

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 16 December 2025

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

Councillors Asvachin, Foale, Patrick, Vizard, Williams, R and Wood

Apologies:

Councillor Wright

Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Place, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Head of Service - Finance, Interim Head of Service - Housing, Collections & Content Manager and Democratic Services Officer

88

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2025, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the following amendment:

- Minute No. 81 – replace the word Carter’s Court with Carder’s Court.

The minutes of the special meeting held on 26 November 2025, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

89

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

90

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 19

No questions from members of the public were received.

91

MATTERS REFERRED BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were no matters referred from the Scrutiny Committees for this meeting.

92

2026/27 BUDGET STRATEGY AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Executive received the report which provided a strategic overview of the budgetary position for the 2026/27 financial year and beyond which included the likely level of available resources, the known demand for resources and the proposals to ensure that a balanced budget could be achieved. It was noted the Council was required to set a balanced budget and Council Tax prior to the start of the financial year.

Particular reference was made to:

- the report was being presented early due to there being no January Executive meeting and the report was prepared before the final central government finance settlement was received;
- the report reflected the current estimates of the Fair Funding review and was the first multi-year settlement in over a decade;

- the report set out the assumptions for the current estimates for the next financial year, which included inflation and interest rates;
- external consultants had been used for forecasting the Fair Funding review and business rate resets;
- the government was using a new national formula to assess how much income the Council could raise from council tax and the report outlined expected changes to council tax capacity, business rates retention, and formula grants;
- the overall financial outlook was more positive, with a balanced budget achievable without difficult decisions and over £1 million of budget reductions had been identified, mainly from aligning budgets with actual income and spending;
- the largest saving would be £645,000 from reduced gas and electricity costs; and
- budget proposals would be given to Members at a briefing in January 2026 once the settlement was confirmed and the final budget would be presented to Council for approval in February 2026.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:

- the positive budget outlook was welcomed and officers were thanked for identifying major savings;
- the council was praised for its long term long-term prudence and leadership for the current financial position and avoiding major service cuts;
- the upcoming government finance settlement, fair funding review, and multi-year settlement was welcomed;
- the budget would provide a positive impact, especially given Exeter's historically low council tax and it was a more positive year-end than in recent years;
- clarification was sought on inflation assumptions in the budget table, including gas at 0%, motor fuel, and insurance increases;
- the positive savings relating to the City Management Portfolio were highlighted and the £100,000 additional income from recycling sales was commended, and residents were thanked for their participation;
- the £100,000 savings on fleet hire costs and £30,000 reduction in fuel costs were praised, which supported reduced carbon emissions;
- officer leadership and assurances on budget management was commended; and
- it was enquired whether the Fair Funding Review would close the funding gap for Devon authorities or whether the area was likely to remain low-funded compared to other councils despite the reforms?

In response to questions raised by Executive Members, the Head of Service Finance advised that:

- the 5 - 18% insurance increase reflected the different uplifts across various insurance policies and insurance inflation was based on an insurers' assessment of risk profiles and wider market conditions, not just council-specific factors;
- policies likely to be affected included public liability and motor fleets; and
- the intention of the fair funding review was on creating a consistent and fair national funding formula for all districts. Council Tax equalisation was a key mechanism for reducing funding imbalances between authorities.

Opposition group leaders made the following points and questions:

- clarification was sought on the £2.1 million funding gap in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and whether the gap applied across the full three-year period or mainly in the first year?
- clarification on committee expenditure was sought, which appeared much higher in the current year compared to future years;
- further explanation of the revenue figures was sought;
- appendix 2 of the report identified £1 million in proposed income generation or savings, but the budget highlighted an additional £500,000 being carried forward from previous budget decisions and further clarification was sought; and
- public communications suggested that there would be no cuts required and clarity on the budget position was sought.

In response to questions raised by opposition Members, the Head of Service Finance advised that:

- the funding gap table covered multiple years because it reflected the required three year period of Medium Term Financial Plan;
- savings taken in one year were recurring and become part of the base budget;
- the peak in committee expenditure in 2025–26 reflected the approved supplementary budgets, which were typically one off, and as such reduced in later years;
- the £590,000 of prior-year savings included £500,000 from the digitalisation programme and £90,000 from additional income at the Matford Centre.

The Head of Service Finance advised that the term 'committee expenditure' was largely historic terminology and agreed that a more accurate description would be 'net service expenditure' which would be used in future years.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Foale, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RECOMMENDED that Council note the contents of the report and approve the proposals to establish a balanced Revenue Budget and Capital Programme.

93

COUNCIL TAXBASE AND NNDR 1 2026/27

The Executive received the statutory report which set the 2026/27 Council Tax base in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012. The report also sought approval to delegate the Council's estimate of Business Rate Income (NNDR1) for the next financial year to Strategic Director Corporate Resources and S151 Officer.

Particular reference was made to:

- the Government referendum principles remain unchanged and therefore with the Council tax increases remaining below £5 or 3% there would be no referendum trigger;
- the budget strategy had assumed a 2.99% council tax increase, which was consistent with recent years and there was a modest increase in Band D equivalent properties compared to the current year;
- 334 additional Band D equivalent properties would be subject to council tax;
- recommendation 2.3 of the report requested delegating authority be granted to the Section 151 Officer to complete and submit the annual business rates

return by the end of January 2026, which calculated the forecast income for 2026–27; and

- a collection fund surplus of just over £1 million was being proposed, which was a statutory, ring-fenced account for council tax and business rates and any surplus or deficit would be declared by the billing authority and shared with precepting bodies in the following financial year.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:

- it was highlighted that Exeter City Council only received 8% of the total council tax collected, with the majority of it going to other agencies;
- the council tax collection rate of 97.5%, was 0.2% above the national average and officers were commended for their effective collection performance;
- clarification was sought on the tax base of £40,186 against 59,000 households and whether the difference represented households from which council tax was not collected; and
- an enquiry was made about the council tax banding review process for properties that had undergone significant changes and whether there was a set process to capture those changes and if they affected future council tax income projections?

In response to questions raised by Executive Members, the Head of Service Finance advised that:

- the difference between total households and the tax base was due to adjustments for properties where council tax could not be collected. Those adjustments mainly reflected the Council Tax Support Scheme, which reduced the effective tax base; and
- inspection officers did visit properties undergoing major changes, but a more detailed response would be provided to Members outside of the meeting.

The Head of Service Finance, advised that recommendation 2.1 needed to be amended to reference the correct regulations as follows:

- the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Leader agreed for the amendment to be accepted.

The Leader moved the recommendations as amended, which were seconded by Councillor Foale, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RESOLVED that Executive approve:

- (1) that in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Exeter City Council as its tax base for the year 2026/27 will be £40,186;
- (2) the Collection Fund Surplus of £1,060,596; and
- (3) that the Section 151 Officer be granted delegated responsibility to approve the Council's NNDR1 return by 31 January 2026.

The Executive received the report which set out the proposed changes to Council dwelling rents, garage rents and service charges with effect from 1 April 2026.

Particular reference was made to:

- the rent increases followed the Government's social rent setting policy with rises to CPI + 1%, which took September 2025 CPI inconsideration and equated to 4.8%;
- the Service charges and garage rents were outside the scope of the social rent setting policy but were proposed to rise by 4.8% for consistency;
- the government had indicated its intention to implement a convergence policy, to allow rents currently below formula levels to be increased annually, so tenants in similar properties within the same area pay comparable rents; and
- delegated powers were sought to implement the convergence policy once government guidance was issued.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:

- would the reinstatement of the Winter Fuel Allowance affect the outcomes under the cost of living/energy on page 56 of report?
- £15,192,519 had been spent on capital works, £11,293,222 spent on revenue works and 152 homes were retrofitted which highlighted the service charge increases and how it funded those essential works;
- winter fuel allowance was in place for residents earning under £35,000 a year or were born before 1959, which would also impact calculations;
- it was enquired whether data and the impact of retrofitting could be included in future reports as a positive element mitigating cost-of-living pressures;
- the proposed service charge increase was modest compared to private/leasehold management fees and reflected value for money in HRA services; and
- the relevance of the race and ethnicity section in the EQIA was raised and clarification was sought on how it related to the questions asked.

The Leader acknowledged that any rent increase would be unpopular but emphasised the context that Exeter's social rents remained lower than housing associations and was still significantly below private rental market rates. He further clarified that Winter Fuel Allowance was paid upfront and adjusted through income tax coding over the year.

In response to questions raised by Executive Members, the Head of Service Finance advised that:

- service charges complied with government guidelines and were limited to cost recovery only. They could not exceed the actual cost of providing the services and were regularly reviewed to ensure they reflect the true cost of delivery; and
- other questions raised by the Executive Members will need to be responded to outside of the meeting.

Opposition group leaders made the following points and questions:

- it would be positive for tenants that the rent increase this year was lower due to lower CPI;
- clarification was sought on the 15% increase in the use of Council bailiffs between 2022–23 and 2024–25 and whether it primarily related to Council housing arrears or general council debts;

- there was a need to monitor impacts of rent levels on tenants, including access to benefits support;
- council housing was the only affordable housing option in the city;
- following recent national discussions on housing issues, it was highlighted that Exeter City Council was ahead in this discussion;
- clarification was sought on the migration from housing benefit to Universal Credit and whether this migration posed any issues, and at what stage the council might need to intervene or implement a policy; and
- it was noted that Universal Credit payments went directly to recipients, unlike housing benefit, which would affect the council's ability to manage income directly.

The Leader acknowledged questions from opposition group leaders and advised that those issues did not affect the upcoming vote on the report and that detailed answers would be provided outside of the meeting.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Foale, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RESOLVED that the Executive approves:

- (1) the increase of Council dwellings rent by 4.8% from 1 April 2026;
- (2) the increase of Garage rents by 4.8% from 1 April 2026;
- (3) the increase of Service Charges by 4.8% from 1 April 2026; and
- (4) in principle, an additional increase in rents for non-convergent properties to bring them into line with convergent rents over a period of time, with the precise level of any such additional increase be delegated to the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources and the Strategic Director for People and Communities, in consultation with the Leader and the relevant Portfolio Holder.

95

RAMM COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY (2026-30)

The Executive received the report to approve a new Collections Development Policy for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM) to cover the years 2026 to 2030. Members noted that the Collections Development Policy required Council approval as a requirement of Museum Accreditation, which was a UK standard to enable museums to apply for major investment from Arts Council England and other funding bodies.

Particular reference was made to:

- the policy, together with the forward plan for the RAMM, formed key components of Arts Council accreditation;
- the policy was comprehensive and set out how the museum acquired and managed its collections as well as the circumstances under which individual items may be disposed of;
- the RAMM held over 1 million objects, but only 1% were on display at any time, highlighting extensive behind the scenes work;
- collections dated back to around the 1860s, with some items of outstanding historical and cultural importance; and
- the policy also highlighted the RAMM as a unique and valuable resource for the city and future generations.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:

- the strong focus on acquiring materials and artefacts from Devon and the local area and emphasis on ethical standards in collection management was commended;
- it was enquired whether disposal processes involved both sales and gifting and if income from disposals were anticipated;
- the RAMM was a regionally significant museum and custodian of national and international history and culture and the responsible approach to collection care and acquisitions was praised;
- having clearly defined criteria for what the RAMM would not collect was also important;
- the inclusion of a formal repatriation policy was an important and sensitive area; and
- the intentions to acquire items reflecting Exeter's multi-faith society and LGBTQ+ community was commended.

The Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism endorsed the policy and commended the detailed work in identifying the rationale and disposal opportunities across 10 broad categories. He also highlighted the importance of legal and ethical frameworks.

In response to questions raised, the Collections & Content Manager advised that the first preference for disposal was to transfer to another public organisation and any selling of objects being a last resort. Any funds from sales were reinvested into the museum and disposal was not intended to generate financial benefit for the organisation.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Foale, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the Royal Albert Memorial Museum Collections Development Policy 2026-30.

RAMM FORWARD PLAN (2026-29)

The Executive received the report which required Council approval for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM) Forward Plan to cover the years 2026 to 2029. An approved Forward Plan was also a requirement of Museum Accreditation, for museums and galleries.

Particular reference was made to:

- the forward plan set the future direction for the RAMM and highlighted its importance locally, regionally, and beyond;
- the plan had been developed collaboratively by the RAMM team and set out vision, objectives, outcomes, and delivery methods;
- the plan would be reviewed over a three year review cycle and updated as circumstances change;
- the RAMM had an average annual attendance of 200,000 visitors and contributed £6.8 million to the local economy, whilst it engaged with communities for education, learning, and well-being; and
- the forward plan captured both the strategic policy and the broader societal impact of the RAMM to the area.

The Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism highlighted that approval was required to secure Arts Council funding and that the plan was adaptable and expected to evolve over time. It highlighted five key areas and included strategies to

reduce RAMM's dependence on council funding. The Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism endorsed the recommendation for approval.

An opposition group leader raised concerns about the recent thefts at the RAMM and in Bristol and noted that the report did not identify security and theft as a risk. Analyses of security measures were requested for the collection, both on-site and in storage. The opposition group leader advised that she had submitted the question in advance of the meeting to the Portfolio Holder.

The Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism confirmed he had received a copy of the questions the day preceding the meeting and that he had responded to advise that a comprehensive answer would be provided.

The Leader acknowledged the response and highlighted that the questions did not impact the recommendations being voted on and requested the Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism to respond outside of the meeting.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Foale, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the Forward Plan for the Royal Memorial Museum and Art Gallery for the period 2026 to 2029.

97

EXETER CITY COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICES HATE CRIME POLICY

The Executive received the report on the revised Housing Services Hate Crime Policy 2026-2031 for adoption and implementation. The policy would operate in conjunction with the Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy to address hate crimes and hate incidents within Council housing communities.

Particular reference was made to:

- the Hate Crime Policy was initially presented to Executive on 23 September 2025 for recommendation to Council, however, Members had expressed concerns about the quality of the Equality Impact Assessment and the decision was made to defer the item to enable a more thorough review;
- since the September meeting, the EQIA had been updated and had significant changes had been made;
- the policy provided guidance for managing hate crime reports within council homes and estates and focussed on a victim focused approach as well as the Council's zero tolerance stance on hate crimes;
- the policy defined hate crimes and hate incidents, staff responsibilities, reporting, and recording as well as the importance of supporting victims and witnesses; and
- the policy definitions also aligned with the Police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) standards.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- the policy was commended both previously and currently and the clear definitions and updated EQIA were seen as important improvements;
- the policy was a valuable addition to the council's housing policies; and
- the updated EQIA was commended for its clarity and thoroughness and had been supported by the Council Housing and Development Advisory Board and Tenants groups.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Foale, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the adoption of the new Hate Crime Policy for the period 2026-2031.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.33 pm)

Chair

The decisions indicated will normally come into force 5 working days after publication of the Statement of Decisions unless called in by a Scrutiny Committee. Where the matter in question is urgent, the decision will come into force immediately. Decisions regarding the policy framework or corporate objectives or otherwise outside the remit of the Executive will be considered by Council on 13 January 2026.

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