

REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 23rd September 2021

Report of: Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management

Title: Graffiti Service

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Programme Board received a request from Councillor Vizard for a review of the graffiti removal policy and strategy, with a focus on whether the current service provision in Exeter is suitable and efficient for a modern, growing city. This is in the light of the challenging financial circumstances and the recent Covid-19 enforced pause in service. The report will help to identify what the role should be for Exeter City Council's (ECC) graffiti removal service what preventative measures could be utilised, and what part volunteer services, the community, and external organisations can play in the reporting and removal process. This report will also address the issues around whether allowances could, or should, be made for more artistic examples of graffiti, and whether the provision for formal spaces of expression of graffiti would help reduce incidents of unwelcome graffiti across the city.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 Members are asked to note and comment on the contents of the report.

3. Reasons for the recommendation

- 3.1 Graffiti is increasing within Exeter. As seen last year when the service was temporarily suspended for "in-year savings", graffiti during this 9 month period appeared and stayed within the community. This caused a great deal of concern for residents, business, ward members and officers for all the reasons stated above. In doing so it identified the importance of the graffiti to the residents and stakeholders in Exeter, and the need to review to ensure effective service provision and continuous improvement in accordance with the ECC's strategic objectives.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources.

- 4.1 Currently the graffiti team comprises 1 operative, using a van with hot water, lance and chemicals. The Graffiti service often overspends each financial year, which is offset by savings elsewhere within the Public and Green Space overall Street Scene budget. This continued over spend allows no flexibility to extend graffiti provision within a balanced budget.
- 4.2 In the past the service applied a small charge of £25 to remove graffiti from private property, this resulted in very few graffiti attacks being removed as when asked for

payment, people said to ECC officers that they regard the removal of graffiti as “something they already pay for in their Council Tax”. This charge subsequently ceased in 2019 as a result of the constraint it applied to provision. The financial reports in Table 1 evidence that the charged process was not cost effective, reducing removal and failing to prevent over expenditure of budget prior to 2019.

Table 1. Graffiti Financial Systems Report (Period 1, 2015 – Period 3, 2021)

eFin Date	Financial Period	Cost Centre Name	Account Name	Budget 6	Actual Exp'	Variance
2015	I - 13	Graffiti Cleaning	Total Income & Expenditure	£41,040.00	£62,306.01	£21,266.01
2016	I - 13	Graffiti Cleaning	Total Income & Expenditure	£46,590.00	£185,805.96	£139,215.96
2017	I - 13	Graffiti Cleaning	Total Income & Expenditure	£130,450.00	£139,313.43	£8,863.43
2018	I - 13	Graffiti Cleaning	Total Income & Expenditure	£128,370.00	£152,138.90	£23,768.90
2019	I - 13	Graffiti Cleaning	Total Income & Expenditure	£89,030.00	£110,076.17	£21,046.17
2020	I - 13	Graffiti Cleaning	Total Income & Expenditure	£52,640.00	£66,811.74	£14,171.74
2021	P3	Graffiti Cleaning	Total Income & Expenditure	£32,023.86	£90,860.00	£58,836.14

4.3 The service should continue to receive the appropriate budget to ensure the core graffiti removal service. The service will continue to explore opportunities to work with business and other landowners to provide additional income where appropriate to help support this service. We should consider ring-fencing this income to assist with rising costs of chemicals and materials.

5. Report details:

5.1 Graffiti is still generally considered by the public a nuisance that lowers the tone of an area. In some cases it may even cause alarm and distress that a neighbourhood is in decline and feels threatening. The latter is very difficult to demonstrate other than anecdotally. However, public reports indicate that where graffiti has remained in a location for any length of time, it has often attracted more graffiti, and this is the point when people have reported feeling less safe in their neighbourhood. This is known as “broken window syndrome”.

5.2 Due to the nature of the ad-hoc and informal incidents of graffiti attacks, officers believe that official graffiti walls will not reduce or eliminate the scattergun approach to tagging across the city. However, official graffiti walls will enable those graffitiists that may have moved on from random tagging to producing graffiti artwork to have somewhere to display their artwork. This artwork is unlikely to be left untagged as we have seen in locations across the city. As was witnessed in Lockdowns 1 & 2 in 2020, when this service was paused, there was a large build-up of graffiti, leading to increased complaints and anecdotal evidence of the public feeling more vulnerable in their neighbourhoods. In order to continuously tackle this issue, the Council will need to decide on whether this service is of value to the City and its Citizens. Officers

believe that this service is essential in protecting Exeter’s neighbourhoods and preventing the feeling of declining service provision.

- 5.3 The current ECC graffiti policy is outlined on the graffiti reporting portal on the Council Website. It says “We aim to remove racist or offensive graffiti as soon as we can, however, the removal time may depend on constraints imposed by circumstances, for example, where the graffiti needs specialist equipment or the owner’s permission is required”.

Table 2 shows the total reported levels of graffiti since April 1 2021. A total of 1133 reports have been made during a four month period. Showing demand for a graffiti removal service remains high.

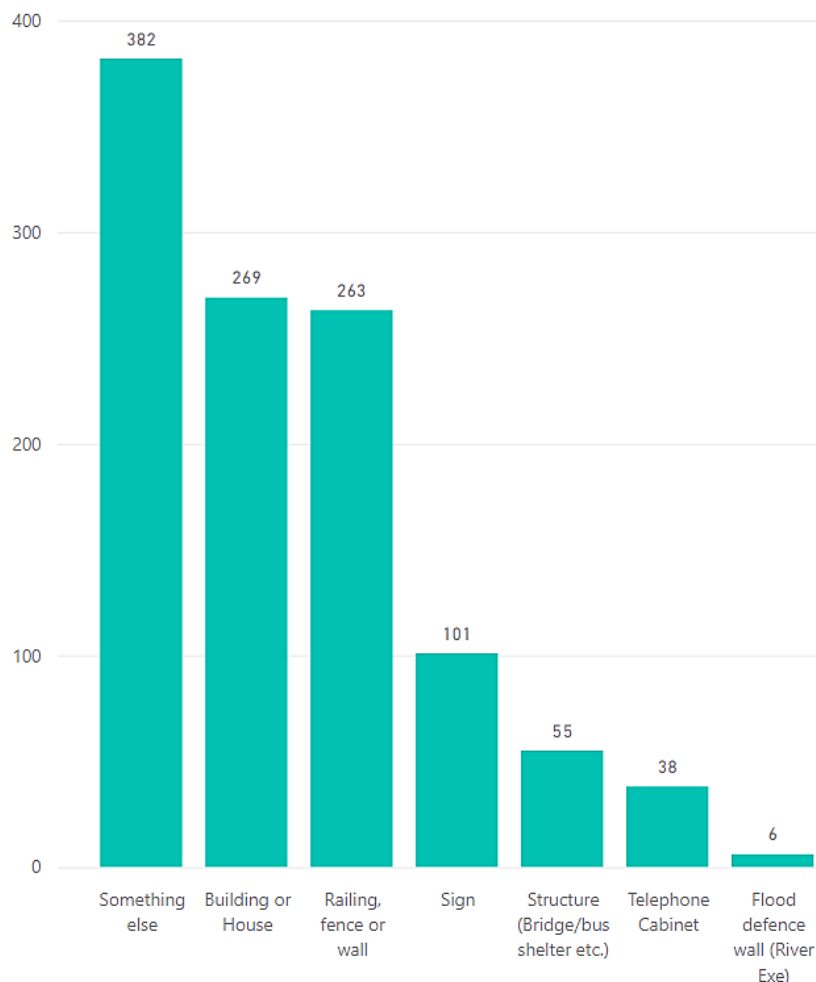
Table 2. Graffiti Total Report (01/04/2021 – 16/08/2021)

<u>Structure</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Offensive</u>	<u>Racist</u>	<u>Total</u>
Building or House	242	32	2	276
Flood defence wall (River Exe)	5	1	0	6
Railing, fence or wall	204	62	3	269
Sign	94	4	4	102
Something else	356	29	3	388
Structure (Bridge/bus shelter tc.)	40	14	1	55
Telephone Cabinet	34	2	1	37
Total	975	144	14	1133

Service Constraints:

- 5.4 One particular constraint to the service has been, until recently, where Graffiti has appeared on land that is not the responsibility of ECC. Where Graffiti is found on an external agency or landowner site, private business or residence, ECC have neither responsibility, nor permissions respectively, to remove it. Where this has occurred in the past it has led to increased reporting, poorly perceived customer service as a result of the failure to effectively remove the graffiti, and additional resource requirements through the complains management and investigation process.
- 5.5 Measures have now been taken to address this. Where graffiti is on property that is owned by an external agency or organisation such as; Network Rail; Environment Agency (EA); Devon County Council (DCC); Open Reach etc. The reporting individual is now advised to report directly to the relevant landowner. The ECC website will no longer accept reports of graffiti on non-ECC land, instead redirecting the reporting person to an appropriate website, or telephone number, for the other known landowners. ECC Power BI graffiti report system, shows in graph 1 that between April 1 2021, and August 8 2021, the implementation of the new system has redirected 200 enquiries. This can be seen in the recorded numbers for road signs, structures, telephone cabinets and flood defence.

Graph 1. Count of Incidences by Building Type, (1/04/21 – 8/08/21)



5.6 Evaluating the impact of the reporting system update, it could be perceived that ECC has admonished responsibility and lost engagement in the graffiti concerns city wide. However, whilst the service is now directing reports to individual land owners, ECC have continued to engage and maintain close working relationships with those agencies. The importance of continued partnership working, for both removal and prevention purposes has not been forgotten. To that end, ECC continue to support those agencies with expertise, and by collaborating and carrying out works on their behalf where they have requested and paid for the service. This is most aptly evidenced with the flood defence, in which the collaboration between ECC and the EA is ongoing.

5.7 The second primary constraint to service provision is capacity. Currently the graffiti service operates one operative over a 37 hour a week. In this, the direct time available for active graffiti removal, or the 'actual capacity', of the service is less than 29 hours. Table 3, shows the breakdown of the recordable capacity reductions.

Table 3. Service Capacity Restraints

Daily Activities	Capacity Reduction Daily (minutes)	Capacity Reduction Weekly (minutes)	Hours Lost conversion
Vehicle Safety Inspection	15	75	1.25
Water Tank refills	40	200	3.33
EMP Welfare/ break	30	150	2.50
Vehicle off load	10	50	0.83
TOTALS * 95		475	7.92
* These figures do not account for the additional time losses of: refuelling, travel between sites, stock replenishment, toilet welfare stops. These are additional, reducing the 'Actual capacity' of the service below 29 hours.			

The resource and financial implications related to this can be seen in section 4 of the report.

- 5.8 To date the service has taken a number of steps to ensure effective service provision in spite of the limited available capacity. By redirecting non- ECC enquiries as previously discussed, there has been up to 200 less sites, between April and August, for the service to carry out site visitations on. This has enabled that time to be redirected to ECC and residential removal work. ECC's Growth and Commercialisation team were successful in securing external funding in April, this has enabled the extension of the graffiti service to a 7 day working service. This extension is also mirrored in the partnership removal works paid for by the relevant authorities, where graffiti is removed outside of the core working week, directly extending service capacity.
- 5.9 Most recently ECC's graffiti service has collaborated with residents to reduce the resource requirements in an extensively and repetitively attacked lane. Hoopern Lane residents were successful in securing £4000 grant funding to help them address the ongoing anti-social behaviour in the lane. After seeking advice from the ECC graffiti team, it was agreed that the funding would be used to apply anti-graffiti paint to the surfaces throughout the lane, in an effort to enable residents to undertake small works themselves. In addition it was considered that it would reduce resource requirements for the ECC Graffiti team through a reduction in time spent on site.
- 5.10 In removing the graffiti recently after the paint application, officers found that it significantly reduced labour requirement. Pictures 1, and 2 show the most recent pre and post removal efforts for the site. Officers estimate it reduce labour by as much as 70%, taking only 40 minutes rather than an anticipate 3.5 hours to remove. However, the upfront resource requirement, and the materials costs, are prohibitive and not achievable within existing revenue budgets making external funding necessary. The process for just the Hoopern Lane site cost £3500 with 80 hours of labour required, this cost can be evaluated against the financial and resource implications in section 4 of this report. The service continues to look for external funding, and where funding is made available the application of anti- graffiti paint is a viable means to reduce the demand that individual sites generate.

Picture 1. Before Removal

Picture 2. After Removal



Enforcement/ Prevention:

Enforcement and Prevention are key considerations in any behaviour based ASB.

- 5.11 The use of graffiti walls, and graffiti murals, as preventative methodologies have been applied in both the ECC asset and POS context, and by external agencies to their own frequently graffitied structures. As a result there is collective anecdotal evidence to indicate how successful they are as preventative strategies in their own right.
- 5.12 Currently ECC have Graffiti walls in Exwick Station Road play area, and Belmont Park. In addition, the Phoenix Arts Centre utilises all of it walls for graffiti art expression, providing individuals request to use them. The walls are frequently used for large murals, which is testament to the popularity of the provision, however tags and additional graffiti continues to appear on the peripheries of each site despite the use of those walls. Picture 3. Is the current graffiti wall at Belmont, and Picture 4 is the surrounding graffiti on the site. These indicate that individuals utilise surrounding structures as an extension to the mural wall where ever they are in place. The continued targeting of the City wall in Northernhay and Rougement, next to the Phoenix mirrors this as well. This is a base indication that whilst popular, the walls are unlikely to be a cost effective prevention strategy unless surrounding areas are free of built infrastructure, as there will always be the need to extend beyond the boundaries of the existing provision.

Picture 3. Belmont Kick/ Graffiti Wall

Picture 4. Belmont Surrounding Structure



- 5.13 Murals as a means to reduce tagging and graffiti attacks have been utilised by DCC as part of the subway improvement process in the last 10 years. Starting initially in Coombe street subway, DCC have extended their murals though all of the Exbridge subways. DCC have worked with partners including Exeter Graffiti Academy to apply

the murals at a cost to DCC. Subsequent to the murals being painted, officer's report there was a decline in the level of reports within the subways, and that level has continued to remain low where the graffiti is bold and encompasses the full wall around Exbridge. Coombe Street however has continued to be targeted post installation indicating that design and location are possible factor impacting the success of murals as a deterrent against tagging.

- 5.14 In May 2021, Exeter City Council in partnership with Devon and Cornwall Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) where successful in securing Home Office grant funding for the Safer Street Project. The project includes funding for Graffiti prevention measures and clear up, [£8,000] and for Parks Improvements [£10,000] to help sever the link between the ASB and crime. The Community element of the project will look at prevention measures such as murals engaging with both external organisations, specifically utility companies, as well as the community to best identify where preventions will be most effective. Community project lead officer and Community supporting team will continue to meet in September with a view to utilising grant funding to maximum effect.
- 5.15 In addition, to the Exeter City Council in partnership with Devon and Cornwall OPCC as part of the Safer Street Project, ECC continues to support police enforcement processes. The data that is captured via the online reporting portal can be produced on the request of Police to assist with an investigation / prosecution. This has happened on a number of occasions, and we will continue to work with the police on these matters. We have to acknowledge in this report however, that other agencies, including the Police are under similar pressures to the Council, and this results in the necessary prioritising of services.

Continuous development and community working:

- 5.16 The continuous improvement of the service remains vital to ensure cost effective provision. This report has shown that there are effective short term measures that can improve areas, through either the use of harmonising or agreeable mural art work or the application of costly anti-graffiti paint. The financial constraints identified in section 4 of the report evidence that this cannot be achieved within existing revenue budgets, and that to continue to improve ECC's response to graffiti, we will require ongoing engagement with the community and external agencies. This will include continuing to foster collaborative relationships with existing partners, DCC, EA, In Exeter, and OPCC as well as building new relationships with utility companies and with the community via the Community Builders, and with individuals themselves.
- 5.17 The chemicals the Council uses to remove graffiti are strong and powerful and as such we only permit trained personnel to use them. However with appropriate budget availability we could look at sourcing other materials that community groups could use to remove graffiti from shiny surfaces like street signs / posts, lamp columns etc. However, this good intention may well result in lost information / reporting if communities carry on removing graffiti without reporting it, unless the community group reports the graffiti and then removes it. This change would need to be integrated into our online reporting page.

5.18 We will continue to encourage people to report graffiti where its seen and this is born out in the Graffiti BI Report whereby 2240 self-service (online) reporting versus 10 people calling the office to report the graffiti during the period 01/04/20-05/08/21. This shows a willingness by the public to report graffiti via the web site at a time to suit them. In addition we will continue to refine ownership information on the BI report system to enable better identification of where the highest prevalence of issues lie enabling a more targeted approach to collaborative working.

6. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

6.1 Graffiti continues to have a significant impact on Exeter's neighbourhoods, reducing 'liveability' through the blight of tagging and the oppressive atmosphere that visual ASB brings to an area. The graffiti service tackles this head on, helping to build better neighbourhoods and redress that decline. It has continued to provide the best service possible within the context of the financial restraints handed down through central governments grants loss. The service not only continues to supply residents for no charge, but has improved efficiencies to date through digitisation, on line reporting refinement, and continued partnership working. Improving service provision wherever possible and providing a value for money service.

7. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

7.1 The risks associated with the suspension or failure of the graffiti service were evidenced between the 23/07/20 and 01/04/21, and the loss of the service for COVID emergency budget savings. During this period the levels of graffiti throughout the city increased, with large scale tagging in not only residential areas but along arterial routes such as Heavitree road and the Waitrose wall attack. As a result, resident satisfaction declined. Officers received higher levels of emailed communication, and complaints, direct from residents pressuring for the reinstatement of the service.

7.2 Additionally, suspending the service resulted in a significant backlog in graffiti and increased resource pressures to bring levels back to a sustainable level. This risk is reduced where the service continues to operate consistently.

8. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

8.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

8.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

8.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

8.4 In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because: this report is for information only.

9. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

9.1 No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations as the report is for information only.

10. Are there any other options?

10.1 The available alternative options are:

- To cease graffiti removal. This will result in an increase in complaints and a decline in neighbourhood standards. In ceasing the graffiti removal service, the service would save the revenue budget cost associated with graffiti Operations.
- Graffiti operations could be extended to a 7 day a week service, providing a more extensive service for residents. This would require the employment of one full time operative and a see a significant increase in chemical use annually requiring a correlating increase in revenue budget.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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