

# REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 29th September 2022

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Councillor Duncan Wood – Lead Councillor for Climate Change

### 1. Issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities

**Net Zero 2030 Road Map** – Exeter City Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 committing to a target of net zero carbon by 2030. It is clearly one of the Council's key priorities. Working through Exeter City Futures (ECF) a Carbon the Net Zero 2030 Road Map was produced and ECC and ECF with the support of partners is working to deliver the plan.

**Net Zero 2030 Exeter City** – Carbon the Net Zero 2030 plan has been adopted and in June the Strategic Scrutiny Committee considered the City of Exeter Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory (territorial emissions). The observations and challenges in the report have been given much debate at Scrutiny and Executive. The scale of the challenge facing the city of Exeter to achieve a net zero 2030 target date is clear for everyone to see. Clearly the City Council cannot achieve Net Zero across the city on its own. It is a collective, collaborative challenge for all sectors and residents of Exeter to rise to.

**Net Zero 2030 Exeter City Council** - An integral part of achieving net zero is the carbon reduction of organisations within the city. ECC must lead the way by achieving net zero carbon for its own organisational activities. As with many other councils committed to reaching carbon neutrality this is a significant challenge across such a complex organisation and a significant employer within the city. However, unlike the city wide net zero challenge, the council is clearly more able to directly control the carbon emissions from its own activities. We began this journey many years ago and have achieved so much. We have an organisational greenhouse gas inventory for Exeter City Council and we are pushing ahead.

**Transport** – is clearly a component part of delivering Net Zero 2030 (22% of territorial emissions for the city of Exeter) and the challenges created by our transport systems can impact significantly on residents. We are not the transport authority (which is Devon County Council) but Exeter City Council plays a supportive and critical friend role on transport matters. From supporting active travel measures to lending support for transport improvements, such as with GWR in support of community infrastructure for the new Marsh Barton railway station and improvements to St Thomas Station. However our ability to directly respond to transport and travel challenges is obviously limited.

**Exeter City Futures** – was tasked to produce the Carbon the Net Zero 2030 plan and to engage and explore collaborative working, concepts and projects to help deliver it. A progress report on Exeter City Futures was reported to Strategic Scrutiny Committee on 16th June. Given the size of the challenge here, there are limited resources to explore opportunities and drive the collaboration between stakeholders and residents to make the range of significant changes needed.

**Strategic Communications** - The council has a responsibility to communicate well with residents. Sharing public interest information, updates, council decisions and initiatives. This information is done through its recognised news site, mainstream social media, and a paper magazine, the Citizen, delivered widely across the city. It is important that accurate balanced messaging reaches as many residents as possible and in this ECC it

is supported by public service broadcasting, Local Democracy Reporting Service and the strong media outlets not driven by circulation targets or other agendas.

The Council has a number of social media channels some are based within specific functions of the Council for example the Dennis the Dustcart accounts on waste and recycling as well as Exeter Housing Services amongst others.

The Strategic Comms Team itself manages the core Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram as well as the news site and the design and distribute the Citizen magazine. So far this calendar year the council has had a reach of 3.404,500 interactions across all its main social media channels. With the news channel also having 193,000 visitors. Main stream media often picks stories up directly, further extending the reach of accurate, balanced information and updates.

## **2. Update or commentary on any major ongoing programmes of work**

### **Net Zero 2030 - Exeter City (ECF)**

Alongside the strategic influencing work of the ECF Board a series of projects are being delivered this year and these include:

**A series of workshops** to engage partner policy makers and system leaders in a discussion on key topics to assess to what extent there are shared strategies towards Net Zero and to identify priorities for shared action to create the right conditions for systemic change. ECC councillors will be invited to each of these workshops:

- **Commercial District Heating Network:** A proposal for Exeter City Futures partners and discussion on appetite and viability
- **Exeter Transport Strategy: Review of current strategy:** to what extent will this get us to net zero: what else might we need to consider?
- **Exeter Electric Vehicle Charging:** Developing a clear strategy for the city: facilitator Exeter City Futures
- **The role Hydrogen could play in decarbonising Exeter:** An opportunity to understand the potential that taking a strategic approach to hydrogen production and distribution could offer the city
- **Engaging communities in Net Zero:** the role of community energy projects

**Exeter Development Fund** Progress on the DLUHC funded project linked to Liveable Exeter continues with an ECC scrutiny task and finish being established to enable members to fully understand the model and concept as it emerges.

**National Lottery Change Makers Programme** - The funded project is under review with discussions planned with the funder to review performance and outcomes planned for the end of the project in March 2023. These include the publication of a free to access toolkit for communities and small businesses to help them address climate change and achieve NetZero.

**Community Energy Project Pilot** - This project is aiming to design and test out the concept of a street by street retrofit and renewable energy provision with neighbours working together to share assets and resources. It is anticipated that the pilot will commence early in 2023 and the evaluation will help shape a proposal for a systemic roll out across each ward to work towards the city's 2030 target.

### **Net Zero 2030 - Exeter City Council**

**Water Lane Smart Grid and Storage** project near completion. Includes, a ground mounted 1.2 MW array at Water Lane co-located with energy storage technology and a connection providing a renewable energy supply to the Council's Operations Depot at

Exton Road to support the electrification of the Council's fleet. Including testing of battery storage at three further sites where solar energy is generated and a 140kw solar installation at the Riverside Leisure Centre

**Decarbonisation survey** undertaken to establish a bid for the next round of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, to decarbonise heat and reduce energy consumption in high use buildings that meet the funding criteria

**Review of Solar opportunities and new Invest to Save proposal** for generation to reduce rising energy costs and PPA potential to reduce carbon emissions through self-supply to be completed

**Net Zero Ambassadors** recruited and will act as a champion for services to ensure new and existing projects make a positive contribution, reducing carbon emissions and working towards net zero for the City Council.

**Carbon Literacy training programme** is in place to deliver carbon literacy training by newly qualified Net Zero team members. To be provided to Councillors, Net Zero Ambassadors, SMB, OMB, and other relevant officers and teams.

**Developing a structured reporting format** to carbon impact information to support committee papers informed by the above Carbon Literacy training.

## Skills Agenda

**The Skills Strategy** was approved by council, training session held for members on 07/09/22 with a summary version circulated and full version and action plan available. There is ongoing activity to deliver against the priorities and work with partners.

**Exeter Works** – a review of the service and offer is required to ensure that value for money is being achieved and that demand is being met in the customer groups that are not supported by other organisations.

**Shared Prosperity Fund** – 'People' funding available for 2024-25 financial year. Scoping of requirements in 12 months' time to define the needs of our residents and procure activity. There is also a funding allocation for a Retrofit Skills project as part of this fund.

**Construction Skills** – Building Greater Exeter entering its 5<sup>th</sup> year of operation, strong partnership delivering a variety of services to promote the sector and support people in to employment, including the use of planning and procurement.

**Retrofit Skills** – major project underway with Exeter College to establish a dedicated Retrofit Skills Centre in Exeter as part of their construction offer. Also Green Construction Skills Advisory Panel established by College, with ECC and Building Greater Exeter engaged. Identifying gaps in the curriculum, developing content and responding to industry need. Working with partners across the South West.

## Strategic Communications

- **Exeter Plan** – launch of eight week public consultation, on the draft Exeter Plan is due to commence on September 26th.
- **Formal opening of Edwards Court Extra Care Facility**, first Passivhaus care facility in the UK. Delayed from September 9 now likely end of September.
- **October Executive** will highlight the city's response to the Cost of Living Crisis.
- **National Passivhaus Trust conference** comes to Exeter on October 26.

- **Newtown city access** – the consultation on better public access to the city centre through Newtown expected later this year in partnership with Devon.
- **Devon District Councils Forum** - Exeter takes over chairmanship of the Devon District Councils Forum at the end of the year.

### 3. Issues that may impact : services delivery/financial performance/future budget requirements

Given the scale of the strategic ambitions for a Net Zero 2030 City of Exeter it has not been built on a credible budget and delivery plan. The Net Zero road map identified the scale of investment required to support the goal and the greenhouse gas emissions inventory coloured the practical implications and the scale of measures required to achieve the goal. It is not credible to expect the city council to solve the problem on its own.

The work that is being done in support of the ambition of a 2030 goal is being pursued in good faith but this has not been formally acknowledged by Scrutiny members. KPI and targets cannot be realistically assigned in the absence of a resource plan. In the absence of defined powers/levers over the key areas and an adequate resource plan, KPIs and targets can only be, at best, stretch targets.

**Building Greater Exeter** will be required to contribute financially to corporate services (e.g. Strata, finance) from April 2023. This will reduce the amount of funding available for direct activity, and will require the project manager to spend some time focussed on generating additional income.

There will also be a change to Project Manager and chair at the end of September. A chair designate has been identified and the Skills and City Inclusivity Manager will provide continuity to the project whilst a new PM is appointed.

**Exeter Works** – limited budget and staff capacity to deliver, there is a need to manage expectations and to provide a service in line with this.

**Skills Strategy** – some of the work identified within the strategy is currently being scoped. It is likely that not everything will be able to be delivered, so prioritisation and collaborative working will be required.

### 4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered

Matters that need to be addressed in the Net Zero Plan were identified by the progress report on 16<sup>th</sup> June to Strategic Scrutiny Committee. Recognition of the collective responsibility and the size of the challenge is important in securing the wider stakeholder commitment required to achieve a net zero city by 2030. Exeter City Council cannot do this alone it is a city wide challenge.

Review of **Exeter Works service** – both physical hub and online offer in line with need and demand within the city.

### 5. Other matters the Portfolio Holder wishes to raise with the Scrutiny Committee

**Problems with buses in Devon and Exeter** are well publicised, of course we acknowledging that driver shortage and fuel costs are a national problem impacting on bus and other services. We know how challenging it is to get drivers and to continue to provide services.

However, I have no desire to provide excuses for Stagecoach regarding the shape or reliability of their services. In my view how shortages has been managed is very poor in

comparison to other bus services facing the same challenges. In fact the service within the city was shrinking, both in terms of routes run and the frequency of buses, well before the impacts of Brexit, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine were felt.

The services failings are manifest and it may be an area Scrutiny members may want to explore directly with the transport authority (DCC) and Stagecoach. We await the findings of the Traffic Commissioner's Public Inquiry on the 27th October with interest.

**Environmental Intelligence Institute** - It has been a long term ambition to achieve for Exeter an Environmental Intelligence Institute building on the world class climate change sciences and research being undertaken in the city.

It is a project that is the product of partnership work between the University of Exeter and the Met Office and was advanced in the work done by the city on the local industrial strategy and it has been a consistent theme of the work of the local enterprise partnership and is part of the ask of the county deal. The project is identified in the University of Exeter's ten year strategy.

As is the concept of an innovation hub in the city centre. In the context of both projects the work of Exeter City Futures in building an enabling culture between key stakeholders with a focus on innovation and net zero is central to the strategic ambitions of innovation and creating a living lab demonstrating practical solutions to addressing climate challenges. This is an area that members may want to consider as a subject for a future briefing.