
Premises visits executed	4650
ASB incidents attended	365
Items of Intelligence submitted to community intelligence systems	84
CSAS powers exercised	116
Safeguarding referrals made	15

The CST has been run on a pilot scheme which is now coming to an end in March 2026. Joint funding has been committed from InExeter but the Police and Crime Commissioner's grant received for the last two years has not been extended. Therefore, work is ongoing to investigate funding from Devon & Cornwall Police, as well as other organisations to ensure the permanence of this project.

Data from the CST, the Police and InExeter is currently being collated to form one central data portal to log, assess and ascertain the effectiveness of all aspects of targeted action against ASB in the city. This work to form a data portal is being undertaken by Exeter College.

CCTV and Control Room

Following a member of the control room staff being awarded a commendation from the Police & Crime Commissioner earlier this year, the team have made further crucial identifications of wanted criminals and been able to assist the police in their work. As I have seen myself when visiting the control room at night, the team also play a crucial role in spotting behaviours and

vulnerabilities to which they can then alert security staff, the police and the Community Safety Team.

The City Council have 311 City Centre CCTV cameras.

Additional budget has been allocated to replace any remaining old analogue CCTV Cameras across the City Centre and within car parks. Any surplus budget will be used to buy and install new CCTV Cameras in any areas of concern. Officers are working with D&C Police and InExeter to identify these locations. The team are working with procurement to purchase the CCTV cameras and should be installed this autumn. This has been funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

A new CCTV camera has recently been installed in South Street.

The CCTV Control Room is open 24hrs a day, 7 days a week.

New yellow 'Do you need help' signs with the phone number to the control room, have been installed over the summer. 140 are installed to date, with a further 24 to be installed when the additional new CCTV cameras are installed this autumn.

The City Council are working with Safer Exeter Community Safety Partnership, to raise awareness of the work undertaken by partners to address ASB within the city centre. A press event is being organised for November, where information on the CCTV network, the yellow help signs and the Community Safety Team will form part of the press event. The press event will also include work undertaken by partners in addressing ASB, including InExeter, the City Council and Devon & Cornwall Police.

Community Safety Partnership – Safer Exeter

The review of this partnership, its priorities and Operation Sub-Working Groups and potential outcomes is ongoing. The work of the partnership so far has been to bring key stakeholders together to share information, create specific focus groups to bring forward objectives, and to facilitate bids for relevant Home Office Funding for community safety.

The work of the Sub-Working Groups is having a positive impact on the city.

Sustainable Environment

Recent input through the Exeter Partnership has highlighted the need to include sustainability and environment in our work on the City Centre Vision and Strategy, as a golden thread. Parks and biodiversity within the city centre will be a focus as will working with business to reduce carbon footprint and take advantage of potential joint ventures to improve sustainability.

A Well-run Council

- **Leading a well-run council**

Effective investment and maintenance programme for the assets that underpin our business

Open and transparent decision making

Work is well underway to modernise and clarify our democratic processes and our Constitution. A cross-party governance sounding board and regular communications with group leaders has informed, shaped and checked the work in this area. So far, sections of the constitution referring to the Planning Committee have been adopted. In addition, full Council has approved the changes to Council meetings. Further work on Scrutiny committees and the Executive committee is underway. Once these changes have been approved by full Council, the provisions will be implemented as a whole.

The reduction of committees to eleven places and the provision of substitutes has been approved by the Audit & Governance committee and by Council and is now in place.

Councillor training and development continues to receive good feedback and is ongoing throughout the year. Specific briefings in addition to training have been welcomed by members many who have feedback that this aids their decision making.

Members are encouraged to undertake any specific individual training that they identify, and a recent email has set out the process for applying to do this.

The move to reduce the number of reports that come to Executive for noting before going to full council for debate and decision making has started to streamline and clarify accountability.

It has been decided by the Councillor Development Steering Group to continue with the online training platform available to members and work is ongoing to improve the take-up of this certified training.

IT & Digital

Officers continue to focus on delivering the Digital Customer Strategy, which guides our approach to making council services more accessible, secure, and responsive.

- **Digital Customer Services & Online Access**

- The “My Exeter” online portal now has over 20,000 registered residents. It makes it easier to access council services, supports self-service, and improves the customer experience.
- Support was provided to assist the launch of the new consultation and engagement site, “Engage Exeter.”

- **Customer Feedback & Service Improvement**

- New online processes for handling customer feedback and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests are being developed to improve compliance and responsiveness.
- Work is continuing with services to create new “report it” processes to make it easier for residents to interact with the council and track service requests.
- **Contact Centre & Telephony Modernisation**
 - A new phone and contact centre system is now in place, making customer communications smoother and more reliable.
 - The new telephony system also provides comprehensive data and customer insights which will be used to monitor performance and identify areas for improvement.
- **Business Systems & Data Management**
 - Improvements are being made to the Idox Uniform system –case management system in City Development, Building Control, Environmental Health, Licensing and Private Sector Housing. A review highlighted gaps and underused modules, which is being addressed by updating system settings, training staff and improved reporting.
 - A review of the iTrent HR system has led to automation of onboarding, offboarding, and internal movement processes. A new HR Business Intelligence Dashboard now provides real-time data for managers on absence, turnover, EDI indicators, vacancies etc.
 - The same process is now underway with the Corporate Health and Safety system: AssessNet,
- **Azure Migration Project**
 - Strata have started to move our IT systems to Microsoft Azure, a secure cloud platform. This change will make services more reliable, save money, and help the council meet its environmental goals. The project is happening in stages to avoid disruption, with careful planning and backup systems to protect data.
- **Cyber Security & Compliance**
 - Following an independent IT health check, all identified cyber security gaps have been addressed by Strata. Annual Public Sector Network (PSN) compliance has been assured, safeguarding council data and services.
- **End User Computing Transformation**
 - Staff now have Windows 11 laptops, moving away from virtual desktops and giving direct access to Office 365 for a better user experience.
- **Enterprise Middleware Architecture (EMA)**
 - Strata have developed new architecture to connect key systems (e.g., Waste, Licensing) enabling more efficient data flows and will help enhance our service to residents.
- **Project Management & Collaboration**
 - Officers continue to collaborate with Strata and other councils within the partnership to share best practice, deliver joint projects, and maximise value for Exeter’s residents.
- **Future Focus**

- Officers are exploring explore how AI can be used in council services to further improve efficiencies and service delivery.
- A full review of the council website will take place to update content and make it easier to search.

HR and Workforce

- Officers undertaken a significant transformation of its HR function following an independent review in March 2024.

Key developments include:

- **Digital Transformation:** A full review of the iTrent HR system has led to automation of onboarding, offboarding, and internal movement processes. A new HR Business Intelligence Dashboard now provides real-time data on absence, turnover, EDI indicators, and vacancies.
- **Workforce Accessibility:** A new HR SharePoint site, including a “People Hub,” is being developed to centralise HR resources, policies, and guidance, improving access for managers and staff.
- **Recruitment and Talent Development:** A council-wide apprenticeship scheme has been launched to address skills shortages and support underrepresented groups. Recruitment processes have been streamlined, with a new careers landing page and automated workflows improving candidate experience.
- **Learning and Leadership:** A strategic leadership development programme is underway, alongside targeted people management workshops to build capability across the organisation.
- **Employee Experience:** 24 HR policies have been reviewed, with new policies introduced on Hybrid Working, Secondments, and Neonatal Leave. A new Occupational Health provider is being procured to improve wellbeing support.
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI):** Following an LGA Mini Peer Review, an EDI Task Force has been established and action plan agreed. A new EDI policy published, and a training framework developed for staff and members. Improvements to Equality Impact Assessment governance and EDI data collection are also in progress. EQIA training has been delivered to staff and members.
- **Industrial Relations:** A modernised IR framework has been launched in collaboration with Trade Unions to support inclusive and transparent staff engagement.
- **KPIs and Strategic Planning:** HR now tracks key metrics such as sickness absence, turnover, vacancy rates, and apprenticeship levy spend, with targets aligned to national benchmarks and ECC’s strategic workforce goals.
- **Corporate Health and Safety:** Responsibility for Corporate Health and Safety is transitioning to the HR service. Recruitment is about to commence for two new roles: a Health and Safety Manager and a Health and Safety Officer, to strengthen organisational oversight and support.
- **Future Focus:** Officers are exploring AI integration into HR functions, including chatbot support, automated job evaluations, and transcription tools, to further enhance efficiency and service delivery.

Legal Services: A review is underway to look at the processes currently used to address Traveller and non-Traveller encampments and incursions. This will be in conjunction with Housing, Estates, Parks and Open Spaces, the Police and the Community Safety Partnership.

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

1. All covered in the sections above

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

CCTV

A tender is being developed to procure a new maintenance contract for the extensive city centre CCTV network. Additional budget was allocated this financial year to pay for a new maintenance contract.

Additional commercial contracts are in negotiation with external organisations.

Homecall is starting to show an increase in customer numbers following a two-year slow decline. Work is underway to raise the awareness of the services through Homecall.

4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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

1. **Devon & Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner Panel**
A report on the last two meetings will come out with the next Councillor Information Bulletin.

END