

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 June 2026

Present:

Councillor Brian Rappert (Chair)

Councillors Begley, Darling, Haigh, Harding, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Moore and Payne

Present as substitute:

Councillors Chelvanayagam and Cookson

Apologies:

Councillors Wetenhall and Williams

Present as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Atkinson, Bialyk and Pole

In Attendance:

Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero, Team Lead - Property, Planning & Non-Contentious and Democratic Services Manager

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2026 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

2 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

There were no questions submitted by the public.

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

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

Question

Devon County Council have set up a scrutiny committee for local government reorganisation - will the administration support the setting up of a scrutiny committee for the 5 stages of LGR as set out in the Centre for scrutiny guidance: [Scrutiny and local government reorganisation - a practice guide - CfGS?](#)

Response

"MHCLG has produced comprehensive guidance that sets out how it expects local areas to establish Transitional Governance Arrangements for LGR. This includes the establishment of Joint Committees who will have statutory responsibilities for overseeing the first phase of transition (decision to shadow council election) which will be set out in the underpinning Structural Change (SCO) order. Both the MHCLG guidance and the SCO are clear that predecessor (sovereign) council's role is to

maintain business as usual during all transition phases. The establishment of the transitional governance arrangements combined with the existing scrutiny structure will enable effective scrutiny of BaU services and transitional arrangements as advised by the Centre for Scrutiny Guidance.”

Supplementary Question and Response

In a supplementary question Councillor Moore asked what sort of scrutiny would be helpful and the Leader responded stating that all member briefings such as the one held earlier the same week gave all members of the council a chance to hear reports and ask questions and that this was an inclusive process ahead of the inception of a shadow authority.

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

Question

The City Wall in St Bartholomew’s Cemetery has had Herras fencing along it for years. What outcomes are there of any monitoring that is taking place of the stability of the wall, and what action is the council taking to prepare for its repair so the fencing can be removed?

Response

“The Heras fencing and the associated section of the City Wall is checked on a monthly basis by one of the Council’s Assets Surveyors and whilst there are concerns over the stability of the wall, there has been no notable deterioration observed as part of the ongoing inspection process.

Works to fully address the structural issues requires the consolidation of loose masonry, underpinning, and the installation of steel rods and ties to stabilise the wall. All works would be subject to approved design and Scheduled Monument Consent. These works are extensive and are currently estimated to cost in the region of £250,000.

Members will be aware that similar structural issues exist at other points of the City Wall and, for areas where pedestrian footfall is highest, these areas need to be prioritised for repair ahead of the St Bartholomew’s Cemetery site. Most recently, a large section of the City Wall was repaired in Bartholomew Street East (City Gate).”

Supplementary Question and Response

In a supplementary question Councillor Moore asked when this work would be carried out and the Leader responded stating that this would be a large capital project which it was intended to carry out when funds allowed and with the new capital monitoring the Strategic Management Board would bring works forward.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Moore in relation to the Portfolio of the Councillor Patrick who was not in attendance and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Bialyk responded.

Question

The consideration of the Mary Arches Planning application relied heavily on the London Local plan policy for co-living. The policy in the emerging plan is scant compared to that. In the last year the administration committed to bring forward a co-living policy for this council to use - will that policy be developed this year?

Response

“The City Council has previously suggested the need for a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to cover co-living. However, further clarity has been provided by the

Government on the future of SPDs as part of widespread planning reforms. It is now clear that it is not possible for Councils to adopt new SPDs after 30 June 2026. On this basis, it will no longer be possible to produce an SPD on co-living. An alternative would be to produce co-living guidance for development management purposes. The City Council would look to do this after the adoption of the Exeter Plan which is scheduled in March 2027. This timing would mean that the final text of the co-living element of the Exeter Plan would be known in advance of preparing the guidance."

In a supplementary question Councillor Moore asked if any preliminary work would be undertaken before 2027 and the Leader responded that he would like to see this but there may be a resource issue as the Planning officers were working on the plan.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Moore in relation to the Portfolio of the Councillor Patrick who was not in attendance and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Bialyk responded.

Question

Please can you set out the Councils' position on allowing the operators of Purpose Built Student Accommodation to use this accommodation for Air BNB, if it has not been specifically approved as part of the planning application?

Response

"Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) is typically approved as a *sui generis* use specifically for student occupation, often secured through planning conditions or legal agreements. The use of such accommodation for short-term letting (including AirBnB or similar) would normally fall outside that approved use unless it has been expressly authorised as part of the planning permission."

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Chelvanayagam in relation to the Portfolio of the Councillor Pole who was in attendance.

Question

For each of the council operations, to what extent is adaptation to the impact of climate change being considered and costed?

Response

"As my predecessor reported on 11 September 2025 the Net Zero team attend the Devon, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Climate Impacts Group, where adaptation measures and progress are discussed. The Net Zero Risk Register had been expanded to cover adaptation measures to support service delivery and to protect our communities in Exeter. This supported our People strategy, with Intended Outcomes that Communities would be more resilient and Exeter would be a safe and thriving city with great things to see and do for everyone.

The 22 January 2026 Executive Committee resolved to consider strengthening the Climate Action Plan by adding an Adaptation and Resilience plan.

The June Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group meeting earlier this week focused on adaptation for Exeter, and the team are following up with attendees on ways to deliver tangible outcomes on adaptation.

Today I attended the SWEED (SW Environment and Energy Group) and Adaptation is one of three sprints being worked on by the Devon Emergency Partnership. They are looking at adaptation indicators, they are "getting there" and meeting soon to finalise the adaptation indicators.

Through our membership of SWEED, an adaptation strategy is being developed for Devon, which will be adapted for each District Council including Exeter City Council.

From this, we will be able to develop plans for City Council services, in being prepared for the increasing risks posed by climate change, as well as identifying new opportunities.

Partnership work through Devon Community Resilience Forum, Devon Communities Together, SWEEG are all examples of actions in line with the Climate Resilient Devon Cornwall and Isles of Scilly action plan action point HBEC3.

The emerging Exeter Plan does provide a clear policy direction on climate resilience and adaptation, including through policies on adaptive and resilient development, flood risk, green infrastructure, biodiversity net gain and urban greening. This includes:

NEB5 Exeter Plan Climate Change Vision.

D1: Design principles (Strategic policy),

Policies CC1: "Net zero Exeter (Strategic policy)" including Biodiversity Net Gain and CC7: "Development that is adaptive and resilient to climate change" (updated per EVB-CC-11),

S1: Spatial strategy (Strategic policy)

S2: Liveable Exeter Principles (Strategic policy)

NE4: Green infrastructure (Strategic policy)

and the Biodiversity Duty Report.

We are in the early stages of developing our wider approach in areas such as Biodiversity Net Gain delivery, though further work is required and planned.

The Environment Agency's representation to the Exeter Plan states 'In our view the plan is achievable yet ambitious and, whilst promoting sustainable growth, vibrancy and a thriving economy, emphasises the inherent need for restoring and enhancing its environment by promoting a nature-rich, climate resilient and adaptable city"

Adaptation is still at an early stage across many service areas. Some services are considering and adapting to extreme weather conditions to ensure staff and building users are not put at risk. Housing is continuing with increasing the energy efficiency of our homes through a self-delivered retrofit programme, we are decarbonising the Riverside Leisure Centre and increasingly planting climate ready plants, for example at St Sidwell's Point and at The Gardens in Whipton. Once the Devon Climate Partnership have finalised their measures Exeter City Council will be in a position to use these same measures and we are waiting for them to progress their work so that we can make further progress at the Exeter level."

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Chelvanayagam in relation to the Portfolio of the Councillor Pole who was in attendance.

Question

By making the language of net zero and adaptation accessible, what can we as a council do to help residents prepare for change, build resilience, and help future proof our communities and environment? What are your plans to communicate clearly and simply to residents, the risks, the impacts, and the benefits of climate adaptations?

Response

"Over the previous six months we have increased our climate and nature communications with residents, links to recent news features will be included in the minutes.

As part of the Devon Climate Partnership, the City Council has been involved in recent discussions on communicating about climate and adaptation issues. Our

communications team will be sharing additional messages, stories, and advice from the Devon Climate Emergency across our social channels in the coming months.

- [Exeter residents urged to be 'weather ready' during the heatwave - Exeter City Council News](#)
- [Give your views on how nature can thrive in Exeter - Exeter City Council News](#)

[Winter energy saving campaign to encourage people to save on bills - Exeter City Council News](#)"

The current ECC "Climate Emergency" web page signposts e.g. Flood Hub, and to the Devon Climate Emergency website where there are adaptation learning resources aimed at adults and children, and our partnership work supports the Climate Resilience Devon Cornwall and Isles of Scilly action plan action HBEA2. I am discussing with the team ideas initiated by the previous PFH and have had some informal discussions with the team earlier today, with a view to having further meetings to discuss.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Moore in relation to the Portfolio of the Councillor Ruth Williams who was not in attendance and the Leader answered in her absence.

Question

Now that the technology has been upgraded please can the scrutiny meetings to broadcast via the Councils usual Youtube channel enable transparency and accountability on the issues discussed here?

Response

"We are currently working with Strata to develop our capacity to stream more meetings that take place in Rennes. We will work with the portfolio holder to develop a timescale for this and communicate it to members."

In a supplementary question Councillor Moore asked if there was a timescale and the Leader responded that he would ask the Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Moore in relation to the Portfolio of the Councillor Pole who was in attendance.

Question

In the Costed organisational footprint report (in link) please can you tell us when the business as usual/ Positive Current Trajectory (PCT) measures are expected to (LGR aside) achieve net zero for the Council's Operations?

Response

"We commissioned SWEEG to develop the costed Carbon Reduction Plan to 2030 and not beyond, as a result we do have data beyond 2030 for the 3 scenarios. The only exception was for PV where 2030, 2040 and 2050 were used as a reference to complete all PV installations by."

Measure	BAU Scenario	Mid Scenario	Max Scenario
Domestic PV installation	Install PV on all suitable homes by 2050 – 70 homes a year	Install PV on all suitable homes by 2040 – 111 homes a year	Install PV on all suitable homes by 2030 – 269 homes a year

In discussing this with SWEEG, the further you go into the future, the less accurate the modelling becomes due to technology and data improvements.”

In a supplementary question Councillor Moore asked if the Portfolio Holder was in contact with the BAU position and what actions could be taken to make further progress. Councillor Pole responded that she was not satisfied but that this was a positive trajectory compared to other authorities and that the research and papers from SWEEG had been cutting edge and innovative. She added that actions identified by officers would be embedded into departmental plans and as portfolio holder she would challenge and scrutinise and push for faster delivery where possible.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was put by Councillor Darling in relation to the Portfolio of the Councillor Patrick who was in not attendance and the Leader responded in her place.

Question

Is the Portfolio Holder content with following the guidelines which dictate the size of co-living accommodation or were they looking to deliver something better?

Response

This issue was sui generis and the Council would try to get the best possible outcome for the city. Developers were entitled to make a profit and guidance was needed as co-living was an alternative for some people. We don't ask those who live there and it would be good to hear their voice.

Councillor Darling stated that she would welcome consultation with residents of co-living and the Leader responded that co-living could be useful and the Council had a duty to ensure it was appropriate, especially when it may be allocated to people on the housing list but it was clear that it would not be suitable for families.

5 Working Towards Net Zero - Exeter City Council's Corporate Carbon Footprint Report and Carbon Reduction Action Plan Progress Report

The Head of Service City Centre and Net Zero presented the report making the following points:

- the carbon reduction plan had been presented and approved at the Executive in March;
- the plan had been developed from the report published by the University of Exeter, which was the first of its kind for a local authority and covered scope 1 and 2 emissions;
- the plan was a live document and would be reviewed every six months;
- grant funding was important in delivery and where grant funding hadn't been secured for projects they represented future ambition;
- section 4.9 provided a highlight of current and recently completed projects;
- project delivery groups would be required for major projects as delivery was dependent on several services working collaboratively as had been the case for the Riverside Leisure Centre decarbonisation project;
- early discussions with Heads of Service on the prioritisation of projects would be required in order to avoid capacity issues;
- promotion of completed projects both internally and externally would be useful to highlight the impact on cost and carbon savings;

- additional benefits brought by delivery of the Carbon Reduction Plan were cost savings to the running of council buildings, energy cost savings to council tenants, healthier and more comfortable homes and buildings, biodiversity enhancement, improved health for workers and residents and decarbonisation work; and
- the next update would include carbon emissions saved for each project on the table seen on page 25.

The Head of Service City Centre and Net Zero responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- the air source heat pump trial was not underway as yet;
- tree planting plans for this year were not confirmed as yet;
- lessons had been learnt from cavity wall insulation in the private sector and problematic types would not be used;
- solar panels would not be placed on the parts of the Wonford Community Centre which were to be demolished;
- percentages would be included in the next iteration of the report where previously some areas included snapshot figures;
- there was an element of procurement included in section 5 in relation to Scope 3 which showed improvement each year;
- delivery of the action plan was not only to reduce carbon emissions, there may also be cost savings. Retrofit of social housing had cost benefits but the relationship hadn't been determined yet but would form part of future updates;
- Riverside Leisure Centre decarbonisation was a major project with replacement of the roof to enable an air source heat pump to be installed. The project manager would be working with the appointed provider to ensure least impact on service delivery during the works;
- in order to scale the installation of cavity wall and loft insulation external grant funding would be required but a more detailed response would be sought from the Housing service;
- a written response would be provided regarding which plants or where hydrogenated vegetable oil to replace diesel would come from as well as the carbon cost of delivery of fuel;
- the project to install solar PV panels on page 19 had been through a procurement process and work was due to begin imminently;
- a response would be given outside the meeting regarding those sites which did not have covered cycle storage and when it might be installed;
- collaborative work with housing associations would come under City Wide net zero programme of work rather than corporate net zero, discussions were yet to commence but were on the programme;
- action was focussed on tree planting rather than other greening solutions but the team were working with Parks and Open Spaces teams on climate-ready; and
- other biodiversity activity could be included in future reports.

During discussion Members made the following points:

- the importance of any new authority continuing this work;
- the investment plan would be seen as part of the annual budget-setting process; and
- a risk in delivery of the costed carbon reduction plan was availability of funding.

The Chair moved the recommendations as set out in the report, seconded by Councillor Payne which was CARRIED unanimously.

Councillor Moore noted concern that the extent to which the plan would contribute towards the 2030 net zero objective.

6 Scrutiny Annual Report

Councillor Cookson presented the report in the absence of Councillor Matthew Williams, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Board. Councillor Cookson had been a member of the Board.

During discussion members' made the following points:

- it would be useful to speak to officers to see what they found useful about presenting to scrutiny committees and whether any changes could be made;
- learning from officers during budget scrutiny sessions had been helpful for the Customer Focus Scrutiny committee;
- measurement of improvements as a result of scrutiny could be included in the report with attention drawn to communication with petitioners;

Councillor Cookson informed members that this was the second report of this type and that feedback from members of the two scrutiny committees had been included for the first time in this report.

The Chair moved the recommendations as set out in the report, seconded by Councillor Moore, which following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

7 Legislative timetable update regarding Community Land Trusts

The Team Lead – Property, Planning and Non-Contentious presented the briefing note making the following points:

- Community Land Trusts were one tool which could be used to obtain land and the ways in which this could be done had changed recently;
- the changes were set out in the briefing note as well as the implications for the council; and
- Assets of Community Value had been in place for just over a decade and the council received one or two per year but this was likely to increase as the definition expanded.

The Team Lead – Property, Planning and Non-Contentious responded to members' questions in the following terms:

- the Act had passed into law but the provisions had not yet come into force and regulations were awaited;
- changes to the Localism Act had not yet come into force and regulations had yet to be consulted upon;
- the Community Asset Transfer policy dealt with Council assets and how they transfer whereas Assets of Community Value may not belong to the Council;
- members of a community could nominate buildings or land as Assets of Community Value which could include council-owned assets but could be sporting assets, pubs or ski slopes, for example.
- becoming an Asset of Community Value was subject to statutory tests;
- Community Land Trusts would see groups or organisations becoming the recipient of land;
- a timescale for the regulations coming into force could not be given at this stage;
- regarding associated costs, some detail would follow in the regulations but it was likely that some involvement from officers would be necessary, including payment for evaluation and officer time;

- the current scheme of delegation allowed the Estates Team to make decisions in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, meaning that there was member involvement. A review of a decision to nominate land/building as an Asset of Community Value could only requested by the landowner; and
- the Right to Bid was only a right to bid, the landowner could still decide not to sell but changes to Right to Buy would mean they would be locked in to sell and the regulations would bring about this change.

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

Members commented on the work plan.

Suggestions were made to move items and to hold an additional meeting with a focus on the Local Plan and that the issues in the Rivers Transparency Template be referred to the Harbour Board.

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

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.38 pm

Chair