

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 November 2021

Present:

Councillor Barbara Denning (Chair)

Councillors Newby, Allcock, Atkinson, Hannaford, Jobson, Moore, J, Pearce, Sheldon and Vizard

Apologies:

Councillors Branston, Buswell, Mitchell, K and Sills

Also present:

Director Finance, Commercial Manager, Net Zero & Business and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk	- Leader
Councillor Bob Foale	- Portfolio Holder for Transformation & Environment
Councillor Rachel Sutton	- Portfolio Holder for Net Zero Exeter 2030
Councillor Duncan Wood	- Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Physical Activity

26 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2021 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

27 **Declaration of Interest**

No declarations of pecuniary interest were made by Members.

28 **Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order 20**

In accordance with Standing Order 20, the following questions were submitted by Councillor Sparling:-

Councillor Foale, the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Environment responded to the following questions as set out below:-

1. According to Public Health England in the latest Air Quality Annual Status Report, almost 1 in 20 deaths in Exeter in 2017 were attributable to particulate air pollution. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that the Air Quality Action Plan is sufficient to safeguard the health of Exeter's residents? Additionally, what plans are there to set new air quality targets following the release of the updated World Health Organisation guidelines, which strongly suggest the target for Nitrogen Dioxide should be 75% lower than the current legal limit?

The statistics quoted in the question would benefit from some context. Public Health England's Public Health Outcomes Framework tool shows that in Exeter in 2017, the fraction of mortality attributable to particulate air pollution was 4.4%. This is equal to the regional figure for the whole of the South West (4.4%) and below the national level of 5.1%. Exeter therefore has levels of particulate matter

which are causing harm, but this problem is less severe than in nearly 75% of the country.

With regard to the second point, the Council has a legal duty to monitor air quality and work to achieve the current national standards for air quality. It would be for Central Government to alter these standards in light of the recent World Health Organisation (WHO) report. The Council is working with Devon County Council to reduce air pollution and recognises that even where compliance with the current standards is reached, there may still be harm caused. However, it will continue to prioritise those areas with the highest concentrations (i.e. above the current standards). It was also worth noting that the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Appraisal of our last Annual Status Report was extremely complimentary, commenting on both the structure, the detailed and accurate work and robust quality assurance procedures. Defra finished off by saying that 'the Council should continue their good and thorough work'.

Councillor Sparling asked the following supplementary question as to whether the Transport Working Group could be convened to look into this issue further, especially as the Working Group had been discussed, but had not yet met.

Councillor Foale said he would raise that matter with colleagues.

2. Can the Portfolio Holder describe the transformation and impact on services that One Exeter will have and how it will create savings?

A report outlining the detail of the work streams of the One Exeter Transformation Programme and its implications for Council services and identified savings requirements from the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan is being prepared for Council in February, to run parallel with the budget-setting process for 2022/23.

Councillor Sparling asked the following supplementary question of the impact the One Exeter Programme was expected to have on improving services?

Councillor Foale responded and stated that this work had to be looked at in context of this Council, which had lost a significant sum year on year and there was now over £7.5 million savings to be made over the next three years. There was a duty of care to look at all areas of expenditure that could be considered and make the Council as efficient as we can after these savings are made. A recommendation will be made to the Executive in February in line with our normal budget setting procedure.

29 **Commercialisation Work Stream**

Following a reference to the University of Exeter, Councillor Allcock declared an interest that a family member worked for the University.

At the meeting of the recent Combined Strategic and Customer Focus Scrutiny Committees, a number of work streams were discussed as part of identifying any savings in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Councillors were asked to consider how they could be involved in developing and identifying the Council's commercial prospects. David Greensmith, the Commercial Manager was invited to attend the meeting and he provided an overview of the Council's commercial projects, including the particular project focus of the Waste Management and Public and Green Spaces services, and outlined the team's future plans as part

of the commercialisation work stream within the One Exeter Programme. (A copy of the presentation was attached to the minutes).

The Commercial Manager referred to the importance of working collaboratively to deliver an improved Waste Management service, to reduce costs as well as working towards a reduction in carbon. The City Council had the advantage of being able to dispose of commercial waste at the Waste to Energy plant on Marsh Barton, which made an important contribution to the Council's Net Zero ambitions. Other project areas included a waste contract working with the University of Exeter, exploring ways to reduce the transport movements associated with the collection and disposal of residential and commercial clinical waste. Work had taken place around cemeteries and a further pilot involved the Parks and Green Spaces service and roll out of a gardening service for residents and commercial partners in the city. They were particularly proud of the waste management compliance project, which offered education and advice for hirers using any of the Council's land or services. A number of options to improve the Home Call Service had also been considered with the Council's Legal Services which could offer benefits to other Local Authorities and Housing Associations.

The Commercial team were currently working on 33 projects across all service areas, working towards the One Exeter Programme to support the Council's MTFP. The Commercial Manager calculated that from changes identified to the services provided, there was a projected minimum income of £1.3million until 2026. Further details would be presented to Members on individual projects as they progressed.

The Commercial Manager responded to Members' suggestions and comments -

- the team's work and any expansion of existing services in the city was driven by the Commercial Strategy, and the incrementalism approach of keeping as local as possible. A project scoring matrix and SWOT analysis were used to ensure that any opportunity explored would offer a viable return, was a good fit for the city and met the Strategy's criteria. A copy of the Commercial Strategy was available on the Council's web site.
- a greater awareness of the environment and events such as COP26, the United Nations Climate Change Conference which took place in Glasgow last month was starting to change the emphasis of national contracts impeding local decisions. There was local negotiation which was enabling national companies to help them with their Net Zero journey. The Portfolio Holder Net Zero Exeter 2030 had also been working with the Commercial team and this discussion was taking place with local businesses.
- he welcomed the Member's question about the areas that might be pursued to reduce the Council's deficit. There were three contracts that involved detailed discussions that would make a significant impact to the MTFP. A number of Service Leads and their teams were working on this and he was confident that they will meet the target savings over the three years.

A Member made the following suggestions for further consideration -

- to identify any opportunity for renting out river or canal moorings for leisure use and holiday makers.
- hire out the Council's electric or commercial vehicles when the vehicles were not in use.
- use some of our parks and open spaces for adventure activities.

The Commercial Manager thanked the Member for these suggestions and referred to his brief to look at areas where he could deliver the best return on investment, which would be subject to Council approval. He made the following brief responses, and referred to a detailed analysis of the River and Canal use which had shown that the viability of such opportunities was low, against a significant investment. There were similar viability issues with adventure activities in our parks, but there may be other space that could be used, and whilst using the Council's electric vehicles (EV) was a valid suggestion, when they are not being used, they were being charged.

He also responded to the Member's comment on EV charging points in the city's car parks and of the many challenges from the lack of electrical infrastructure to support high demand from charging. There is an ongoing review of all EV charging across the city, including work with Devon County Council to maximise the opportunity in our car park spaces. A significant investment would be required.

Members noted the presentation and the Commercial Manager to explore the suggestions made and report back to Members.

30 **Forward Plan of Business**

Members noted the Forward Plan.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.05 pm

Chair