

COUNCIL

Tuesday 3 March 2026

Present:

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor Councillor Anne Jobson (Chair)

Councillor Gemma Rolstone (Deputy Lord Mayor)

Councillors Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Begley, Bennett, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Foale, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Hussain, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Parkhouse, Patrick, Payne, Pole, Read, Rees, Sheridan, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Williams, M, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

Apologies:

Councillors Hughes, Palmer and Wetenhall

Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director for People and Communities, Head of Service - Commercial Assets, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

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MINUTES

The minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 13 January 2026 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as a correct record.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Lord Mayor advised Members of the events she had attended, which included:

- attended the Exeter College Awards, celebrating the achievements of young people, and visited the Exeter College Technology Centre to see cutting-edge apprenticeship work;
- joined the opening of Tops Nursery, meeting staff and pupils;
- attended Clyst Vale Community College's production of 'Beauty and the Beast' at the Barnfield Theatre;
- attended the Exeter University Theatre Company's production of 'And Then There Were None' at the Northcott Theatre;
- supported the IJW Dance Show at the Cygnet Theatre and the Mayura Dance Awards at America Hall;
- attended performances by the Band of the Royal Marines at the Northcott Theatre and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra at the University Great Hall;
- celebrated the 75th Anniversary of Exeter Writers at the Custom House and attended the Exeter History Book Festival at the Mint;
- spoke at the Southernhay and Topsham Rotary Club breakfast meeting;
- attended the AGM of Exeter Twinning Circle and heard about plans in Rennes to mark the 70th anniversary of the twinning between the two cities;
- met with crafters and members of the Hong Kong community at Spring Festivals hosted at the Phoenix and the University Forum, celebrating the Year of the Horse;

- attended Evensong for the Northern European Cathedrals conference;
- marked the appointment of Canon Chris Palmer as Dean of Winchester Cathedral, with thanks given on behalf of the city;
- commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day at services held in the Cathedral and the Guildhall;
- marked four years of war in Ukraine with a vigil and an evening of Commemoration & Culture at St Stephen's Church; and
- attended the wreath-laying ceremony and service at the Cathedral to commemorate HMS Exeter.

The Lord Mayor invited the Leader to speak to make a special announcement.

The Leader expressed appreciation for the Chief Executive's 20 years of dedicated service to the Council.

The Leader described the Chief Executive, Bindu Arjoon, as a respected leader who demonstrated integrity, intellectual rigor, genuine warmth and approachability with a strong sense of public service. It was noted that she joined the Council in 2006, providing two decades of senior strategic leadership and was appointed Deputy Chief Executive in 2021, leading corporate transformation during a period of significant financial and operational challenge, and became the Council's first female Chief Executive in 2023.

Members were advised that she had led on a wide range of major service areas, which included: housing, homelessness, planning, business transformation, ICT, HR, corporate strategy, community safety and strategic partnerships. Her work had strengthened the Council's financial resilience and governance arrangements, while overseeing significant regeneration programmes supporting housing, economic development and environmental sustainability.

The Chief Executive had been recognised for her steady leadership through the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living pressures, championing inclusive growth and community wellbeing, and maintaining a strong focus on residents and frontline services. It was noted that she has represented the city regionally and nationally through Local Government Association peer work, contributing to improvement across the wider sector.

In addition to her Executive duties, she had demonstrated a strong commitment to education, serving as Chair of Governors at St Thomas Primary School and St Peter's School, and as Chair of the Corporation of Exeter College. She was also recognised as a mentor and champion for colleagues, supporting the development of future leaders.

The Leader described her as a leader of integrity, humility and loyalty, who exemplified modern civic leadership through a thoughtful, inclusive and determined approach.

The Lord Mayor was invited to present the Chief Executive with her long service award on behalf of the Council, and congratulations were formally recorded.

The Chief Executive thanked the Leader for his kind words and reflected on her 20 years of service to the city, describing it as a great privilege. She recalled first arriving in the city with her young son and noted that it had since become her home, where she has felt welcomed and supported. She expressed her appreciation to colleagues, elected Members and partner organisations for their support and friendship over the years.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Lord Mayor advised that two questions from Members of the public had been received.

Question from Mrs Jane Smith:

Post meeting (1/12/2025) a planning officer admitted she had not read the 36 objections but would “have a look”. Vital information was ignored, a significant impact on the outcome. No mention of environment impact (normally included), in spite of e-mail to environment enforcement officer in September. How was vital information ignored and how could residents ensure their concerns were properly heard and considered within the planning process?

The Portfolio Holder for City Development acknowledged the resident’s concerns and apologised that she felt her views had not been heard. However, it was confirmed that all 36 objections submitted in relation to the application were read, assessed and analysed by the planning team prior to the committee meeting, and were considered by Members as part of the published committee report.

It was clarified that no officer had stated that objections had not been read. It was further advised that environmental and ecological matters were fully addressed within the committee report, including impact assessments, habitat and species considerations, biodiversity net gain requirements and associated management plans.

With regard to the reported site works, it was confirmed that this matter was being dealt with separately through the Council’s enforcement process and remained under investigation. Officers were satisfied that the issues raised did not alter the recommendation or the Planning Committee’s decision, which was taken with reference to the full report and all relevant information. She invited Mrs Smith to make further contact for updates if required.

In a supplementary question Mrs Smith acknowledged the response but maintained concerns regarding the accuracy of the developer’s environmental surveys. She stated that she held filmed evidence of wildlife activity within the hedgerows and field which, in her view, contradicted the submitted environmental assessments, and indicated she was willing to share this information.

The Portfolio Holder for City Development responded that she would be happy to receive and review the additional evidence. They expressed confidence that the planning team had presented all relevant information to the Committee but acknowledged the resident’s concerns regarding a lack of response to previous communications and invited her to forward the information directly.

Question from Mr Kris Christmann:

Why has Exeter City Council (as the principal duty holder for Rougemont Gardens, a Grade II listed historic park) tolerated long-term homeless encampments with tents, open defecation, and associated graffiti damage to the city walls for months—despite available powers under park byelaws, civil remedies, and (previously) Section 4 of the Vagrancy Act 1824—rather than enforcing removal and restoration, or has the park been redesignated as a campsite?

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services responded that the City Council's housing team regularly visited encampments across the city to offer support and assist individuals into suitable housing. Where antisocial behaviour occurred, notices to leave were issued under the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014; however, such notices must be served to an individual, which can be challenging in some cases.

The encampment at Rougemont Gardens had now been cleared, with rubbish and tents removed, and any remaining damage being addressed by the relevant services.

In February 2026, the Council's Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee received a report and presentation on homelessness. The housing team was working towards ending homelessness in the city, with a focus on prevention, particularly for care leavers and single homeless individuals. The Council aimed to develop a proactive, integrated, and trauma-informed homelessness and housing needs service to support those in need.

Kris Christmann commented that while it was positive that the encampment had now been removed, the process had taken around six months and expressed concern about the length of time taken. They noted this was not viewed as an issue of homelessness, as the individuals were voluntarily homeless, and emphasised the need for more timely action by the Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services acknowledged the concerns, apologised for the delays, and provided assurance that the Council addressed such issues as quickly as possible, while recognising the frustration caused by the time it can take.

145 **AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 27 NOVEMBER 2025**

The Minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee of 27 November 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Wardle, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 27 November 2025 were received.

146 **CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY - 13 NOVEMBER 2025**

The Minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 13 November 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Rees, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 13 November 2025 were received.

147 **CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY - 22 JANUARY 2026**

The Minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 22 January 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Rees, and taken as read.

Councillor Banyard asked which cultural organisations, partners, or individuals were consulted or involved in preparing the City of Culture expression of interest, and whether the expression of interest would be shared with the Council.

Councillor Rees as Chair of Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee expressed enthusiasm for the City of Culture proposals and stated that the Portfolio Holder

would be consulted and information regarding which organisations and individuals were involved would be provided.

Councillor Read asked whether it was appropriate that no cultural stakeholders were involved in drafting the City of Culture expression of interest and whether the Council considered this as a suitable approach.

Councillor Rees responded she would consult with the Portfolio Holder and a full response would be provided and made available to all Members.

The Lord Mayor following discussion, advised Members that questions during Council meetings were formally addressed to the chair of the relevant committee. If further detail was needed, the chair may consult with others and any additional responses will be attached to the minutes. The Lord Mayor further emphasised that detailed questioning of Portfolio Holders was normally conducted at scrutiny committee meetings.

The Lord Mayor also confirmed that any Councillor may speak at a committee meeting on any agenda item regardless of committee membership.

(A copy of the questions and responses are appended to the Minutes).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 22 January 2026 were received.

148

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15 JANUARY 2026

The Minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 15 January 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Pole, and taken as read.

Councillor Moore asked for an expected timeline for the introduction of the negotiated stopping policy.

Councillor Pole as the Chair of Strategic Scrutiny Committee advised that the negotiated stopping policy had been referred to the Executive, and an update was pending. She would continue to monitor progress and provide an update when available.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee held on 15 January 2026 were received.

149

LICENSING COMMITTEE - 27 JANUARY 2026

The Lord Mayor advised Members that the recommendation for the Licensing Fees and Charges in Minute No. 11 were taken as part of the budget setting meeting held on 25 February 2026 and was voted on accordingly.

Councillor Moore asked about antisocial behaviour, noting that while the committee minutes explained why no changes could be made, she wished to understand how the Council's wider objectives and licensing objectives could be considered. She requested that the chair ensure the scrutiny committee's intentions were followed through, particularly in relation to access to alcohol in the city centre and its impact on antisocial behaviour.

Councillor Snow as Chair of Licensing Committee, responded that the minutes (Minute No. 10) clearly outlined the position under the Licensing Act 2003, which did

not allow blanket restrictions on licensed activities. Each application must be considered on its individual merits, though cumulative impact areas in parts of the city centre required applicants to demonstrate how they would maintain an orderly operation.

He offered to take any specific points back to the licensing officers for further consideration and confirmed that the actions the Council could take to address antisocial behaviour were clearly set out in the minutes and further information could be provided if requested.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Licensing Committee held on 27 January 2026 were received.

150 **PLANNING COMMITTEE - 19 JANUARY 2026**

The Minutes of the Planning Committee of 19 January 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Planning Committee held on 19 January 2026 were received.

151 **STRATA - JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 28 JANUARY 2026**

The minutes of the Strata – Joint Executive of 28 January 2026 were presented by the Leader and taken as read.

The Leader advised that a report relevant to this item was not attached to the minutes. It was therefore agreed that the item would be deferred for consideration at the March meeting.

RESOLVED that the matter be deferred to the meeting on 24 March 2026.

152 **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 3 FEBRUARY 2026**

The Lord Mayor advised the recommendations for the following minutes were considered at and voted at the meeting Council budget setting meeting held on 25 February 2026 and would therefore not be debated or voted upon:

- Minute No. 103 General Fund / HRA Estimates and Capital Programme 2026/27;
- Minute No. 104 HRA Estimates and Capital Programme 2026/27;
- Minute No. 105 Capital Strategy 2026-27;
- Minute No. 106 Treasury Management Strategy Report 2026/27.
- Minute No. 107 The Prudential Code for Capital Finance.

The minutes of the Executive Committee of 3 February 2026 were presented by the Leader, Councillor Bialyk, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 102 - Exeter Plan: Process for Authorising Proposed Changes Resulting from the examination**, the Leader moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Wright. Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 108 - Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2026/27**

the Leader moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Wright. Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 109 – Consultation and Engagement Strategy** the Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright. During the debate, the following points were made:

- the strategy was welcomed as a positive step in strengthening relationships between the Council and the community;
- there was an importance in establishing clear mechanisms to report back to communities following consultations and asked how this would be implemented;
- further information on community insights was sought and how these would be shared with Councillors and local communities;
- there was a need to move beyond small grants and ad hoc networking towards genuine investment in building community capacity;
- supporting social enterprise organisations as long-term partners was suggested;
- clarification was sought on how the proposed civic society covenant would operate as a meaningful framework for engagement with the community sector;
- welcomed the concept of citizen assemblies as a space for deliberative discussion;
- stressed the importance of two-way dialogue and active listening to improve communication and collaboration with communities;
- expressed overall support for the strategy and interest in a future iteration being focused on consultation, engagement, and cooperation;
- the portfolio holder's commitment to exploring citizen assemblies was welcomed;
- such initiatives should not be deferred until the new unitary authority was established, which may be more than two years away; and
- similar arrangements could be implemented sooner, potentially with the shadow authority.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities in responding made the following points:

- many of the points raised were already under discussion;
- referred to the recent Member briefing on the strategy, which addressed several of these points;
- expressed personal support in principle for citizen assemblies and confirmed discussions with officers would explore capacity and practical implementation;
- noted that governance considerations may arise in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the future unitary authority;
- confirmed that a civic society covenant was being considered in early discussions with the Strategic Director and service portfolio;
- advised that further work was still required to determine the covenant's scope and application; and
- welcomed the feedback and highlighted the topic as an area of ongoing interest.

The Leader in summarising advised:

- noted that citizens assemblies were an interesting concept but were not currently included in the strategy under discussion;

- emphasised that elected Councillors retained ultimate decision-making responsibility;
- highlighted the importance of consultation and engagement, allowing residents to provide input while Councillors made the final decisions;
- clarified that no commitment was being made to implement citizens assemblies at this stage, given the upcoming unitary authority and other governance priorities; and
- stressed that focus should remain on current priorities and expressed his support for the recommendation as presented.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 110 – Amendment to Grants Panel Terms of Reference – Ukrainian Community Grants** the Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright. During the debate, the following points were made:

- there was strong support for Exeter being a ‘City of Sanctuary’ and commended the Council for establishing this status;
- highlighted the severe conditions currently being experienced in Ukraine, including prolonged electricity outages and limited access to clean water;
- emphasised the importance of continuing to provide sanctuary and support to Ukrainians in Exeter until it was safe for them to return home;
- welcomed the proposal for funding to be overseen through the Council’s Grants Panel to ensure proper scrutiny and governance;
- highlighted that funding was external, meaning it would not impact the Council’s own finances;
- highlighted the importance of supporting Ukrainian residents; and
- welcomed establishing a clear framework for managing and awarding funding through the existing Grants Panel and urged members to support the proposal.

The Leader in summarising made the following points:

- highlighted the seriousness of the ongoing situation in Ukraine and the need for a transparent approach in providing support;
- referenced personal communications reflecting the difficult conditions being faced by people in Ukraine;
- Ukrainian residents were valued members of the Exeter community; and
- commended how different communities in Exeter had worked together to welcome Ukrainian residents.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 111 – Temporary Accommodation Allocations Policy** the Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright. During the debate, the following points were made:

- referred to a previously submitted question and requested clarification on a legal matter regarding housing allocations for people fleeing domestic violence, noting current regulations may restrict a placement in private accommodation;
- highlighted the potential need to prioritise this group differently within the policy; and

- sought guidance on how to proceed if the policy was agreed but later required adjustment to include this special criteria.

The Leader in responding:

- apologised for any delay in response and confirmed that directors would provide a formal reply;
- noted that the issue was addressed in supporting operating procedures and proposed clarifying these procedures and circulating them to all members; and
- he provided reassurance that the Council's approach aimed to include everyone appropriately and to do the right thing.

The Lord Mayor emphasised that policies could be amended if needed, through the proper Council processes.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Executive Committee 4 November 2025 be received.

153

ANNUAL PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2026/27

The Leader moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Wright, and invited the Strategic Director People and Community to introduce the report

The Strategic Director People and Community in presenting the report made the following points:

- the Annual Pay Policy Statement was a statutory requirement under the Localism Act 2011, in which the full Council must approve and publish it annually before the start of the new financial year;
- the statement ensured there was full transparency, accountability, and public assurance regarding employee pay;
- it included details on: Chief Executive pay, definitions of lowest paid employees, pay multipliers and pay governance framework;
- benchmarking showed that Exeter had a favourable pay ratio between its lowest paid employees (Grade B) and the Chief Executive, performing better than other regional authorities with the lowest ratio; and
- the recommendation was for Council to approve the Pay Policy Statement and enable its publication.

In summing up the Leader advised Members that the Council adopted the real 'Living Wage' as the minimum spinal column point from 1 January 2014 which had served the Council well and was continuing to work effectively. He expressed hope that all parties representing working-class constituents shared this view and expressed his support for the recommendations.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED.

154

OVERVIEW OF THE GENERAL FUND BUDGET QUARTER 3

The Leader moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Wright, and invited the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources to introduce the report

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources in presenting the report made the following points:

- the report highlighted there were continued financial challenges;
- the General Fund working balance was projected to fall below its minimum recommended level;
- with 28 days remaining in the current financial year, the final position would be assessed after year-end and officers would prepare a list of recommendations for Council to consider in June 2026 as part of the outturn reports if any actions were needed;
- the shortfall was primarily due to delays in implementing planned savings, which were part of a longer term strategy to balance the budget over multiple years; and
- there had also been some unavoidable costs exceeding the budget, but many of those had been addressed in the recently approved budget.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources responded to Members questions as follows:

- the overall budget for car park income had been between £9.5 million and £10 million of income, and was currently down by £895,000;
- the car parking fee increase was approved in February and the full-year effect was expected to significantly improve income;
- some costs had increased such as the Ringgo expansion, but other budget recommendations and a new app contract would help reduce expenses;
- car parking finances would improve and no additional income assumptions had been built into this year's budget;
- regarding final costs for Northbrook, the final closure cost was not yet available and negotiations with the trust were still ongoing;
- asset maintenance related to rental income at the Civic Centre, which would not improve by the end of the financial year; and
- a more realistic figure had been included in next year's budget, which would address the issue going forward.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED.

155

GENERAL FUND CAPITAL MONITORING QUARTER 3

The Leader moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Wright, and invited the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources to introduce the report

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources in presenting the report made the following points:

- there were still ongoing challenges like previous quarterly reports;
- there was a limited expenditure this quarter, with many schemes being deferred to next year's capital programme;
- there were no additional capital expenditure requests included in this report;
- a Capital Programme Board was now in place, which was chaired by the Chief Executive, and was actively monitoring capital spend and the capital programme to move projects forward;
- finance would be working with Strategic Directors and project managers at year-end to reflect realistic delivery timelines;
- the capital programme spanned multiple years, so not all projects needed to be completed in the first year; and

- there was a commitment to producing a more realistic multi-year capital programme going forward.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources responded to Members questions as follows:

- the Capital Board was chaired by the Chief Executive and included the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources, Strategic Director of Operations, Head of Commercial Assets, Head of Finance, and Head of Asset Maintenance;
- additional members were invited as required and the board met every two months to review progress on capital projects;
- key projects were defined as projects of significant cost, value, and importance to the city. Examples included the MRF project approved on 10 February, which was considered to be a key project by the Board;
- the Board reviewed the full capital program, identified risks and issues, and monitored significant projects;
- Council funding for the Mallison Bridge project remained in place and allocation and expenditure would be reviewed and managed accordingly;
- current works on the Topsham Museum focussed on waterproofing and scaffold removal, which was expected to complete before year-end; and
- the budget did not cover the full long-term cost for Topsham Museum and work was ongoing regarding a long-term lease, with a report expected in the new financial year to outline options.

In summing up the Leader advised Members that the Council was actively working with the museum and maintaining regular communication with Strategic directors and heads of service. He advised that some legal issues remained unresolved, limiting progress on certain matters. He confirmed that board members and local residents were being kept informed and provided assurance that the Council was committed to a collaborative approach with the museum. He further acknowledged frustration over delays but stressed the importance of doing things correctly before moving forward.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED.

156

HRA BUDGET MONITORING REPORT Q3

The Leader moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Wright, and invited the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources to introduce the report

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources in presenting the report advised that the HRA was performing well with no significant issues to bring to Council's attention.

Following a unanimous vote the recommendations were CARRIED.

157

CATHEDRAL & QUAY MULTI STOREY CAR PARK REFURBISHMENT

The Leader moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Wright, and invited the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources to introduce the report

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources in presenting the report made the following points:

- the report was requesting approval for a £2.5 million capital budget to enhance and improve the Cathedral Quay multi-storey car park;
- the car park had required improvements for some time and a recent intrusive structural analysis confirmed the car park was structurally sound, contrary to earlier concerns;
- given the concerns of the structural analysis had been alleviated, the budget would be used to improve appearance, lighting, and overall user experience as well as upgrading the surrounding landscape;
- the budget would also enable the re-opening of two and half decks which had been closed for an extended period of time;
- the site had experienced ongoing antisocial behaviour issues and the proposal sought to outsource the day-to-day operation to a specialist car park managing agent to address operational and safety issues;
- the Council would retain full control of decisions and all income from the car park;
- the estimated borrowing cost would be around £158,000 per year and additional revenue was expected from re-opening of the closed decks; and
- the projected additional income was expected to offset both the borrowing costs and operator fees.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources and Head of Service for Commercial Assets responded to Members questions as follows:

- the recommendation was seeking Council approval to outsource the management of Cathedral Quay car park only and the decision would be made by Council;
- the recent structural report included an intrusive structural analysis, unlike the report from two years ago and the latest findings were considered more reliable;
- consultants had confirmed that the car park was structurally sound and met the required standards, even in the unlikely event that it was fully occupied by heavier electric vehicles;
- the refurbishment works could require the car park to be closed for six months', though this was not yet confirmed. A phased refurbishment option may allow parts of the car park to remain open, but this would be more complex;
- it was likely there would be some disruption to nearby businesses during the works but the Council would consult and engage with local traders to minimise disruption as plans developed;
- although a private operator would be managing the car park, the Council would retain full control over all operational decisions and requirements;
- the refurbishment provided an opportunity to improve the carpark layout and usability of its spaces, taking into account larger modern vehicles;
- the aim was to maximise usable spaces and create one of the city's best multi-storey car parks;
- to confirm, Members were being asked to approve a £2.5 million capital budget, with the borrowing decisions being delegated to the section 151 officer in consultation with the Council Leader, with updates reported back through normal reporting processes;
- the main measures proposed to address anti-social behaviour were - installing CCTV, re-opening and providing full usage of the car park, increasing natural surveillance and providing an outsourced operator presence, with staffing and active management on site;
- KPIs would be included in the contract to ensure proper staffing, maintenance, and a high-quality user experience;

- the operator would be appointed through a formal competitive tender process in line with procurement regulations and Council approval would enable officers to negotiate commercial terms;
- Council would be consulted again if there were any significant changes or if costs become unaffordable;
- the Council currently managed multiple surface and multi-storey car parks across the city using existing council staff;
- currently staff were capacity stretched, particularly due to the need for requiring an on-site presence at John Lewis, Guildhall, and Mary Arches, in the event of machine failures;
- by outsourcing management at the Cathedral and Quay car park, it would support existing staff capacity and act as a trial to assess effectiveness and maximize that that benefit of improving the car park;
- initially, outsourcing arrangements would be for a three to five year period, though a shorter contract was preferred. This was the first time using this approach, and having flexibility was important in case that it did not work as intended;
- the Council would retain responsibility for parking enforcement and would not be outsourced to the private operator;
- cameras could be installed on site, and enforcement would still require Council officers to check vehicles and issue Penalty Charge Notices on site;
- the existing Council enforcement team would continue to manage enforcement at the Cathedral Quay car park and would operate to the same standards and processes used across all council owned car parks;
- the debt servicing included repayment of the principal and interest and borrowing for the project would be repaid over 50 years, reflecting the expected lifespan of a building asset;
- borrowing periods typically aligned with the asset life span;
- the Council's car park service would manage the contract, with oversight from the Head of Commercial Assets, with clear KPIs being established to ensure service quality and accountability;
- performance would likely include regular monitoring with monthly records covering cleaning, security, and maintenance and formal reviews would occur annually or biannually depending on contract terms; and
- the agreement would include a termination provision, allowing the Council to end the contract if performance issues arose and persisted.

The meeting was briefly adjourned between 20:05 and 20:15.

The Leader proposed an amendment to recommendation 2, which was seconded by Councillor Knott to read as follows:

- the outsourcing of the management function of the Cathedral and Quay MSCP park on terms to be agreed shall be delegated to the Strategic Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to enable it to re-establish itself as a premier car park for the city.

The Leader in speaking to the amendment advised:

- the amendment highlighted that he had listened to concerns raised and had previously held discussions with the Head of Service regarding the proposal;
- he clarified the proposal related to outsourcing the management of the car park, rather than full privatisation;
- he clarified that external operators could bring additional capacity, expertise, and resources, while recognising there would be financial considerations;

- there were examples from other cities such as Liverpool and Manchester, where modern systems (including number plate recognition and controlled access) provided a safe, efficient, and welcoming parking experience;
- the Cathedral and Quay car park was an important asset to the area and should be improved for visitors and residents;
- the current car park condition and management could be significantly improved, particularly with safety and environment;
- the intention was not to outsource all civic car parks immediately, but to trial the approach first and assess outcomes;
- proportionate enforcement was needed to ensure drivers were not penalised for minor issues while addressing persistent misuse and antisocial behaviour;
- details of enforcement, expectations, and service standards must be clearly defined in any agreement;
- a forthcoming meeting with the Strategic Director was planned to refine the tender offer, expectations, and financial arrangements;
- contract terms, including break clauses and review periods, would be carefully considered; and
- the primary aim of the report was to improve the quality and management of city car parks, ensuring they provided a good service and supported the attractiveness of the area.

During the debate on the amendment, the following points were raised:

- the amendment, provided greater oversight by Members regarding the proposed outsourcing of car park management;
- Portfolio Holders routinely brought issues from their areas to the Executive informally, and this matter could also come to the Executive formally in the future if required;
- the amendment provided reassurance that decisions would not be taken without proper consideration, particularly given concerns raised by residents;
- the clarification that parking enforcement would not be outsourced was welcomed;
- the Leader's amendment was welcomed but considered not going far enough;
- concerns were raised about the principle of outsourcing a public sector function and lack of detailed reporting, evidence, and discussion prior to the proposal;
- there was a significant policy shift from in-house provision to outsourcing should be supported by clear evidence and fuller debate;
- given the timescale for capital work, there would be sufficient time for further review of the management arrangements before any implementation and the matter needed to come back to a future Council meeting for further consideration;
- concerns were raised regarding the employment conditions of staff working for any external operator, including wages, pensions, and working conditions;
- employment standards could potentially be addressed through contract requirements or KPIs;
- more detailed evidence, scrutiny, and discussions were required before proceeding and there was no need to rush the decision;
- any outsourcing arrangements needed to include ongoing feedback mechanisms from both car park users and nearby residents;
- live performance data linked to KPIs should be made available, using digital tools such as QR codes to gather feedback;
- there was support for the amendment, given the alternative options were less favourable;
- clarification was sought on how the proposal aligned with the Council's procurement processes, including the role of the Procurement Board;

- no best value or cost–benefit analysis had been presented, particularly comparing outsourced management with in-house provision;
- a Member enquired how outsourcing would integrate with existing Council services, including community safety priorities and initiatives to protect women from violence;
- funds potentially used for contractor profit could instead be reinvested in council teams;
- there was a need to demonstrate best value for money;
- the proposal to restore the car park to full operation was welcomed, the amendment provided reassurance on outsourcing issues, and the approach ensured outsourcing would only occur if it represented best value and was the most practical solution; and
- a Member considered that the wording of the amendment still assumed that the management function would be outsourced, albeit subject to delegated approval.

In summing up the amendment, the Leader advised that

- delegation to the Strategic Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder would not make outsourcing a foregone conclusion, and allowed for further consideration before any final decision;
- he acknowledged the point raised regarding the need for a cost–benefit analysis, which would be discussed with the Strategic Director;
- he noted the need to clarify operational details, including the potential use of number plate recognition technology for entry and exit, and confirmed further questions would be addressed with officers;
- the Council's reputation and service standards would be protected in any arrangements made;
- re-iterated that the amendment followed standard Council practice of delegating decisions to officers in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder;
- appropriate safeguards, guidance, and contractual conditions would be put in place, including consideration of issues raised during the debate;
- confirmed that outsourcing the management function remained the proposed direction, subject to delegated decision-making;
- further delays or additional lengthy council processes would be unnecessary, as the matter could be progressed through delegated authority;
- it was important to move forward with improvements and investment in the car park, noting that local traders and the public wanted improvements to be made; and
- the intention was to listen to contributions in the debate and ensure concerns raised were addressed in the implementation process.

Following a vote the AMENDMENT was CARRIED.

Councillor Fullam proposed an amendment to recommendation 1, which was seconded by Councillor K. Mithcell to remove the word “estimated” to read as follows

- a budget of £2,500,000 for undertaking the refurbishment and upgrade works at Cathedral and Quay MSCP.

Councillor Fullam in speaking to the amendment advised:

- the minor amendment was to solely remove the word “estimated” from £2,500,000 budget, and he expressed his support for the figure provide that it was a fixed figure;
- any additional funding should be requested through a future supplementary budget if needed;
- he welcomed the redevelopment as an opportunity to improve a problematic area of the city;
- he acknowledged general scepticism toward large capital projects but expressed confidence that the officers’ financial projections were robust;
- he highlighted the potential for increased revenue from improved car park facilities, benefiting wider city spending; and
- expressed support for the proposal, subject to the requested wording amendment.

The Lord Mayor advised that removal of the word “estimated” would not alter the substance of the motion and the Leader accepted amendment to remove “estimated” from the substantive motion to assist procedural clarity.

Councillor K. Mitchell proposed an amendment to recommendation 2, which was seconded by Councillor M. Mitchell to read as follows:

- that a further report be brought back to Council on the outsourcing of the management function of Cathedral and Quay MSCP versus retaining the service in-house.

Councillor K. Mitchell in speaking to the amendment advised:

- he had reservations after reviewing the report and listening to the debate;
- expressed support for recommendation 1, agreeing that the car park required additional funding and improvements, including addressing anti-social behaviour;
- he was not able to support recommendation 2 due to concerns about outsourcing the management function and there was a lack of sufficient evidence or justification that the service could not be delivered in-house; and
- he raised concerns about maintaining staff standards and protecting employee terms, including pensions, under outsourcing and further information was needed;

The Leader advised that he would be deferring the report to allow for further work to be carried out and explained the following:

- he acknowledged the concerns raised during the debate and confirmed he had listened to Members’ views;
- a revised report would be brought back to a future Council meeting which would provide clearer detail on the proposed outsourcing/management arrangements;
- he emphasised the need to address key issues, including understanding of what was being proposed, ensuring strong governance, oversight, and performance measures and maintaining control over pricing and service standards;
- he referenced past issues with outsourced services to highlight the importance of proper controls and accountability; and
- reiterated that the intention was to ensure any future proposal was robust, transparent, and compliant with the Council’s constitution.

RESOLVED that the report be deferred.

**NOTICE OF MOTION BY COUNCILLOR DARLING UNDER STANDING ORDER
NO. 6**

Councillor Darling moved, and Councillor Cookson seconded the Notice of Motion as outlined in the agenda requesting that the Council resolves to:

- Request that the Leader of the Council write to Devon County Council urging them to reconsider its proposed severe reduction in branch library opening hours that adversely affect Exeter's residents, especially given the recently announced county council multiyear settlement.
- Now that the survey consultation has closed, request that Devon County Council consult directly with the staff at Exeter's branch libraries, before any decisions are made, to explore more modest changes to opening hours based on firsthand knowledge of the way the libraries are used.
- Encourage Devon County Council to explore options to protect and/or enhance library access and services, for example, by drawing on existing case studies such as those published by Independent Mind. This should also involve an exploration of collaborative opportunities with existing public services, such as the arrangement St Thomas Library has with Theatre Alibi.
- Request that DCC provide a full Equalities Impact Assessment to decision makers before the decision is made to cut this key public service. It is not enough to simply ask for views on the proposed changes, as stated in the introduction to the consultation.

As Secunder, Councillor Cookson spoke in support of the motion, making the following points:

- he welcomed Devon County Council's reversal of the proposed £650,000 library cut, driven by community pressure;
- restoring funding did not guarantee restoration of access or opening hours;
- he highlighted concerns over a lack of commitment to reverse reduced staff hours and library opening times;
- commended the motion to urge for a reconsideration of cuts, direct consultation with staff, exploration of ways to protect/enhance access, and a full Equalities Impact Assessment;
- he was disappointed with the shift in language from libraries to hubs;
- he commended the local community efforts, particularly campaigners organising opposition and emphasised the importance of libraries as essential safe and warm spaces for vulnerable residents; and
- strongly supported the motion.

During discussion, Members made the following comments on the motion:

- the motion was welcomed and reaffirmed the importance of libraries;
- local councillors were credited for identifying funding and helping reverse proposed cuts;
- the debate had shifted to consultation on opening hours, with significant public engagement;
- libraries were evolving due to technology and changing community needs;
- there was limited transition funding from Devon County Council, but was not sufficient for all libraries;
- it was important to identify stable funding to maintain staffing and opening hours;

- councillors needed to engage locally on how transition funding could best support libraries;
- libraries now served as vital community hubs, providing a wide range of services to vulnerable groups, families, and elderly residents;
- reducing hours would significantly impact community services and access;
- Councillors Darling and Cookson were thanked for bringing the motion forward;
- Pinhoe library was facing a reduction in operating hours from 15 to 6 hours (around a 60% cut);
- there was a community value with over 9,000 visits in less than a year;
- there were concerns about reliance on volunteers, who could not replace trained staff;
- the reversal of budget cuts were welcomed but the lack of commitment on restoring hours and staffing was a concern;
- there was an absence of direct consultation with library staff;
- libraries provided a wide range of services beyond books, including classes, story times, baby groups, breakfast clubs, board games, Wi-Fi, and computer access;
- it was important to protect libraries as community hubs;
- Devon County Council's proposal to rely on volunteers to run libraries was criticised, noting volunteers often had other jobs and could not fully operate a library;
- having experienced library staff managing the services, volunteers would provide assistance which was important;
- the debate was welcomed but it would have been preferable during the formal consultation period so the Council could submit official views;
- the previously proposed £650,000 cuts were efficiencies carried forward from last year and had been reinvested in library services;
- an additional £1 million has been allocated for the library transformation scheme; and
- there was an ongoing consultation, which had already received over 23,500 responses.

Councillor M. Mitchell proposed an amendment to the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Fullam to read as follows:

- that the Leader of the Council writes to the Leader of Devon County Council requesting that the cabinet member responsible for library services be invited to a meeting of Exeter City Council to meet with interested Members and discuss both the current provision and future provision of library services in Exeter.

Councillor M. Mitchell in speaking to the amendment, advised that the amendment was a more proactive way for the council to engage and influence library services locally.

The Leader raised a protocol concern, noting that a local authority could not be summoned to a meeting and suggested the appropriate forum would be an invitation to a scrutiny committee meeting.

Councillor M. Mitchell agreed that an invitation to scrutiny would be acceptable, allowing discussion and public attendance without mandating participation. Councillor Darling as the mover of the Motion accepted this amendment as an additional recommendation to the motion.

Returning to the debate on the amended motion, the following points were made:

- the motion was important particularly for Pinhoe as one of the fastest-growing areas in Exeter with rising demand for community facilities;
- the proposed reduction of Pinhoe library to just 6 hours per week was not acceptable;
- thanks were made to local campaigners, for pressuring Devon County Council to listen to them;
- volunteers, brought skills, commitment, and local knowledge, but required clear frameworks and support from paid staff;
- volunteers could not replace trained professional staff and should not be used as a cost-saving measure;
- cross-party support for the motion was commended;
- additional funding from central government enabled Devon County Council to reconsider cuts;
- the Save Devon's Libraries campaign was praised for raising awareness and influencing decisions;
- it was regretful that the motion was necessary but was commended as a positive step for protecting library services;
- reading was a fundamental life skill, and reducing opportunities for families to take young children to libraries was a concern;
- Devon County Council should not have considered making cuts to library funding;
- the St. Thomas library was a valuable community facility;
- the motion was slightly out of date due to recent developments;
- libraries had evolved beyond books to include technology, computers, and modern community services;
- reduced hours in one area could be balanced with increased hours or new resources elsewhere;
- the consultation process was welcomed and seen as a way to tailor services to public needs, such as book availability, computer access, service complexity, or location; and
- the earlier amendment strengthened the substantive motion and supported maintaining or enhancing library provisions.

In summing up, Councillor Darling as Mover of the Motion made the following points:

- thanked all Members for engaging in the debate and acknowledged the contributions of Solomon Elliot, Lucy Finlay, and other campaigners;
- welcomed the reversal on the proposed library cuts but stressed that restored budgets did not guarantee restored hours or services;
- that libraries were evolving into hubs, but standard hours failed to reflect the needs of individual libraries, causing dramatic reductions in services;
- branches, like St. Thomas, faced significant cuts on operating hours impacting on community use;
- she was critical of the move toward a volunteer-led model, stressing that professional librarians were essential for reading support, IT assistance, material selection, and community engagement;
- consultations had been limited and functioned more as volunteer recruitment exercises than opportunities to shape library services;
- case studies and examples of enhanced library programs could not operate effectively with only six hours of opening; and
- although Devon County Council announced the reversal of cuts on 18 February, the motion was still needed to protect library hours, professional staffing, and service quality.

Following a vote, the motion was CARRIED as amended (as follows):

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Leader of the Council write to Devon County Council urging them to reconsider its proposed severe reduction in branch library opening hours that adversely affect Exeter's residents, especially given the recently announced county council multiyear settlement.
- 2) now that the survey consultation has closed, that Devon County Council be requested to consult directly with the staff at Exeter's branch libraries, before any decisions are made, to explore more modest changes to opening hours based on firsthand knowledge of the way the libraries are used.
- 3) Devon County Council be encouraged to explore options to protect and/or enhance library access and services, by drawing on existing case studies such as those published by Independent Mind. This should also involve an exploration of collaborative opportunities with existing public services, such as the arrangement St Thomas Library has with Theatre Alibi.
- 4) Devon County Council provide a full Equalities Impact Assessment to decision makers before the decision is made to cut this key public service. It is not enough to simply ask for views on the proposed changes, as stated in the introduction to the consultation.
- 5) That the Devon County Council cabinet member responsible for library services be invited to a Scrutiny meeting with interested Members to discuss both the current provision and future provision of library services in Exeter.

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**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER
NO. 8**

In accordance with Standing Order No.8, the following question was put by Councillor Moore to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services:

“I appreciate that the Council listened to St Petrock's to change the methodology so that we get a better picture of how many people are experiencing rough sleeping. The Customer Focus minutes highlight the new strategy which plans tackle homelessness in a more systematic way, and that is expected in the autumn. In the meantime, what is the interim plan to respond to the growing rough sleeping crisis?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services responded to this question stating that the increase in reported numbers was largely due to a change in methodology this year, designed to better align with partner organisations and provide a more inclusive and accurate count, meaning the rise appeared greater than it actually was.

In response, a range of improvements were being introduced, including a new “off the streets” offer providing same-day accommodation, a re-designed and more integrated outreach service, and a new commissioning model separating personal support from accommodation to improve stability and engagement. There would also be gender-specific accommodation, enhanced support pathways for people leaving institutions such as hospital, prison, care, and the armed forces,

and an expansion of Housing First and long-term supported housing for those with complex needs.

All current contracts would be replaced with new outcome-focused ones by summer 2026, alongside embedding a trauma-informed approach across services. Overall, these changes aim to deliver a more effective and sustainable reduction in rough sleeping throughout the year.

In asking a supplementary question, Councillor Moore thanked the Portfolio Holder for the response and requested that the information be shared more widely with residents. She noted that many residents were asking about the issue and emphasised the need to reassure the public that the Council was improving how it supported people quickly.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services agreed with the request to share information with residents and would see about exploring ways to communicate the updates more widely.

In accordance with Standing Order No.8, the following question was put by Councillor Read to the Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Community Safety and City Centre:

“It was really interesting to find out recently that there are 58 services which are now only accessed by a digital login to My Exeter, e.g. making a noise complaint, reporting graffiti, ordering a new or replacement bin and 55 other services.

This method of digitally logging into My Exeter to report issues and request Council help puts off many people and potentially creates digital exclusion. I know that ECC is using various different performance indicators for analysing if people are being excluded from services, and that there has just been a review of this, when will the next review be planned for to ensure that no one suffers from an inability to access Council services due to digital exclusion in Exeter”.

The Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Community Safety and City Centre clarified that services were not only accessible through the MyExeter platform; it was encouraged for convenience but was not mandatory.

She confirmed that residents could still access services via phone or in-person at customer services and provided assurance that multiple communication channels remained available and functional. Access and performance were continuously monitored rather than reviewed annually and any accessibility issues would be addressed promptly as they happened. There was no evidence that improving online access reduced availability for those using non-digital methods.

In accordance with Standing Order No.8, the following question was put by Councillor Read to the Leader:

“In the light of the shocking docudrama ‘Dirty Business’ does the Leader think we can do more to have liaison with our local water company, South West Water, and the Environment Agency to understand whether situations here are likely to improve or worsen”?

The Leader, Councillor Bialyk, responded to this question stating that Members should recall that it had previously been agreed that contact with South West Water would be made but unfortunately the offer of a meeting was declined. As a district authority, the Council had no statutory powers over water companies or the Environment Agency. Regulation, enforcement and investment decisions rested entirely with national agencies and Southwest Water themselves.

However, the Council was committed to representation and partnership liaison whenever and wherever possible in order to ensure that service delivery concerns are raised on behalf of residents.

In asking a supplementary question, Councillor Read noted that South West Water had declined to attend a meeting, which was disappointing and urged continued pressure for engagement. She asked whether farmers or their representatives could be invited to future discussions, noting their absence at previous meetings despite their role in water pollution.

The Lord Mayor advised that the supplementary question was not related to the response provided.

(The meeting commenced at 6.10 pm and closed at 9.56 pm)

Chair

Member Questions Raised at Council

Minute No: 147 – Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee – 22 January 2026

Question from Councillor Banyard to the Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism

Please could the portfolio holder tell us which of Exeter's cultural organisations, partners, or individuals were asked, consulted, or involved in the preparation of the Expression of Interest for the Exeter City of Culture bid. Also, will the EOI be shared with councillors?'

Response

The Expression of Interest was produced as part of the work on the emerging Cultural Strategy and was informed by 5-months of engagement activity with a broad range of cultural organisations, stakeholders and individuals from the cultural sector.

Question from Councillor Read to the Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Arts, Culture & Tourism

I understand from cultural stakeholders in the city that they had not been consulted with in the preparation of the Expression of Interest for the Exeter City of Culture bid. Does the Council think that this is the correct approach? Would the Council have the same approach in future bids?'

Response

The Connected Culture Group, which supports the Exeter Partnership, is made up of over 20 people representing a range of organisations from the cultural sector and helped shape the Expression of Interest.

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