

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 April 2026

Present:

Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, K, Haigh, Harding, Hussain (as substitute), Miller-Boam, Moore, Payne, Rolstone, Wetenhall and Williams, M

Apologies:

Councillor Atkinson (sent substitute)

Also present:

Executive Office Manager, Place Partnership (Sport England) Manager, Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero and Democratic Services Manager

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Bialyk and Vizard

43 **Minutes of meeting Thursday 12 March 2026 of Strategic Scrutiny Committee**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2026 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct subject to the following amendments.

Minute No. 41:

- an application **was being planned for** had been submitted for Nature Towns and Cities accreditation;
- there was a contamination issue with separate on-street **recycling** litter bins but these would be trialled at the Quay;
- Viridor seemed positive at a previous **Strategic Waste-Exeter ERF Community Liaison** Committee meeting.

44 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

There were no questions submitted by the public.

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

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions were submitted by Councillor Wetenhall in relation to the Portfolio of the Leader who attended the meeting.

Question

“Councillors have been waiting for an update on a review of CIL governance since November 2024 when internal audit identified as an area of weakness. In January this year, you said in an email to me that “*The Task Group is an officer meeting to explore governance models and approaches for CIL/S106. This part of the work is now complete, and the Head of City Development is finalising draft proposals for SMB to consider.* Last week’s Audit and Governance Committee was informed that a further internal audit is now being undertaken next financial year.

Can the Portfolio Holder answer the following questions, to enable Strategic Scrutiny members to have an oversight of what is happening given the long delay and no date being provided as to when Councillors will have further information.

1. When do you expect SMB to consider proposals from the work of the Task Group given that you said the work was complete in January of this year?
2. What changes or improvements are already in place on CIL governance, if any, since the audit report of Nov 24?
3. How and when will Councillors have an opportunity to see any aspect of this ongoing work?"

Response

1. SMB had reviewed the draft proposals for CIL/s106 governance and the Leader would meet with Directors next week.

2. A report to the Executive on 28 April would recommend a new governance framework

3. All the actions recommended by the audit review have been completed and will be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee in due course.

Supplementary Questions and Responses

1. Councillor Wetenhall asked why the Strategic Director had stated that the report would be ready in two weeks if the Leader was meeting with him next week? The Leader responded stating that officers were bringing forward the proposal for him to consider and it would likely be complete by next week but he may ask for amendments to be made.

2. Councillor Wetenhall asked if she could see the work of the task group, which she had asked the Director. The Leader responded that audit had identified a weakness which the Council was looking at. He also informed the committee that officers had been working on this and had met with him once and there had been further work to complete and he had received a draft last week. The Leader added that he would discuss this with the Portfolio Holder and report back to the Executive team but not necessarily a committee.

3. Councillor Wetenhall asked if there had been changes or improvements and the Leader responded that SMB were working on the issues raised, that CIL money was present and when a project arose funding was considered however, proposals for how to handle these in future.

During discussion about procedure the Chair agreed to speak to the Monitoring Officer as Councillor Wetenhall had requested sight of the original report.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions were submitted by Councillor Moore in relation to the Portfolio of the Leader who attended the meeting.

Questions for the Leader from Councillor Moore:

1. Please can you explain what happened to the Bronze plaque on Mallison Bridge and can it be given to the Mallison family?
2. Cllr B: What are you doing to ensure there is increased transparency around assets that may be disposed of that might be of interest to communities?
3. Cllr B: a community asset transfer request was submitted by the community for Bromham's hut on 20 February and there has been no reply. Why is this?

RESPONSE:

1. Officers will look into this and respond outside the meeting.
2. This is currently being reviewed to ensure that any potential opportunities are communicated.
3. The asset has a complex ownership structure which prior to responding on the CAT proposal we were attempting to clarify with the EA – but to no avail so far. The Bromhams CAT proposal is being allocated to an Officer to progress and Estates will contact the community representative as soon as possible. They apologise for not having sent an acknowledgement email in a timely manner.

47 **Performance and Service Provided to Customers and Stakeholders of Stagecoach South West in Exeter**

The Chair welcomed representatives from Exeter & District Bus Users Forum and Stagecoach South West.

The Exeter & District Bus Users Forum outlined key challenges as follows:

- congestion and traffic conditions, including variability between school and non-school days;
- the impact of new developments on service planning;
- issues arising from “super stops”, where multiple stops had been combined without sufficient infrastructure improvements; and
- that these were not necessarily unique to Exeter but faced across the country.

Members questioned representatives on ticketing models, planning for new developments, and the design and effectiveness of super stops. It was highlighted that early provision of bus services into new housing developments was important to embed travel behaviours before car dependency became established.

The Chair reminded the committee and those present that Devon County Council was the responsible authority for transport.

The Committee also heard from a blind bus user who shared lived experience of using the bus network, highlighting:

- difficulties locating shelters, vehicles and doors;
- challenges arising from glass shelters, floating bus stops and combined stops;
- the value of knowledgeable drivers and the assistance card scheme, provided by Devon County Council;
- limitations of app-based systems for users without smartphones; and
- quieter electric buses, where diesel buses were easy to hear.

Members welcomed this insight and discussed potential mitigations such as tactile features, audible signals and greater consistency in design.

The Managing Director of Stagecoach South West presented current performance information making the following points:

- passenger numbers remained stable despite fare increases;
- punctuality was reported at approximately 85%, carrying 250,000 passengers per week;
- the app was 93% accurate and the remaining 7% could be missing vehicle data;
- ticketing equipment and tracking was likely to be replaced during this year;
- there were currently 13 driver vacancies in Exeter which represented 3.2%;
- investment was being made in fleet replacement, including the introduction of electric buses, subject to depot power connections;

- reliability continued to be affected by congestion, roadworks and infrastructure constraints;
- the remainder of the fleet would be electrified in 2027 with £47 million investment of private capital which showed the confidence in Exeter;
- this year drivers would undertake specific training underpinned by the Department of Transport regarding the safety of women and girls at night;
- disability awareness training was extensive;
- there was more use of off-bus ticketing in Europe and in London there was no interaction with bus drivers and multidoor buses were used which risked fare evasion; and
- he was proud of what his team delivered every day and they were part of the communities in which they live and work and he would welcome positive ways forward.

Members' raised issues including route reliability across the city, coordination with rail services, timetable changes, accessibility, pricing, and engagement with local businesses and Devon County Council being the transport authority.

The Managing Director of Stagecoach South West responded to members' questions in the following terms:

- data informed timetable changes and service planning;
- there were operational challenges on cross-city routes and consideration may need to be given to splitting the P route in the next timetable changes if they did not see improvements;
- engagement with Network Rail and GWR was through the enhanced partnership and he would discuss Newcourt with GWR to understand the needs better as he hadn't understood the issue for residents, particularly on rugby match-days;
- there were limits to fare reductions due to funding and revenue requirements;
- there was ongoing work nationally and locally to improve accessibility and the customer experience;
- there had been issues of poor parking and enforcement around the Marsh Barton rail halt as well as the bus stop not having a raised kerb, shelter or realtime information, which Devon County Council had been made aware of;
- the Flexi 5 and 10 had been withdrawn but the same discount was available when buying multiple tickets;
- lots of modelling had been carried out;
- Exeter was the 10th most congested place in the UK which made it challenging to run buses reliably;
- the record for a bus running late was 90 minutes which during September when there were issues on Barrack Road and Topsham Road and it was a university open day;
- it had been enlightening to hear first-hand experience and that he had made note of things to do which he would also feedback through national forums;
- driverless ticketing was not being considered at present as this would need to be funded from revenue; and
- the Stagecoach industry position was that where new routes were to be implemented they would need to be underwritten by the local transport authority and the Devon County Council budget was fully committed but section 106 fund could be utilised.

A member stated that as a business-owner she felt there was room for wider discussion as many of her staff were non-drivers and she placed them where they could access via public transport rather than the best place as a business and if buses serviced other areas at key times data from mobile phones may be very different.

During discussion it was suggested that the Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities could be asked to raise issues with the relevant Devon County Council Portfolio Holder, that were potential actions which could be requested of Planning and route suggestions which could be made to Stagecoach.

Following discussion, the Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor Mitchell that the minutes of this item be sent to the Strategic Director for Place and the Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities which following a vote was **CARRIED** unanimously.

The Chair thanked the guests and stated that she felt enlightened and more able to understand the bus service across the city.

The committee took a break at 7.23pm and reconvened at 7.29pm

48 **Live and Move Programme Update**

The Place Partnership Manager presented a verbal report (slides attached), making the following points:

- this was a review of the last six to twelve months;
- the Newtown scheme was a flagship active travel infrastructure scheme with construction underway;
- there had been a presentation on the Wonford project given at Extraordinary Council on 24 March and capacity-building was underway with trustees of the community group;
- work on the Green Circle was underway, developing 12 shorter routes for local residents with Wellbeing Exeter and Members' were called upon to promote this;
- work covering Cranbrook was continuing, working towards a Memorandum of Understanding;
- there had been an increase in inactivity in the lowest socio-economic groups; and
- the team were supporting Cornwall and Swindon as part of the project, who had asked to meet with political leaders as well.

The Chair reminded members that the committee would have a more detailed report with the local evaluation partner provided at the September meeting.

The Place Partnership Manager responded to Members' questions in the following terms:

- specialist help would be utilised in co-designing the governance model at Wonford, led by the Live and Move Team and the Head of Service Customers and Communities;
- the aim of the investment in Wonford was to support local residents and work had been done alongside them which demonstrated this commitment. There was a range of national evidence regarding integrating leisure with other services and how this would bring people to the hub who may not visit a leisure centre;
- the September report would include activity in other areas of the city but he was aware of seated exercise being provided with the Shilhay residents Association in the St David's area;
- he would feedback to ECCT the request to connect with ward members;
- work with those with disabilities was carried out in partnership with Activity Alliance and Sport in Mind;

- infrastructure would be provided using Sport England 'Active Design' principles which were inclusive;
- the council did not apply to the GWR Community Fund this year as advised by the Regional Development Manager as they prioritised those who had not applied within twelve months;
- regarding connecting to the Valley Park and the Sustainable Habitat Mitigation Strategy he would liaise with the Chair and Planning colleagues; and
- consultation and engagement had been undertaken with residents in Countess Wear on the opposite side of Bridge Road to King George V Playing Fields but signage was a suggestion which he would take away and ECCT would want to understand the barriers to crossing the road.

Members welcomed the progress made through the programme to date and acknowledged the scale and ambition of the work. It was requested that the report later in the year, include more detailed performance information.

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

Members commented on the work plan making the following points:

- policy issues as a result of the Local Plan examination would be more relevant the process; and
- further information in the item column could be useful.

In scoping the bike parking item, scheduled for the committee meeting in June, it was requested that Planning was considered and that Councillor Wetenhall, as proposer, would liaise with the Head of Service Net Zero and City Centre with regard to the report to be brought.

The Chair agreed to contact the Strategic Director for Place regarding the CIL Governance Report.

The Chair agreed that the Shared Prosperity Fund report would be a report to Councillors' Information Bulletin.

Following a unanimous vote the proposal from Councillor Wetenhall on Community Land Trusts was added to the work plan. Outline scoping of the item resulted in a request to officers for an update on the legislative timetable in June if it was not possible to bring the item at that time and that an officer report on the resource and opportunity implications of the emerging Community Empowerment Bill with regard to community assets, to include Community Land trusts and any work being undertaken on Community Asset Transfer be brought to the committee.

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

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.52 pm

Chair