

REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 12th March 2026

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Cllr Duncan Wood – Leisure Services and Physical Activity

Annual Summary and Highlights

Leisure 2025/26 reported stats up to Feb 2026

- 5.6 million recorded visits since onboarding Leisure in 2020
- 1.7 million visits from 1st April 2025 to date
 - 1,256,545 Members
 - 82,560 PAYG
- 6,327 memberships sold since 1st April 25 to date
- Club live – 12,420 members to date
- Group exercise – 91,912 participants since 1st April 2025 to date
- Swimming 777,965 participants since 1st April 2025 to date
- Swim school –
 - 2,038 junior swimmers participating in swim lessons each month.
 - 70 adults who previously have never learnt to swim.
- GP Referral Scheme – this year we will have delivered over 1,600 sessions to some of our most vulnerable Exeter residents

Healthy & Active 2025/26

- Newtown active travel scheme approved through Exeter City Council and Devon County Council HATOC for delivery commencing in March 2026
- Working alongside Exeter City Community Trust to deliver significant improvements to King George V including a new 3G pitch, two Play Zones and upgraded changing rooms
- Local Active Survey results (based on 1664 responses from residents within local priority areas in Exeter & Cranbrook) highlighting a significant and continued trend of inactivity falling amongst ethnically diverse communities
- Enhanced programme of work developed with Wellbeing Exeter, partnership with Exeter City Community Trust launching City Sisters to 500 female participants
- Over 100 local residents and families from ethnically diverse communities engaged in Inclusive Exeter run festivals, including the 'United Smash' badminton tournament
- Successful delivery of the Great Western Railway funded community programme 'Rails to Trails', improving signage and access from local rail stations to the Green Circle.
- All Live and Move projects, case studies and learning materials available here: [Our Learning - Live and Move](#)

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

'Healthy & Active City'

The annual Local Active Lives Survey data and insight highlights some continued challenges amongst local physical activity lifestyles:

- Inactivity levels in Exeter priority areas are at 43%
- Inequalities exist across demographics, but most notably those residents on lowest incomes are the least active at 60%

Full survey results can be found here: [Microsoft Power BI](#)

Wonford – The Vision for the Wonford Community Wellbeing Hub as agreed with the community is:

To create a single hub facility to act as a focal point in the community - to promote access to, and participation in, community, health & wellbeing activities and services, to better connect with the nearby green space and better meet the needs of the local community.

Work is continuing to progress this.

2. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered

Exeter Arena – Exeter Arena is a key athletics and sporting facility in the Southwest, playing a vital role in the local and regional sporting landscape, sitting with the City Council's Leisure Portfolio.

Work remains ongoing to ensure the sustainable future of the facility. Alternative management models remain under consideration though there is no significant updates in this respect to date.

We continue to explore opportunities with partners, including Exeter City Football Club and the Devon FA, to support the development of youth and women's football at Arena. Collectively stakeholder are exploring opportunities to secure the necessary facility and pitch grading at Arena to allow Exeter City's Women's section to establish a permanent Home Club base within the city, strengthening the pathway for local talent and enhancing sporting provision for young people across our community.

Repairs to Leisure stock

Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) project was delayed in 2024/25. The second application to the government's decarbonisation fund outlined in 2025 report was successful. The project is now progressing at Riverside Leisure Centre. A two-year work programme is due to start in July 2026.

- Year 1 – Replacement of the roof
- Year2 – Replacement of mechanical and electrical systems (M&E)

Leisure teams are working with the contractor on operational plans to minimise disruption to services.

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

Leisure Financial Performance –

Exeter Leisure continues to demonstrate strong financial performance, with projected income strongly surpassing annual targets. Quarter 3 results indicate that income trajectories remain ahead of profile, driven by effective operational management, sales and targeted marketing activity, achieving sustained demand across key sites.

Despite cost pressures due to removal of the budgets for Northbrook and Arena in 2025/26 (the Arena budget has now been re-instated for 2026/27), the service is progressively offsetting this impact through improved revenue performance. At the close of Quarter 3, the forecast overspend has reduced to £300.3k, representing an £86k improvement compared with Quarter 2. This reduction reflects the service's

stronger-than-anticipated income growth, while maintaining high-quality provision for residents and visitors.

Newtown Active Travel Scheme

Exeter City Council and Devon County Council approved the implementation of the scheme. These approvals paved the way for the scheme to progress to construction design detail and contractor appointment.

This work has now been completed, and funding is in place for Phase 1 of the scheme, which will commence in March.

Following the recent approval of the Clarendon House proposals, an opportunity has arisen to create a new high quality, landscaped street, called "Garden Lane", to be delivered as part of the development. The new street will connect Newtown with the City Centre, via the Triangle car park. The development will also provide an improved pedestrian crossing at the junction with Western Way as well as contributions to the network of pedestrian and cycle routes. As a result, the project construction has been split into phases.

Further design work is required for the Triangle car park, to fit in with the above. The main cycle/walking path through car park is unaffected and will be built as part of Phase 1. The other works include the Denmark Road / Russel Street Junction to the Triangle car park and the contraflow cycle lane on Clifton Hill.

Phase 2 will include the Clifton Road / Clifton Street Junction and the Clifton Road / Belmont Road Junction.

Phase 3 will complete the works to Triangle car park and Russel Street, and Western Way footway.

King George V

A 50-year lease has been agreed with Exeter City Community Trust to deliver improvements to the playing fields and community facilities.

The council continues to work in partnership with Exeter City Community Trust (ECCT). ECCT is leading the improvement programme which includes a new 3G pitch, Play Zones, upgraded changing room & community facilities and also improvements to the environment with tree planting and nature trails. The planning reference is 25/0197 and further detail can be found via our planning portal: [Simple Search](#)

Works are underway, with completion of Phase 1 due later this year.

Physical Activity as a route to health –

Physical activity is not a luxury; it is a foundation of healthy, connected and thriving communities. The council has made a clear commitment to prevention, early intervention, and reducing pressure on health services by working in close partnership with the NHS.

Our leisure facilities are now an integral part of local healthcare delivery, hosting vital rehabilitation programmes including cardiac and heart failure rehabilitation, falls prevention, and specialist condition-specific classes. Alongside this we provide sessions for non-curative patients.

Over the past two years, Exeter Leisure in partnership with the NHS has expanded its GP Referral Scheme significantly, now delivering 84 exercise referral sessions every week across the city. We continue to work alongside key partners such as Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital, Devon Partnership NHS Trust, the Stroke Association, and FORCE Cancer Charity to ensure residents receive the right support at the right time. This is about delivering measurable outcomes for our communities, tackling health inequalities, and using council services to improve lives.

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

Staffing – there continues to be a national shortage of swimming instructors and lifeguards. Exeter Leisure continues to work in partnership with Swim England to deliver local training courses within our centres with the intent of increasing interest in our vacancies as we support industry resilience and uptake.

In addition - we actively link in with local higher educational settings to engage with school leavers and sports study students.

PSDS project at Riverside Leisure Centre - As previously outlined, the replacement works represent a significant two-year investment in the long-term sustainability of the facility. The programme includes the full replacement of the roof and the mechanical and electrical systems. It is anticipated that parts of the centre will need to close to the public during this period; however, we are working closely with contractors to minimise disruption through a carefully planned and staggered approach. This investment will ensure the centre remains fit for purpose, energy-efficient, and able to serve the community for many years to come.

Ageing Stock –

While St Sidwell's Point represents our flagship facility, much of our wider leisure estate is ageing and requires investment to maintain expected standards. Considering its current age and condition, Isca Leisure Centre is planned to undergo refurbishment early in the new financial year subject to any unforeseen constraints. This will include an upgraded gym and the creation of a flexible multi-use studio space. This planned work reflects our commitment to ensuring all facilities remain modern, accessible, and responsive to the evolving needs of our community.