

COUNCIL

Tuesday 7 April 2026

Present:

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor Councillor Anne Jobson (Chair)
Councillor Gemma Rolstone (Deputy Lord Mayor)
Councillors Asvachin, Banyard, Begley, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Foale, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Hughes, Hussain, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Parkhouse, Payne, Rees, Sheridan, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

Apologies:

Councillors Atkinson, Ketchin, Pole, Read, Wetenhall and Williams, M

Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Senior Estates Supervisor, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

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MINUTES

The minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on 25 February 2026 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as a correct record.

The minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on 3 March 2026 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as a correct record, and noted the error in Minute No. 148 had been corrected to read as "Strategic Scrutiny Committee".

The Lord Mayor also advised that amendments relating to the Strategic Scrutiny Committee on 12 March had been addressed at their recent meeting.

The minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Council held on 10 February 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 AGM of Exeter Twinning Circle on 27 February 2026 and expressed support to Rennes in hosting activities to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the twinning;
- attended the wreath-laying ceremony at the Cathedral for HMS Exeter on 28 February;
- noted that the suffragette flag flew over Exeter's historic Guildhall over the weekend of 6 March to mark International Women's Day;
- attended performances of Forever Young at the Northcott, Annie by Exeter Musical Society, A Streetcar Named Desire by Exeter Little Theatre Company

at the Barnfield, and a performance by Ukrainian actors at the Phoenix concerning the Mariupol Theatre;

- attended Exeter Philharmonic Choir's performance of Solomon at the Cathedral and a concert by the Exeter Symphony Orchestra;
- attended Winchester Cathedral for the installation of Christopher Palmer (former Canon at Exeter Cathedral) as Dean and extended her best wishes;
- met with the new Commanding Officer for CTCRM, Colonel R P M Jones RM, and attended the "Bugles Breakfast" with 6 RIFLES;
- attended Exeter School Founders' Day Service at the Cathedral and a celebration at Shallowford Farm, noting its work with children and young people;
- hosted a reception for the Women's Rugby World Cup Trophy during its nationwide tour visit to Exeter; and
- that she had been able to pay respects of herself and the City at the funeral of Honorary Alderman Margaret Danks, who had served the City with distinction for many years.

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Lord Mayor reported that one public question had been received in advance; however, the questioner was not in attendance. The Lord Mayor read the question, and the response was provided by the Leader. A copy of the question and response is appended to the minutes.

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ST NICHOLAS PRIORY

The Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright. The Lord Mayor invited the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources to introduce the report who made the following points:

- two years ago, Council approved a budget of £88,000 for the Historic Buildings Trust to support a funding bid to Historic England for roof repair work. The bid, however, was unsuccessful, with Historic England declining to support the works;
- the Historic Buildings Trust had subsequently value-engineered the project to focus on essential works to make the roof watertight with the revised estimated cost of the work being £150,000;
- under the Community Asset Transfer agreement, the tenant's liability was capped at £10,000 due to their financial position and therefore the Council as the building owner, remained responsible for the remaining costs; and
- the report sought approval for additional funding of £75,000, bringing the total budget to £163,000, which included a contingency of approximately £13,000.

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

- the Council would fund the works through its usual approach to property-related capital expenditure, primarily through borrowing rather than using reserves;
- short-term borrowing would be used where appropriate, particularly in periods of high interest rates;
- the exact reason for Historic England declining the funding bid were not confirmed, but it was likely related to changes in their funding availability;
- the proposed budget represented the best available estimate based on professional quantity surveyor analysis. There was no guarantee that tendered

costs would fall within this amount, and further approval might be required if costs exceeded estimates;

- works could not commence until a budget was formally approved by Council, after which the Historic Buildings Trust would proceed to tender; and
- photographic evidence of the damage from the roof leak was available and could be shared with Members or appended to the minutes if requested.

During the debate, a Member made the following points:

- officers were thanked for the report and tribute was paid to the Historic Buildings Trust for their work in maintaining the building and in trying to secure external funding from Historic England;
- the building was recognised as a cultural and historic asset, and the Council had an obligation to maintain it; and
- the report confirmed there were no alternative options available and Members were encouraged to support the recommendation.

In summing up the report, the Leader made following the points:

- emphasised the importance of the building as a city asset and the Council's commitment to maintaining it, while supporting the Historic Buildings Trust in its care;
- the scale and ongoing cost of maintaining historic buildings was highlighted, and noted that issues arose regularly, similar to other old properties;
- referenced previous expenditure (approximately £480,000) on repairs, funded by the Council without external support from Historic England;
- noted that decisions on further works must be balanced against available resources and competing priorities; and
- commended the report and hoped for unanimous approval.

Following a vote the recommendation was CARRIED unanimously.

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MINUTES OF CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 5 FEBRUARY 2026

The Minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 5 February 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Rees, and taken as read.

Councillor Moore welcomed the clarification on the minutes, which confirmed that the belief that homeless individuals were coming from outside the area was incorrect. She requested details on the systemic changes discussed and how they would help reduce the number of people at risk of becoming homeless.

Councillor Rees as Chair of Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee stated that proposed changes were being developed and would be reviewed by the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee in the autumn, with a focus on preventative measures to reduce homelessness. She further highlighted that the matter was ongoing and invited further input from the Portfolio Holder.

Councillor Asvachin as the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services, confirmed the process was ongoing, highlighting that an update would be brought back to Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee in September.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 5 February 2026 were received.

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MINUTES OF PLANNING COMMITTEE - 9 FEBRUARY 2026

The Minutes of the Planning Committee of 9 February 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Planning Committee held on 9 February 2026 were received.

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MINUTES OF AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 11 FEBRUARY 2026

The Minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee of 11 February 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Wardle, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 11 February 2026 were received.

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MINUTES OF LICENSING COMMITTEE - 26 FEBRUARY 2026

The Minutes of the Licensing Committee of 26 February 2026 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Wardle, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Licensing Committee held on 26 February 2026 were received.

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MINUTES OF STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 12 MARCH 2026

The Lord Mayor drew reference to the earlier changes to the Council minutes on 3 March 2026, referring to the error in Minute No. 148 which had been corrected and that amendments relating to the Strategic Scrutiny Committee on 12 March had been addressed at their recent meeting.

The Minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee of 12 March 2026 were presented by the Deputy Chair, Councillor K. Mitchell, and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee held on 12 March 2026 were received.

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MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 17 MARCH 2026

The minutes of the Executive Committee of 17 March 2026 were presented by the Leader, Councillor Bialyk, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 116 – Lord Mayoralty**, the Leader highlighted that Councillor Gemma Rolstone was nominated as Lord Mayor for the ensuing municipal year and that Councillor Lucy Haigh was nominated as Deputy Lord Mayor for the ensuing municipal year.

In respect of **Minute No. 119 – Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy**, the Leader moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Wright. During the debate, the following points were made:

- progress had been made at a strategic, county-wide level, but little had been delivered locally to connect green spaces, private gardens, and highways in a way that supported biodiversity;

- what actions would be taken to implement the strategy locally and to produce a coherent plan for nature within the city; and
- there was concern about a lack of coordinated action by the Council over several years and it was enquired what steps could be taken to develop and implement an effective, locally focused nature plan.

The Leader in responding, highlighted that responsibility for this area currently sat with Devon County Council for the next two years and advised that future structural changes, such as the introduction of a combined authority, could affect how the issue was managed. He acknowledged the importance of the matter, and agreed with the point raised, and indicated that further discussion with relevant partners may be needed.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 120 – Crisis and Resilience Fund – Housing Payments and Crisis Payments**, the Leader moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Wright.

The Leader advised that, at the time of the Executive meeting, full details of the funding allocations under the grant agreement with Devon County Council for 2026/27 were not available but has since been provided as follows:

- Crisis Payment Grants: £578,412;
- Crisis Payments Administration: £57,841; and
- Resilience Services: £278,720.

Members were informed that the Crisis Payment funding included an additional £45,442 to support residents affected by increased heating oil costs and that the crisis payment grant funding was approximately 16% higher than the previous Household Support Fund allocations. Further guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) confirmed that this was not a new scheme and that heating costs had always been eligible under the crisis payment strand.

The Leader further advised that additional government funding had been targeted at areas with high oil dependency and low-income households. While Exeter had relatively low oil dependency, the City Council had received a proportionate allocation from Devon County Council. Applications for support with oil heating costs would be assessed in line with existing scheme principles.

The Leader also confirmed that a Member briefing had been scheduled for Thursday 16 April where, further details on the CRF would be provided.

During the debate, the following points were made:

- support was expressed for the recommendations;
- the introduction of a three-year funding arrangement was welcomed, noting it provided greater security, planning, and flexibility for the Council;
- the shift from the Household Support Fund to the Crisis and Resilience Fund was supported and highlighted its focus on long-term solutions rather than repeat applications for short-term support;
- that the previous scheme risked becoming a substitute for statutory benefits, which was not its original intention;

- many residents were experiencing hardship and may lack awareness of statutory benefits, budgeting skills, and available concessions;
- the correspondence from the Leader and the opportunity for citizens to bid for additional support work in this area was commended;
- Council staff would deliver the programme effectively;
- the challenging economic climate was noted, but the CRF approach was a positive step forward;
- over time, demand on the fund would be reduced as residents gained the skills, and knowledge to access support and improve their financial resilience;
- further detail from the Leader on arrangements for delivering resilience work was requested;
- the importance of a strong collaboration between Exeter City Council and Devon County Council was emphasised;
- clarification was sought on how the Council would also work with the voluntary and community sector to support residents;
- highlighted concerns about increasing demand for support services, linked to wider global and economic pressures; and
- the measures being put in place were commended, but there was concern about pressures later in the year.

The Leader in responding:

- thanked Members for their insight and noted lessons would be shared at the upcoming members briefing;
- emphasised the importance of discussing detailed arrangements for resilience work during the briefing;
- highlighted that households who relied on oil heating were mostly on the outskirts of Exeter and often off-grid, presenting particular challenges;
- highlighted some residents may be 'asset-rich but cash-poor', such as older people on small pensions, who may still require targeted support;
- advised that some residents may not realise or claim available support, which could cause distress and that a proactive outreach was important;
- noted that resilience measures should address both practical needs and raising awareness of support available;
- encouraged learning from the last four years of Household Support Fund experience to inform CRF delivery going forward;
- emphasised the fund would likely be administered longer-term, making understanding local needs and outreach essential; and
- highlighted his support for the recommendations and importance of the members briefing to discuss resilience planning.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

In respect of **Minute No. 121 – Corporate Complaints Policy**, the Leader moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Wright. During the debate, the following points were made:

- the policy aligned with standards and recommendations;
- it was important to have a structured complaints process for clarity and consistency and that all concerns needed to be handled through defined stages and escalated appropriately if unresolved; and
- there was a need for a robust and watertight process and officers were thanked for their work in developing and implementing the process.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED unanimously.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Executive Committee 17 March 2026 were received.

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

There were no questions received from Members.

172 **RETIRING COUNCILLORS**

The Lord Mayor expressed thanks to members who were not standing in this year's elections, specifically: Councillor Bennett, Councillor Holland, Councillor Foale, Councillor Parkhouse, Councillor Read, and Councillor Rees.

On behalf of the City, the Lord Mayor thanked them for their years of public service and contributions to the work of the Council and wished them well for the future. The Lord Mayor also extended best wishes to all those Members seeking re-election.

(The meeting commenced at 6.01 pm and closed at 6.47 pm)

Chair