

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 June 2026

Present:

Councillor Adrian Fullam (Chair)

Councillors Wardle, Hussain, Knott, Richards, Snow, Terry and Williams, N

Apologies:

Councillors Banyard and Rappert

Also present:

Head of Service – Finance, Head of Service – Customers and Communities and Democratic Services Manager

In attendance as Portfolio Holder:

Councillors Atkinson, Bialyk, Findlay, Williams, R. and Wood

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on the 22 January 2026 and 19 March 2026 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

2 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

3 Public Surveys

The Head of Service – Customers and Communities presented a brief update making the following points:

- that he wanted to clarify what the committee wanted from the report later in the year;
- in March 2026 Council agreed the consultation and engagement strategy which included provision for an annual report which would include information from surveys;
- Engage Exeter went live in 2023 since which nine surveys had been carried out, two were live now regarding the city centre and cultural strategies. Over 3000 responses from residents had been received with the top surveys being Wild Exeter, the current Cultural with over 500 responses and the Neighbourhood CIL survey with over 300 responses; and
- levels of reach and participation, accessibility, inclusivity and how consultation has informed decision making would all be included in the annual report.

The Head of Service – Customers and Communities responded to a question from a member stating that co-creation would take place for future surveys.

The Chair stated that the annual report would provide a good overview and members' could look before the next meeting and clarify any further detail required.

4 Questions from the Public under Standing Order No. 19

There were no questions submitted by members of the public.

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 Terry in relation to the Portfolio of Councillor Ruth Williams who attended the meeting. The question was circulated at the meeting to Members of the Committee. The response of the Portfolio Holder is set out below:

Question: Brown bin collections contribute well to our waste income stream and contribute to our recycling rates. Could we increase the use of this service? What barriers deter residents subscribing to brown bins?

Response: The garden waste service has been actively promoted over recent years, rising from 8,238 taking up the service in 2022/23 to 12,381 customers being part of the service as of the 31 March 2026. The service in their presentation to Customer Scrutiny in March 2026 set out their communications plans which needs to cover all waste streams that contribute to Exeter's recycling rate. In line with this plan, promotion of the garden waste service took place at the start of the garden waste season with a press release issued on 6 March 2026, an e bulleting circulated to subscribers on 14 March 2026 and a prominent article in the spring edition of the Exeter Citizen informing residents of the service. In addition to this, social media channels including the service's own Denis the Dustcart are used to promote the garden waste service.

Exeter, being an urban area, means that a significant percentage of its 61,810 properties do not have gardens unlike our rural neighbours. In addition, we are a city that can pride itself in producing one of the lowest amounts of waste per head of the household than other parts of England. Those residents who choose not to take up the service can be for a variety of reasons including having effective home composters, wormeries or preferring to take their waste to one of the two household waste recycling centres as and when they produce garden waste. However, our cost-effective garden waste collection service provides a reliable collection service for the keen gardeners of the city that take up the service between February and November each year.

In a supplementary question Councillor Terry ask if a concession might be offered where the cost of a brown bin was prohibitive and Councillor Ruth Williams responded stating that the cost was at the lower end of what was charged by others and a smaller bin was available as well as disposable sacks which worked out at £3.50 each as well as the free option for residents to take their garden waste to one of the two centres and this was working well currently.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Terry in relation to the Portfolio of Councillor Ruth Williams who attended the meeting. The question was circulated at the meeting to Members of the Committee. The response of the Portfolio Holder is set out below:

Question: I welcome the promise of Cllr Williams (in the minutes from last meeting) to update Heavitree councillors of any issues and delays with the Heavitree Splash Pools – what are the reasons for current delay in re-opening, and how will you keep ward Councillors better informed – before it goes out in a press release?

Response: Officers and operational teams made every effort to bring the Heavitree Splash Pools back into use this season. However, significant issues were identified, including a persistent leak causing the loss of over a third of the water overnight and a blown pump. While these were being managed, the sand filtration system suffered a sudden and terminal failure, with replacement costs

exceeding c.£19,000. Given the planned redevelopment, repair timescales, and the fact the existing plant cannot be reused, this was not considered a cost-effective use of public funds. The decision has therefore been taken not to reopen the current facility, with officers instead prioritising delivery of the new splash facility, with works due to commence imminently. Officers will proactively engage ward members where there are substantive and determined operational impacts on service delivery, recognising this may not always be possible in fast-moving situations.

In a supplementary question Councillor Terry asked if ward councillors could be contacted earlier as she had received information via the media which Councillor Ruth Williams noted and stated that she understood the importance of councillors being informed and that use of this facility affected a number of wards as many families used it.

Councillor Wood added that this had been a fast-moving situation and he could confirm that ward councillors were informed before a press release was issued.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Terry in relation to the Portfolio of Councillor Duncan Wood who attended the meeting. The question was circulated at the meeting to Members of the Committee. The response of the Portfolio Holder is set out below:

Question: Please provide an update on the outcome of the Heavitree Park equipment renovation consultation.

Response: The Heavitree Park play area consultation is currently live (15 June–24 July 2026), so no outcomes are available yet. This consultation is taking a targeted, hyper-local approach to capture feedback from actual and potential users via on-site surveys, including gathering the views of children using the facilities. This builds on the 2021 citywide consultation by narrowing the focus to detailed use, barriers, and preferences, specifically to inform equipment choice and inclusive design. Latest results will shape the design brief for the development hoped for later this year.

In a supplementary question Councillor Terry asked how the consultation results would be managed in relation to the expectations of Pride in Place. Councillor Wood responded stating that Pride in Place detail was not yet known and it may be difficult to manage expectations but communications would be clear and provision of play areas would continue to the best ability within the funds available.

6 Quarter 4 Budget Scrutiny

The Head of Service – Finance presented the reports making the following points:

- that there had been a late revision to the Overview of the General Fund report ahead of its presentation to Council on 16 June, due to the Business Rates Pool;
- the reason for the changes had been that a schedule had been received from Plymouth regarding the Business Rate Pool, which materially affected the figures for closing 2025/26 but was mitigated in 2027/28 due to the way the Business Rates Pool operated;
- the section 151 officer was comfortable that the changes posed no issues to the Council's overall Medium Term Financial Plan;
- this was a report brought on behalf of all services across the council so it may be necessary to refer questions back to the relevant head of service;

- the Capital Monitoring report highlighted the challenges of spending in the capital programme as £5.5million had been spent rather than the planned £40million but the Strategic Asset Management Board were now actively reviewing the programme and there had been increased spend already in this financial year with the acquisition of the new recycling facility; and
- the outturn of the Housing revenue Account(HRA) was broadly in line with the in-year forecast with only two year-end variances to draw to Members attention; an underspend in respect of repairs and maintenance due to the time required to mobilise a new contract, which is requested to be carried forward as a supplementary budget in 2026/27 and there had been additional income from rental of housing stock due to a reduction in voids, in number and duration as well as a reduction in rent arrears.

The Head of Service – Finance responded to Members’ questions in the following terms:

- the spend detailed on page 45 to bring an asset back to a serviceable condition was required under the original lease but she would feed back the suggestion that lease clauses were reviewed in relation to reinstatement; and
- an update on the restructure of the assets team and any tangible benefits would be obtained from the relevant Head of Service and reported back to Members.

In response to a question the Chair advised the committee that the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources had advised on the best time to schedule scrutiny of the budget.

Following a unanimous vote the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee noted the Quarter 4 Budget reports.

7 **Medium Term Financial Plan**

The Head of Service – Finance presented the report making the following points:

- the Medium Term Financial Plan was last presented to Council in February as part of approving the 2026/27 budget and covered up to 2028/9 due to the three-year settlement from government;
- the outcome of the fair funding review meant a balanced budget could be set but a saving would be required next year;
- a pay award indication had been received which was 0.8% higher than that budgeted for, an extra £0.25million;
- the year end position had been finalised for the General Fund which was set to benefit from additional business rate income however, this would not be received until the next financial year but was within the Medium Term Financial Plan(MTFP);
- it was possible to set aside funds to support Local Government Reorganisation transition and negate the need to find £1million in savings as well as mitigate the higher pay award; and
- the MTFP was in a healthy position and the section 151 officer was comfortable with the position as Exeter City Council came to an end and a new authority began.

The Head of Service – Finance responded to questions in the following terms:

- any over or underspends in 2025/26 were reflected in the latest MTFP; and
- there would be movement to and from the Council’s reserves but the General Fund working balance would not fall below that which was prudent. A risk-

based method of calculation was used to inform the minimum level of reserves; and

- if Members subsequently made decisions to spend additional monies identify compensating savings would need to be identified.

Following a unanimous vote the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

8 **Scrutiny Annual Report**

The report of the Scrutiny Programme Board was deferred as the Chair, Councillor Matthew Williams was not present.

9 **Petition: Little Exeter**

The Chair informed the committee that the petitioner had chosen not to present their petition to the committee as a similar business was due to open in the unit vacated by Little Exeter.

A member commented that it was a shame that Little Exeter wasn't able to continue but was happy to see that a similar facility would soon open.

The committee noted that the petition had been received.

10 **Scrutiny Work Plan and Proposals Received**

Following a unanimous vote the plan as amended was **AGREED**.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.10 pm

Chair