

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 March 2026

Present:

Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)

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

Apologies:

Councillors Williams, M

Also present:

Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero, Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero and Democratic Services Manager

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Vizard, Wood and Williams, R.

36 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2026 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

Queries were raised regarding follow-up not yet received to supplementary questions on Minute No. 30. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to follow this up. The Chair clarified that the person offering a response would be responsible for providing such.

37 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

There were no questions submitted by the public.

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

There were no questions submitted by Members of the Council.

40 Portfolio Holder report - Councillor Wood

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services and Healthy Living, Councillor Wood, presented his report drawing attention to the following points:

- statistics showed that leisure services were delivering to expectations; and
- indications of the sort of work being carried out and wider projects being delivered were contained within the report, including extending active travel opportunities.

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

- the live link to Live and Move gave further detail and there were filter options on the landing page where data could be interrogated by area as well as other factors;

- physical activity hadn't recovered from the pandemic drop;
- the number of visits to St Sidwell's Point was 1.8million since it opened and 200,000 transactions in the cafe;
- he agreed that there was an error on page 19 in that the path in Newtown *would* be altered as there would be a change of desire line with new buildings planned;
- the City Sisters project was related to the This Girl Can national programme which recognised girls as statistically a group who required to be engaged with around physical activity and this was based at the Wonford centre but could be spread across other projects as demand had outstripped capacity;
- with regard to the timeline for Riverside solar panel installations, it was necessary to manage impact on users of works being carried out. The building was in three modules with two parts having already had roofs replaced and this work would complete the project. Careful plans were being put in place to minimise impact on centre users;
- work on Governance arrangements for the Wonford Hub were ongoing but he was not involved directly. There had been discussions regarding involvement of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector as well as community leadership and associated capacity. Regarding clarity around the commitment required for the Wonford Hub the councillor could email him and he would raise with the appropriate officer. Planning permission had been gained and more detail would be available in due course;
- his understanding was that once capital spend was committed it would continue through the LGR process. There wasn't a contractor on-site at Wonford yet as funding wasn't entirely secured. The project may not be completed whilst Exeter City Council existed but it would be underway;
- recruitment was challenging but rates of pay and terms and conditions were favourable at the council but there was a limited pool of staff and often students took on roles and they may not remain in the city once their studies were complete;
- the steering group for King George V had the football foundation involved who had presented explanations of the difficulties with some types of infill;
- Exeter City Community Trust(ECCT) would be taking on the Council's role of managing the site, overseeing current use and managing use during the works;
- ECCT would not have sole use, licensing of the space meant that teams would know what would be available to them when they booked;
- Playzones were Football Foundation funded programmes which provided new and outdoor mini-pitches for football and outdoor multi-use areas for activities;
- statistics had been collected when Northbrook was open and all of the user organisations had been successfully moved into either St Sidwell's Point or Riverside.

The Chair clarified that the Live and Move report coming to the committee in June would be better placed to give details of the timeline and fundraising situation for the Wonford Hub and that this was a high-level Portfolio Holder report rather than a detailed operational report.

The moved, seconded by Councillor Miller-Boam, that the committee note the report which following a unanimous vote was **CARRIED**.

41 **City Wide Net Zero**

The Head of Service City Centre and Net Zero and Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero presented the report drawing attention to:

- the greenhouse gas inventory from the university which was appended;
- the Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero had undertaken stakeholder engagement across the city which focussed on nature and biodiversity as well as energy. There would be further engagement later in the month, focussing on circular economy, waste and recycling;
- an application had been submitted for Nature Towns and Cities accreditation;
- a survey called Wild Exeter was live and she encouraged members' to share this widely;
- GWR funding had supported travel by train and use of the Green Circle;
- there was ongoing work with Exeter Community Energy;
- she was the main contact for heat network;
- the staff travel survey had consistent questions in order to benchmark in future;
- work was ongoing with Devon County Council on residential EV charging;
- Stagecoach electric buses would be rolled out soon as the infrastructure was installed; and
- there was a focus on three main emissions sectors for carbon reduction, buildings, transport and power.

The Head of Service City Centre and Net Zero and Programme Manager City Wide - Net Zero responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- grid decarbonisation had the biggest impact nationally which was not the Council's input;
- the biggest impact would be in changes around transport and buildings;
- she would speak to Devon County Council about what other activities they had planned;
- the 6 solar sites were not included as they were corporate, which would be discussed at Executive next week;
- some of the planned sites required enabling works such as resurfacing of a car park;
- had met Exeter Community Energy (ECO) and brainstormed, further information would be included in the next report;
- the Civic University Agreement was a university-led group therefore the university would need to be approached with the request for minutes;
- the council now had direct officer links to the national grid to discuss capacity. there were continued discussion about what improvements were required and there had been no issues connecting recently; and
- residents should use the email on social media with regard to the Great British Spring Clean.

The Portfolio Holder Climate, Ecological Change & Communities responded to Members' question in the following terms:

- the department for Transport had announced a £73.2million across the UK for electrification of buses and £7.53million would come to Devon and 100% would be buses in Exeter;
- HATOC was the best place to feed in information from residents and he invited the Chair to put information in writing and he would take to the Devon Bus Forum which he sat on;
- at Water Lane, for example, a district heat network was a possibility;
- discussions had taken place about doughnut economics and he was open to hearing more but had no particular expectation at present;
- from a tour of the Viridor plant run by Devon County Council showed keenness; and

- the district heat network was not a city council-led scheme but there was a further planning application to come forward for redesign of the energy centre but any concerns could be sent to him to discuss with officers.

The Portfolio Holder for City Management, Councillor Ruth Williams, was invited to the table by the Chair to respond to questions regarding waste, greenhouse gas emission and the incinerator.

Councillor Williams responded making the following points:

- DCC was the responsible waste disposal authority;
- the incinerator had a community liaison group where she had asked what plans there were for carbon capture;
- when separating recycling a proportion was lost and “leave loose” education continued to be given;
- investment in a new plant would increase efficiency in capture and acceptance meaning less incinerating in future;
- Denis was excellent and the envy of other districts but there was more could be done. Food waste had now been rolled out;
- there was a contamination issue with separate on-street litter bins but these would be trialled at the Quay;
- Viridor seemed positive at a previous Strategic Waste Committee meeting.

The Chair moved the recommendations as set out in the report, seconded by Councillor Payne, and it was agreed that the words “and officers note discussion this evening and request that further detail on impact and outcomes be considered” be added and following a unanimous vote was **CARRIED**.

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

Members commented on the work plan.

The Chair stated that the Air Quality item would be added to the plan for June 2026.

Members noted the Council’s Forward Plan and draft Scrutiny Work Plan.

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

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.15 pm

Chair