

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 November 2025

Present:

Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, K, Atkinson, Haigh, Harding, Miller-Boam, Moore, Rolstone, Wetenhall and Williams, M

Also present:

Strategic Director for Operations, Head of Service – Environment and Waste, Head of Service – City Centre and Net Zero and Democratic Services Manager

Public Health Specialist – Devon County Council

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Philip Bialyk
Councillor Ruth Williams
Councillor Laura Wright
Councillor Matthew Vizard

19 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2025 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

20 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

There were no questions submitted by the public.

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

There were no questions submitted in advance by Members and no questions put to Portfolio Holders present.

23 Portfolio Holder report - Councillor Wright

Councillor Wright presented her report which was taken as read.

Councillor Wright, the Head of Service – Net Zero and City Centre and Head of Service – Environment and Waste responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had been supportive in the past, including giving grants which were well received, what was required across

the country as well as in Exeter was more police officers. The demise of the PCC would return funds to the policing budget which should have a positive impact on operational policing and on the streets of Exeter;

- the new city centre strategy would include the action plan and would be produced with relevant partners but the timeline had been impacted by Local Government Reorganisation. Before the strategy was finalised it would be ensured that partners could deliver their parts. The Strategy would be added to the Executive Forward Plan to seek consent for public consultation;
- the CCTV covered as far down as Fore Street but the Council had worked with Devon County Council who had traffic cameras in Cowick Street could be monitored giving the Control Centre sight of them;
- the yellow signs were all within sight of cameras and it was known that people were less likely to call the police if they felt they were being followed but they might ring the control centre. Each yellow sign had the number of the nearest camera on them in order that people didn't need to say where they are and locations of cameras could be shared with councillors;
- dialogue with ward councillors would be helpful regarding potential sites for additional cameras as they did obtain information which the police didn't always receive from residents. Crime statistics had informed current camera locations as well as ensuring good coverage of the city centre area;
- the InExeter hyper local ASB Group had worked hard with ward councillors on issues as well as local businesses;
- data from the CCTV control centre would be tracked and shared. A walk-around the city centre with Mr Cox had taken place and it had been identified that some signs were too high and were programmed in to be adjusted;
- Councillor Wright was Member Champion for the SWAN charter and all organisations signed up to the scheme must have a champion. Bystander information was no longer available as part of the scheme but the aim was to encourage men to stand up when they saw inappropriate actions from others. Some venues that had signed up to the Charter have been removed. The CSP intended to look into the SWAN charter in the new year. The Charter was linked to the Best Bar None initially and this did require reaccreditation. These schemes had been resource intensive using short-term government funding which had now ceased. Organisations were still working within the ethos of the Charter;
- Data from MyExeter would be utilised at an operational level but may feed-in to strategic priorities in future;
- the Chair of the ASB sub-group of the CSP was to be handed over to Exeter City Council due to politicisation of ASB and the Monitoring Officer was looking at the constitution with regard to the mechanism for the CSP to feed back into the council and would report back;
- a review of council processes for encampments and traveller sites was being undertaken as there was a clear process by which officers collaborated but this was not currently shared clearly with councillors until there were travellers within their ward. There was tension between new police powers which did not allow them to move people on unless there was a designated site for them to move to and designated sites provisions did not take into account two-tier authorities. Work with Devon County Council hadn't been fruitful in the past and protected characteristics must be taken into account. Scheduled activities on Exeter City Council land did allow eviction as this was not classed as common land; and
- whilst incursion was a strong word, encampments and incursion were the terms used in legislation. Outreach is important but also some people are street-attached rather than homeless.

During discussion Councillor Rolstone commented that in leading a well-run council the revision of the processes and committees, especially in Planning were highlighted as best practice at a recent training session held nationally.

The Chair moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Kevin Mitchell, that the report be noted and following a vote was CARRIED.

24 Air Quality

The Chair invited Public Health and Councillor Rees, as proposer of the item to the table and explained that there was also a recommendation from the Executive.

Councillor Rees, under Standing Order No. 45, presented her Scrutiny Proforma and in doing so, made the following points:

- that this had been submitted in May 2024 prior to the previous Air Quality Action Plan coming to an end with the intention of evaluation before a new one was written;
- there was consensus that many targets were difficult to evaluate as they were not SMART therefore successes could not be celebrated or areas for improvement seen;
- the decision from Executive to have a wider strategy document with clear information for the public and also detailing aspirations;
- the Air Quality Action Plan had a specific remit and a wider strategy would provide a holistic picture of the ambitions for the city; and
- it was great to see Public Health represented.

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

- the status report had been reviewed for twelve years;
- the annual status report had to be presented on a Government issued template which the council couldn't change.
- data from 2024 had been surprising as it had not been expected that East Wonford Hill would fall below the exceedance level set by the government;
- this was a positive situation but there was still work to do to improve air quality further;
- officers were now seeking to go on a different journey and were present at the meeting to hear from and to listen to members of the scrutiny committee;
- The Air Quality Action Plan was now required to be reviewed;
- this was highly specialist work which couldn't be resourced in-house due to the current vacancy; and
- in drawing the strategy together there would likely be workshops and other opportunities for member to engage.

The Public Health Specialist gave evidence making the following points:

- the Director of Public Health must see and sign off the air quality status reports;
- public health were keen to work with officers and members to look at how this could be better coordinated across the wider Devon area;
- Exeter was influenced by being one of the biggest commuting-in areas in the country;
- there was a desire to streamline the process by becoming involved earlier and looking more strategically across the area, including looking to have one data-set;
- once areas had moved beyond Air Quality Management Areas they were looking to address how authorities could work as a system; and

- looking across the whole region included Europe as everyone must be mindful of large forest fires having a wider-ranging impact on air quality.

The Strategic Director for Operations, Head of Service – Environment and Waste and Public Health Specialist responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the Executive had decided not to consult on reviewing the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), as the AQMA would be short-lived;
- there was a legal requirement to look at the Air Quality Action Plan and comments about SMART objectives would be taken on board;
- there was a desire to have a strategy which would contain resourcing and costs to achieve the actions required;
- the government may decide to review current air quality targets, but no announcements had been made to date;
- the timescale for drafting the strategy would be as soon as was feasibly possible and feedback would be given but it was important to note that external resource would be needed and a procurement exercise would be required;
- views of those in the current area at East Wonford Hill that had not been below the government objective were important to the action plan.
- Local Transport Plan 4 had just been released and air quality was mentioned in it and a health impact assessment had been undertaken;
- there was a legal duty on Exeter City Council duty to measure nitrogen dioxide;
- air quality had no boundaries but there were certain controls which could be put in place both locally and nationally;
- locally there were statutory bodies who could take action but individual responsibility played a big part;
- cycling in Exeter was increasing;
- electric buses were due to come into service imminently;
- the duty to measure would continue and there was no plan to reduce the current monitoring network. The kit at the RAMM and Alphington corridor showed Exeter City Council's commitment to measuring air quality;
- transport was a major contributor to air quality as well as domestic heating;
- nitrogen dioxide was reduced through the introduction of electric vehicles, however, particulates would remain through wear and tear of tyres and brakes;
- cars becoming bigger and heavier means increased weight and therefore greater wear and tear on the road;
- the transport plan stated that it was desirable to use alternative modes of transport with the wish to give choice rather than remove options;
- hydrogen was likely to be dismissed nationally as a realistic solution as it produced nitrous oxide;
- there would be a natural drop-off of gas boilers with the installation of more air-source heat pumps;
- The Council's Housing Team oversaw damp and mould in both their own housing properties as well as the Private Sector. They were responsible for the Council's web content with respect to Awaab's Law. Work had been done ahead of introduction and implementation of the law, ensuring contractors working for housing delivered to appropriate timescales;
- improvements in technology would also bring improvements through the reduction of gas cookers in homes which were harmful;
- wood burners had an impact on the external environment but also internal as pollutants were brought directly into the home;

- there was information regarding air quality in deprived areas and it was known that there was often traffic in poorer neighbourhoods and residents were more susceptible to chronic health conditions. Hospital episodes were being looked at and modelling carried out replicating a Liverpool and London study;
- the relationship between internal and external air quality was not as straightforward in Devon as it was in London;
- Exeter's Passivhaus and other initiatives were being held up as examples of good practice;
- wood burners were permitted within a controlled area if they met the DEFRA standard and were burning the correct DEFRA approved fuel. At the point of purchase advice should be given and this would be a trading standards issue otherwise.
- There was legislation regarding Idling vehicles which was an offence not to comply with an officer's request to switch off, but would require enforcement resource;
- the action plan had included items which were out with the city council control and were that of the transport and highway's authority and engagement would be required to meet the actions and since the Public Health Specialist had been in post productive discussion had taken place;
- electric buses were reliant on funding external to Devon County Council and other areas with worse air quality had been more successful in attracting funding in the past;
- all work would look at transition with regard to local government reorganisation;
- cumulative impact came under planning law and it was difficult to demonstrate in planning term but public health and planning worked closely together and could be strengthened;
- permits were issued by the Environment Agency and local authorities depending upon the nature of the business being regulated; and
- a national consultation on permits had recently closed and the questions were wide-ranging which government were looking at, with a report expected in the new year.

During discussion Members' noted that:

- it would be useful to map other policies in existence, such as, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the local transport plan as these all had targets which already existed and could be updated;
- realistic targets should be set which may not only be exceedance of legal limits;
- it would be good to see a return of a car club initiative and enforcement where there was poor practice from developers;
- there could be an opportunity for procurement across Devon which would be to Exeter's advantage as some housing developments were on the edges of the city but out with Exeter City Council boundary;
- internal air quality should be included and advice could be given to residents on how to manage this within their home;
- trees and green infrastructure should be included;
- consideration of a rapid health impact assessment ([Rapid Health Impact Assessment for Local Transport Plan 4.pdf](#));
- Lower layer Super Output Areas(LSOAs) and areas of multiple deprivation should be considered within the strategy as some areas had deteriorated and now had two indicators including health outcomes;
- it was important to draw on best practices from other places and York and Winchester were examples which had links to other policies to ensure clarity

- of the whole air quality picture within an areas and the information was easy to read and understand;
- would a joint strategy with Devon County Council be possible;
- could measures of education and enforcement be clearly stated in the strategy including the costs;
- London had Breathe Cities – request to look at how to involve communities, for example in monitoring, identifying idling hotspots and children designing posters;
- that there was discussion with Planning to identify how developers could be encouraged to think about minimising air pollution at all stages of their building work;
- that single emitters be considered as each was treated separately and not included in wider data;
- it would be good to have more smokeless zones in the city, giving more coverage as well as a review, based on transparent principles, of where the NO2 monitors were. This could include looking at secondary roads which carried regular peak hour flow;
- which polluting chemicals would be considered in the strategy and which wouldn't as a councillor had recently learned about Butedine;
- plans should include all housing stock and be based on Energy Performance Certificate (EPC);
- on development sites dampening work could be undertaken before work began;
- some displacement of traffic may have led to increased traffic in areas of deprivation.

The Portfolio Holder for City Management responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- there was a particular type of birch tree which was not good for air quality and the Parks and Green Spaces Team would give advice to the Planning department in order not to aggravate people's breathing issues;
- the original recommendation to the Executive was to focus on the East Wonford Hill area but that gave the wrong message, that there was no need to worry about the rest of the city;
- monitoring of the 85 sites would continue;
- there were interim World Health Organisation (WHO) targets; and
- her priority was to consider the city as a whole.

The Chair requested that a report be brought back to the Strategic Scrutiny Committee in June 2026 and that particulates be included as well as nitrous oxide.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor Kevin Mitchell that the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee note that officers note their comments and request clarification on the timetable of the Air Quality Management Area and Action Plan, balancing the need to make progress with space to have further workshops and hear back within six months.

Following a unanimous vote the motion was CARRIED.

25 Motion referred by Council

The Chair invited Councillor Wetenhall to present her motion, which she did making the following points:

- there were three resolutions and in order to achieve these some would be easy, cheap or quick and others would be difficult or more expensive;

- some could be done easily and there were best practice websites to compare to; and
- this work was important and relevant.

During discussion Councillors made the following points:

- easy to understand information was required for residents rather than technical detail;
- Denis the Dustcart was an excellent example of how information could be provided and it would be good to have something similar for air quality;
- people may not know the issues of wood burners;
- consultation could feed in information about communicating information and this could be reviewed within the action plan;
- communications could be incorporated into longer term work but it would be good to hear from officers if there were some simple wins; and
- it would be good to bring together technical and communications experts.

The Strategic Director for Operations, Head of Service – Environment and Waste and Portfolio Holder for City Management responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- the Digital and Data team were seeking to address website issues, including making information more easily understandable;
- Awaab's law only applied to social housing at present but would be introduced into the private sector in 2026;
- the non-technical summary was now included on the Air Quality webpage and mapping was available despite some technical difficulties which had arisen;
- some things had been moved from the Air Quality webpage, such as bonfires information which could now be found under pollution and some links maybe required;
- the DCC transport plan had no reference to Air Quality until Exeter City Council's feedback had been responded to;
- the UK legal limits were included in the non-technical summary;
- the example given of York to look at how information was presented was welcomed; and
- some work was outside the remit of officers present, for example responsibility for damp and mould lay with Housing but all points made would be taken on board.

Councillor Atkinson made a proposal which was subsequently withdrawn that all aspects of the motion be considered as part of the strategy review.

Councillor Miller-Boam proposed, seconded by Councillor Rolstone that Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee:

- recognises that this council continues to be open and transparent with Air Quality data at the monitoring site and road level;
- recommends that officers consider additional website content to help improve understanding, for example, links to external organisations, regarding air pollution sources inside and outside the home; and
- guidance to residents and wider review of communications around air quality be brought forward as part of the air quality strategy in collaboration with Strata and Digital and Data teams.

During debate on the proposal Councillor Kevin Mitchell commented that there was no reference to the motion. Councillor Williams stated that he was pleased this motion had come to scrutiny and that relevant officers had increased his understanding and that as a communications professional he would be happy to

support informally where helpful and supported the recommendation. Councillor Wetenhall could not support the wording about being clear and honest as information on the website stated that air quality in this area had low impact and was unlikely to affect residents.

Following a vote the proposal was CARRIED.

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

The Chair made suggestions of changes to the timetabling on the work plan, as follows:

- that the Leader's Portfolio Holder Update be heard in January;
- Rivers Transparency Template, referred by Council be heard in January;
- Portfolio Holder Update on Arts, Culture and Tourism, Stagecoach and Shared Prosperity items be moved to April;

Councillor Moore enquired of her Empty Homes proforma which the Chair confirmed had been received and would be considered by the Scrutiny Programme Board in January after the Strategic Management Board had made comments.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor Haigh, that the committee consider Unauthorised Encampments which she had submitted on a proforma and following a vote was CARRIED.

The Chair invited Councillor Wetenhall to put forward her proforma on Bike Storage. Councillor Wetenhall explained that Devon County Council were producing a report on Devonwide secure bike hanging and partnership working would be required. The Chair explained that a feasibility study would come forward which would be carried out in Exeter with a view to being rolled out. She added that the Green Travel Plan had been impacted by LGR and that a question about bike storage would be added to the tenants' survey.

Councillor Wetenhall proposed, seconded by Councillor Moore that the committee consider Bike Storage and following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

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

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.50 pm

Chair