

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 February 2024

Present:

Councillor Matthew Vizard (Chair)
Councillors Rees, Begley, Fullam, Harvey, Holland, Knott, Miller, Patrick, Sparling and Wardle

Apologies:

Councillors Atkinson and Warwick

Also present:

Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management, Public and Green Spaces Service Manager, Service Lead - Environmental Health & Community Safety, Service Lead Legal Services, MRF Manager, Interim Waste, Recycling & Fleet Manager and Democratic Services Officer (PMD)

In attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk	Leader
Councillor Denning	Portfolio Holder Council Housing Development and Support Services
Councillor Foale	Portfolio Holder for Corporate & Democratic Services and Environmental Health
Councillor Pearce	Portfolio Holder Communities and Homelessness Prevention
Councillor R Williams	Portfolio Holder for Place and City Management

1 **Apologies**

The Chair noted the apologies received and, on behalf of the Committee, expressed condolences to Councillor Atkinson on her recent bereavement.

2 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 30 November 2023 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Harvey declared an interest relating to Minute 9 as a Council allotment tenant. As a result, he would be leaving the meeting for the entirety of the item.

4 **Questions from the Public under Standing Order No. 19**

No questions from members of the public had been received.

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

No questions to Portfolio Holders from Members of the Council were asked.

6 **Portfolio Holder Update - Corporate and Democratic Services & Environmental Health**

Councillor Foale, Portfolio Holder for Corporate & Democratic Services and Environmental Health, introduced the report submitted and made the following further comments:-

- he would be seeking to improve diversity and inclusivity in the Democratic process;

- he viewed Scrutiny as a two-way process;
- he wanted to introduce “City Ambassadors” in the city centre to address anti-social behaviour, and would be liaising with the Deputy Leader about this.

Members expressed support for Councillor Foale’s suggestions. The Portfolio Holder for Corporate & Democratic Services and Environmental Health responded to questions from Committee Members as follows:-

- he expressed concerns regarding Voter ID requirements and the number of people turned away, although it should be noted that two-thirds of those had returned;
- he advised that the Office 365 rollout was not ready yet and that he had put himself forward as a test user;
- he noted Councillor Knott’s offer to raise the issue of the Office 365 rollout at the Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee, which he chaired;
- he recognised that, at one location on Heavitree Road, air quality was in exceedance of the legal objective;
- he felt that members of the public often failed to differentiate between Exeter City Council and Devon County Council; and
- he clarified that there was presently no funding available for his proposed “City Ambassador” posts there was a review taking place to look at how this could be achieved.

Responding to technical queries from Members about air quality monitoring, the Service Lead - Environmental Health & Community Safety explained that:-

- the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Alphington Road were the only two locations which were monitored continuously;
- there was a network of 80 diffusion tubes;
- data was available on the ECC website;
- a bid had been submitted to Defra and awarded for the project looking at Heavitree Road; and
- air quality data results would be published on a month-by-month basis as they have been for many years in the annual status report.

Members praised:-

- the recent successes of the Legal team;
- the introduction of the points-based disciplinary system for licensing; and
- the Street Trading licensing review.

The Service Lead - Legal Services agreed to confirm to a Member who the delegated power sat with in the middle of a Planning appeal.

Members thanked the Portfolio Holder for Corporate & Democratic Services and noted his update report.

7 **Waste Recycling and Fleet**

The Service Lead - Environmental Health & Community Safety, the Waste, Recycling and Fleet Manager and the Resource Recovery Manager talked Members through their presentation, which included:-

- key service statistics;
- operational setup;
- current food waste collections;
- comparison of waste collected;
- recruitment;
- electric refuse vehicles;

- collections;
- MRF statistics for 2023-24 to date;
- current products extracted for sale;
- current issues and costs;
- MRF upgrade;
- future production;
- MRF projects and wider working for 2024; and
- social media and bus stop campaigns.

They further highlighted:-

- the increase in weights for recyclables;
- the current recruitment status of the service;
- the potential impact of the Deposit Return Scheme; and
- how the MRF was 23 years old and required investment.

Members praised the slides and noted the enthusiasm of the presenting party.

Officers responded to Members' questions as follows:-

- £8m worth of investment was required;
- the scheme for separate household glass collection was in the early stages of the government setting out their thoughts and would require careful planning as well as Government money; and
- the infrastructure for sterilising glass bottles wasn't there anymore.

Members made comments about:-

- the consequences of the growth in housing;
- the monitoring of the number of trips that are made to the bottle bank; and
- student properties.

On the last point, the Service Lead - Environmental Health & Community Safety explained the legislation in place and further advised that developers of student properties:-

- used trade waste collection companies and paid more for more frequent collections because of bin storage size issues;
- were sent guidance documents on waste collection; and
- could use Exeter City Council as a commercial trade waste provider.

Members noted the presentation and thanked the officers involved.

8 **Street Cleansing Litter Bin Review**

The Public and Green Spaces Service Manager presented the report, highlighting:-

- the evidenced based approach to rationalising bin stocks;
- how street cleansing teams spent approximately 50% of their time on transport;
- how, after litter bins had been removed, more than 200 visual inspections were carried out, highlighting no visual contamination issues;
- that the last point that the programme had had no significant detrimental impact; however, with the ad-hoc nature of street cleansing, one-off contaminations would continue to occur and be managed as they arose;
- how the second stage of the programme would feature new and revised schedules;
- the necessary bedding-in period; and
- how optimisation was an enabler towards a balanced budget.

Members made the following comments:-

- the process of constant review was a good thing;
- budgetary cuts to street cleansing were contrary to the core functions of a council;
- the deep cleansing system was not frequent enough;
- the optics were essential to any policy implementation and the public perception was that the situation was getting worse;
- it should be noted that conversations were constantly taking place.

The Public and Green Spaces Service Manager clarified what constituted a service request and responded to further questions from Members as follows:-

- the statistics submitted in the report indicated direct service requests;
- an “A” standard of cleanliness across a whole municipal area was hard to achieve and a “B” standard was more realistic;
- visual monitoring was used to measure cleanliness across the city;
- provision for recycling on the go was poor because of contamination;
- mingled bins were used predominantly: however, a dog bin would be installed if residents requested it specifically;
- there was currently no capacity for litter-picking stations;
- it was difficult to put a figure on how much it would cost to improve cleanliness across the entire city;
- changing the culture around litter picking was a national issue. The Government had acknowledged the importance of combining education with enforcement and infrastructure.

She also recognised the negative visual impact caused by the lack of road sweepers, who residents viewed as “bespoke ambassadors”. The Director Net Zero Exeter and City Management confirmed that the optimisation of street cleansing was a continuous process.

Members thanked the Public and Green Spaces Service Manager and noted her report.

9 Allotment Service Review

Cllr Harvey left the meeting, having declared an interest as a Council allotment tenant. The Public and Green Spaces Service Manager presented the report, highlighting:-

- that Exeter City Council’s lease fees were lower than those of its District peers;
- the proposed lease fee increase of £3 per rod;
- indicative expectations;
- the consultation from 26 January to 16 February (not city-wide but targeted at allotment tenants, who had been consulted directly) as well as the recent forum;
- the statutory position;
- the turnover rate; and
- how eviction would always be a last resort.

She replied to Members’ questions as follows:-

- six-monthly payment plans were possible;
- the allotment scheme was cost-neutral;
- while five-rod plots were the standard, ECC offered various sizes and 2.5-rod plots were available;

- other possible options to fund the rise in costs include increasing allotment services, improving turnover and a three-pronged cost review;
- there was no appetite for a voluntary self-management model;
- the current consultation was a genuine consultation, which could generate new methods and ideas;
- the main reason for eviction was mismanagement (after the expiry of the grace period); and
- the role of Exeter City Council was statutory.

The Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management remarked that the annual lease fee increase from £41.75 to £59 (for a five-rod plot) was not significant and felt that increases formulated in percentages could be misleading.

Members thanked the Public and Green Spaces Service Manager and noted her report.

10 **Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan**

The Chair referred to the work plan and sought views and suggestions from Members, reminding them to submit any proposal for consideration using the proforma template.

Members noted the Forward Plan and the Scrutiny Work Plan.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.11 pm

Chair