

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 February 2023

Present:

Councillor Matthew Vizard (Chair)
Councillors Mitchell, M, Bennett, Ellis-Jones, Harvey, Holland, Newby, Oliver, Snow, Sparling, Sutton, Wardle and Warwick

Apologies:

Councillor Foale

Also present:

Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management, Service Lead - Environmental Health & Community Safety, Service Lead Housing Needs & Homelessness and Democratic Services Officer (HB)

In attendance:

Councillor Bialyk	Leader
Councillor Denning	Portfolio Holder Customer Services and Housing
Councillor Ghusain	Portfolio Holder City Management and Environmental Services
Councillor Pearce	Portfolio Holder Communities and Homelessness Prevention
Councillor Williams	Portfolio Holder Recycling, Waste Management and Waterways

1 **Minutes**

Subject to the amendment of recommendation (2) in Min. No. 34 to read:-

- (2) the Local Plan team consider the production of a Biodiversity Status Report, a Nature Recovery Plan and a Tree Canopy Cover Action Plan for inclusion within the Local Plan, with specific and measurable targets for Exeter.

the minutes of the meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 1 December 2022 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 the Public under Standing Order No 19**

No questions had been received from members of the public.

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

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions had been submitted by Councillors Rees and D. Moore and had been circulated in advance to Members of the Committee. The responses of the Portfolio Holders are set out in italics.

Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Recycling, Waste Management and Waterways - Councillor Williams

Councillor Rees

What is the basis for the calculation of the 'household waste collection'? (Table 6 BVP184a kg per head Devon Authorities Strategic Waste Committee (DASWC), Waste Performance Statistics 2021/22)?

Response

BVPI 84a: Total Household waste arisings (HWA) per year in kg, divided by the population. Put simply, total HWA includes green, grey, brown bins, food waste, street cleansing, Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) reject, Bring banks, and Reuse.

The low figure for Exeter is often held up as an achievement, that is, that Exeter residents produce less waste. Can the Council confirm that the low figure for Exeter is primarily as a result of the low levels of garden waste (as highlighted in the waste statistics report)?

Response

Exeter is in the top 10 Waste Collection Authority (WCA) nationally for BVPI 84a with 292.8 kg per person per year, and the best of the eight Devon Districts which exceed Exeter's value by between 11% and 35%. Whilst Exeter does indeed produce less garden waste compared with the other districts, even excluding garden waste from the arisings total, Exeter residents still produce the less waste per head by comparison with the other seven Devon Districts. It is worth noting that high levels of garden waste contribute to higher recycling rates.

Please can Councillors be provided with Household Grey Waste data (not recyclables or garden waste) for the different districts, so that a meaningful comparison can be made?

Response

The data requested for the Devon Districts is listed as NI 191 in the Devon County Council Kerbside Residual Waste Composition Analysis Report, October 2022 which Councillor Rees referred to in her previous questions. There is a detailed Waste analysis breakdown for each District, produced in October 2019, available in the Appendix to the report, which is available online from Devon County Council.

Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Recycling, Waste Management and Waterways – Councillor Williams

Councillor D. Moore

Regarding cardboard recycling:

A. How much cardboard is recycled, for the current year and each of the previous three years?

Response

2019-2020: 448 tonnes

2020-2021: 1,138 tonnes

2021-2022: 1,174 tonnes

2022-2023: 574 tonnes Q1 & Q2 only (Q3 figures due shortly)

B. Where does the City Council send cardboard to for the next stage of recycling processing?

Response

Both the UK and abroad depending on market conditions

C. Are all the processing plants for cardboard used by the City Council in the UK, if not why not?

Response

Mainly abroad at present as the UK market is flat in regards to acceptance and price and we always try and get the best price in the marketplace to help support our frontline services. The UK does not have the infrastructure to recycle all the waste cardboard produced and overseas markets must be used. We do not use spot market for overseas sales and because we produce such a high quality product, we are able to use Lee and Mann Paper which is one of the top four mills in the world for continuity and reliability. We always achieve around £20-£30 per tonne more using this method rather than the UK route.

D. Are the scope three emissions for cardboard processing collected and considered as part of City Council carbon emissions?

Response

All scope three emissions are currently estimated using best practice information until a full service review can drill into the detail. The Net Zero Team have completed the carbon baseline assessment and the carbon action plan. The carbon action plan focusses on areas for further detailed study, including practical ways to reduce carbon emissions. Housing is the first service to undertake that detailed review and waste management will follow later. Scope three emissions will be accounted for in more detail as part of that process.

Supplementary question and answer.

Where abroad are the processing plants?

Answer

The Lee and Mann Mill is in Malaysia. We send our card board from Exeter to the Malaysian Mill to be turned into new cardboard packaging. There is a full chain of custody and we know exactly how it is being used. We can access this specialist mill as we produce a far superior grade of product than other districts. We have used Lee and Mann for many years where possible.

Containers are coming to the UK all the time, full of goods. 70% of containers on a vessel are returning empty, we fill one with our cardboard and make use of the return journey.

5 **Update from the Portfolio Holder for City Management and Environmental Services - Councillor Ghusain**

Councillor Ghusain reported on the City Management and Environmental Services areas of her Portfolio, detailing the issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities, major ongoing programmes of work, issues impacting delivery, financial performance and budget requirements and potential changes being considered.

The following responses were given to Members' queries:-

- using investment from the Police and Crime Commissioner, Safer Streets and Shared Prosperity Funds, it was hoped that the £1million CCTV upgrade project would be completed by July. This included the upgrade of the CCTV Control Room and changing the cameras from analogue to digital. There would be capacity to link up with other systems and offering a monitoring service to neighbouring authorities. We are hoping to work with Devon County Council to share camera access on the highways network, the latter being a reciprocal arrangement, with the County to be able to view the City Council system;
- a number of the new cameras would be in place by the end of March with others scheduled to be installed before the end of July because of technical considerations. Many of these would be located on the new lamp columns to be installed by the County Council. When complete, a plan of the camera locations would be available to be shared as appropriate but not for widespread dissemination;
- the upgrade includes completing the provision of signage to include phone numbers for the public to use if feeling vulnerable;
- staff recruitment, particularly in Public Realm, remained an issue caused by a number of factors including Covid and Brexit and was not unique to Exeter. There were also some 500,000 immune comprised people who were unable to join the labour market because of issues relating to vaccine availability. To combat this, advertised jobs emphasised the pathway to additional training and career advancement and there was close links with Exeter College to offer skilled job opportunities;
- whilst there had been some High Street businesses closing, resulting from issues such as energy increases, Exeter City Centre was performing well compared with other towns and cities and the Exeter BID played an important role in supporting businesses and encouraging new investments;
- the river bed below Trews Weir had been visible as a result of the low water level but the Weir itself had not been undermined. As part of a funding bid to the Environment Agency to upgrade the Weir, a fully complaint fish pass would be provided. Care would be taken when moving sections of the medieval wood as part of the work;
- the play re-furbishment programme included equipment specifically for disabled children;
- the improved railway station patronage was to be welcomed, due in part to the re-opening of the Okehampton line and the importance of using Plain English was noted; and
- concerns regarding pedestrian safety at uncontrolled crossings in Paris and Cheeke Streets should be raised with the County Council Road Safety Unit. City Councillors on Exeter HATOC would also be advised of these concerns.

6 Re-cycling and Food Waste Collection

The Service Lead Environmental Health and Community Safety spoke to the attached presentation on the Waste, Recycling and Fleet Service including Food Waste Collection covering key statistics, recruitment, operational setup, current and future food waste collection phases, the Materials Recycling Facilities upgrade and Glass Bank replacements.

Members commended the Service Lead on an excellent presentation.

The following responses were given to Members' queries:-

- as comparisons of recycling rates with neighbouring rural authorities did not provide a true picture because of the urban/rural mix of the other Devon Districts, recycling figures would be obtained from comparator authorities through the APSE network as part of benchmarking;
- whilst the City Council was the waste collection authority, the County Council was the disposal authority and were responsible for costs associated with disposal at the Energy From Waste Plant and, ultimately, it was hoped that the cost involved would be reduced. Food waste is taken to an anaerobic digestion facility;
- it was anticipated that the full rollout to food waste collection would provide a significant increase in recycling rates from the current levels to nearly 50%.
- the Government had finally released draft legislation for consultation on recycling with view to achieving some consistency in its delivery and, whilst it unfortunately did not include a requirement to promote the Deposit Return Scheme for glass, additional funding might be available;
- the current level of reject material at the MRF would improve further upgrade and, whilst contaminables resulted in rejected materials being deposited at the Energy From Waste Plant, the on-line A to Z advice on recycling has been updated and Councillors were encouraged to promote this with the public.
- the original depot amalgamation programme incorporating Belle Isle Nursery, had been revised because of additional costs associated with the site configuration, underground services and MRF expansion. At present, only small food waste skips were being used at the depot in compliance with the Council's environmental operating permit with a purpose built food bay to be built and Environment Agency and South West Water consent were also factored into the time line; and
- the ability of the Waste, Recycling and Fleet Service to adapt and absorb the ever increasing workload resulting from new development across the city was praised.

Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee noted the report and thanked the Service Lead and the Waste, Recycling and Fleet Service for their excellent work.

The meeting adjourned at 7.00pm and re-convened at 7:07pm

Review of Exeter City Council's Homelessness Service - Report of the Homelessness Task and Finish Working Group

Councillor M. Mitchell, as Chair of the Group, presented the report of the Homelessness Task and Finish Working Group, the Group having been established following a request to the Scrutiny Programme Board by Councillor Barbara Denning regarding the impact of any increase in homelessness in Exeter as a result of benefit cuts and increases in the cost of living. At the same time, the City Council was consulting on its Homelessness Strategy. As well as a call via the Council website for the public to submit their views, opinions and experiences of homelessness in Exeter, two sessions had been held with witnesses working in this field.

Seven formal meetings had been held between June and December and Councillors Rees and Sutton had visited and talked to users of the St. Petrock's services. The Chair of the Group recorded the Group's gratitude to those members of the public who had responded and the following organisations who had contributed as witnesses:-

- Shelter;
- CAB;
- Devon County Council;
- Exeter City Council Housing Needs;
- Exeter Wellbeing;
- CoLab;
- Julian House; and
- St. Petrock's.

Responding to a Member, he stated that the sessions had been predicated on each body responding to Members' queries on their previously submitted statements rather than being required to present to the Group. Whilst the bodies had not been asked to comment on the scrutiny process itself, they had been given the opportunity to review the Group's report and their observations had subsequently been taken on board.

The Task and Finish Group Chair advised that the recommendations divided into two categories:-

- Those that relate to other local and national bodies and to Central Government; and
- Those within the control of Exeter City Council.

The Service Lead Housing Needs and Homelessness reported that the consultation exercise had enabled partners to share their views with Members in a structured manner and this had been particularly beneficial with many of them to be included in the more formalised partnership approach being recommended as part of the Homelessness Strategy within the report to Executive on 7 February 2023. Whilst the recommendations presented did not conflict with, and could be accommodated within the Strategy, because of resource constraints the Strategy was unlikely to pick up all individual suggestions. However, it was anticipated that many could be progressed within the Strategy Action Plan. The Committee Chair echoed this caveat and urged Members to follow the debate on the Executive report.

Another Member also commented on the budgetary restraints on the Council and remarked that progress on the first section of recommendations was not within the Council's gift. All wished to see an end to homelessness and the ongoing positive relationship with partners was vital in bringing forward initiatives.

In respect of recommendation 12, a Member referred to forthcoming Devon Partnership Trust cuts in its Mental Health Services, a revised geographical coverage to now include Plymouth, Torbay and Teignbridge. Whilst mental health services were the County Council responsibility, the work of the City Council's Homeless Advisory Team encompassed support for those with complex needs including mental health issues and was aligned with the work of the Mental Health Alliance.

In respect of recommendation 16, a Member referred to the prohibitive cost of bringing forward any proposals that might arise from any review of the 24/7 provision of public toilets. It was noted that the recommendation sought more to consider the around the clock availability of toilets for homeless people and not a wider assessment of public toilets in the city. Members noted that the desire for more comprehensive facilities could be picked up with partners as part of the Strategy Action Plan.

Members noted a rewording of recommendation 13 to read homelessness in the first line in place of homeless.

The following Task and Finish Working Group recommendations were moved and seconded for adoption by Council, voted upon and carried unanimously:-

Government/External Bodies:

- (1) To seek via the City's two MP's and the Local Government Association a fundamental review and overhaul of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Scheme with consideration to be given to the Allowance reflecting Exeter's circumstances as an urban area in its own right and not averaged with neighbouring authorities in the assessment of the allowance (*as evidenced by Shelter and CAB in session 1 and St Petrock's in Session 2*);
- (2) To lobby Central Government to increase the ability for local authorities to build social housing (*as evidenced by Shelter in session 1 and Julian House and St. Petrock's in session 2 and to undertake a review of Right To Buy (RTB)*);
- (3) To lobby Central Government for the funding of local authorities and agencies to be for a minimum of three years for projects relating to housing provision, as opposed to short term support (*as evidenced by Shelter in session 1 and Julian House and St. Petrock's in session 2*);
- (4) To lobby Central Government to support changes to the planning system to control/limit short term lets and holiday homes (*as evidenced by Shelter and CAB in session 1*);
- (5) To lobby Central Government to support the abolition of Section 21 evictions (*as evidenced by Shelter in session 1*);
- (6) To lobby Central Government to support the reform of the Business Tax and Council Tax regimes for an equitable contribution in respect of all properties (*as evidenced by Shelter and CAB in session 1*);

- (7) To seek a Government review of the current operation of the deposit system for private rented properties for mediation to get an agreement to last no longer than 28 days after which the full deposit is returned. This will assist the tenant to obtain a further deposit for an alternative property. *(as evidenced by Shelter and CAB in session 1)*.
- (8) To seek the support of the Crown and Magistrate Courts for the use of Plain English regarding paperwork relating to court proceedings *(as evidenced by CAB in session 1)*
- (9) To align with the County Council webpages to ensure linkage on information and advice that helps people to find early help and prevent people from becoming at risk of homelessness wherever possible *(as evidenced by Devon County Council in session 1)*;
- (10) To work with Devon County Council's Children's Services, to ensure the Homelessness Prevention Worker function is able to help young people earlier and prevent them becoming at risk of homelessness wherever possible including young people leaving care and making better use of existing tools like Positive Pathways to improve supporting young people earlier on *(as evidenced by Devon County Council Session 1)*;
- (11) To seek increased/joint service contributions from Devon County Council in co-production areas of work e.g. substance misuse services, social care, young persons including care-leavers etc.; and
- (12) To seek increased capacity around mental health services including support for the newly formed Mental Health Alliance and building on existing City Council officer support in this area *(as evidenced by Shelter and CAB in session 1)*.

Exeter City Council responsibilities:

- (13) To undertake a city wide response to homelessness, through a more formalised partnership approach building on the city's social capital and developing flourishing communities - this could be via the proposed Homelessness Housing Forum (HHF) comprised of local accommodation and support providers to see the system as a whole and address blocks and barriers. The HHF will build on learning from the Exeter Homelessness Partnership Alliance as well as from national examples of good practice e.g. Homeless Link. This will build on the existing co-production mechanisms and with the ultimate aim of offering accommodation on first presentation. The involvement of the business/private sector will also be sought *(as evidenced by CAB in session 1 and Co-Lab in session 2)*;
- (14) To maximise renewal of the City Council contract(s) with providers with Member involvement to add greater focus on key areas and targets, including analysis of the evidence base *(as evidenced by Shelter in session 1)*;
- (15) To seek the involvement of a third party organisation in statutory homelessness mediation cases *(as evidenced by Shelter in session 1)*;
- (16) To welcome and support the In Exeter commitment to the provision of drinking fountains in the city centre and seek the review of the 24/7 provision of public toilets in the city *(as evidenced by Co-Lab in session 2)*;

- (17) To welcome and support One Exeter's review of the use of Plain English for Council tax and other written communications and support face to face communications rather than by telephone (*as evidenced by CAB in session 1 and St. Petrock's in session 2*);
- (18) To seek City Council commitment to a continuation of funding for the leasing and purchasing options programme for the supported and temporary accommodation programme (*as evidenced by St. Petrock's in session 2*);
- (19) To seek City Council commitment to the expansion of the Housing First model particularly through local registered social landlords; and
- (20) the Chair of the Task and Finish Working Group to liaise with the Executive Portfolio Holder in order to provide feedback to the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee within six months regarding the above proposals.

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

Members noted the Forward Plan and the Scrutiny Work Plan.

It was suggested that the Community Safety Partnership Team be invited to address the next meeting on 30 March 2023.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.45 pm

Chair

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