

Context and Background to Exeter City Council Productivity Plan July 2024

Context

In 2024 Local Authorities are required for the first time, as a condition of the 24/25 finance settlement, to submit a high level “Productivity Plan”. The Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) requires these plans to be formally adopted by each individual Council, submitted to DLUHC by 19th July 2024 and subsequently published on the Council’s website.

DLUHC have stated the purpose of these plans is to enable them to “... **understand what is already working well across the whole country. What common themes are, whether there are any gaps and what more we need to do to unlock future opportunities**”. In his letter to Local Authorities,¹ The Minister states that the lessons learnt will be shared with the sector, but the plans will not be rated, scored or compiled into league tables and, whilst he does provide a list of themes, he expects a local Productivity Plan to include, there is no clear definition of productivity.

The Minister states that: “**Productivity is not one-dimensional, and I would encourage you to consider the various facets that encompass the drive for greater productivity. When developing your plans, please think broadly and include reference not only to how you run your organisation, but also how you run the public services you provide and how you provide place leadership. It is with this wide view that we can ensure we are providing value for money for residents**”.

The Minister’s letter goes onto say Productivity Plans should be 3 or 4 pages long and set out what Local Authorities have done in recent years, alongside current plans to transform our organisation and services in future and an overview of our local governance arrangements for monitoring our plans and providing assurance to ourselves and residents that we are providing value for money. The Minister sets out a number of themes to consider including such as:

- How we have transformed the way we design and deliver services and what more we intend to do to make better use of resources.
- How we plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.
- Our plans to reduce wasteful spend within our organisation and systems (use of agency, consultants, EDI roles, shared services).
- Barriers to productivity and what government, or the market, could do to help.

Background

As one of the fastest growing cities in the UK, we have seen an 8% growth in new businesses with 5,147 registered for business rates; a 3% growth in jobs: 10% growth in population. In terms of economic productivity, despite its challenges, the Exeter Gross Value Add (GVA) is £5.2bn².

Exeter has an estimated population of 130,800 and is at the heart of a travel to work area of over 499,800 residents with around 35,000 people commuting into Exeter on a daily basis. The city’s wider area includes much of the district council areas of East Devon, Teignbridge and Mid Devon. 297,000 of these residents are of working age and 249,400 are employed. Well over half the workforce is well qualified, substantially higher than the national average.

¹ 16th April 2024 Simon Hoare MP, Minister for Local Government letter to Local Authority Chief Executives: *productivity in Local Government*”

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Exeter has an international airport, two railway routes into London (Paddington and Waterloo), major routes by road (M5 to Bristol), three park and ride schemes and joined up cycle routes within the city.

The largest number of meteorologists and climate change specialists in the UK are based in Exeter. Award-winning specialists in diabetes and breast cancer work at the Royal Devon and Exeter University Hospital. The University of Exeter is both a member of the Russell Group and has a Gold award from the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), for its international reputation for excellence in both teaching and research, with many award-winning research fellows and a world class reputation in climate and environmental science. The University of Exeter is ranked 177th in the latest (2024) Times Higher Education World University Rankings, the most influential global league table.

Exeter College is a thriving and growing tertiary college. An Ofsted Inspection in 2022 resulted in the college retaining the accolade of Outstanding. The College also scored the top assessment of 'strong' for its approach to meeting the skills needs of the area. This makes Exeter College the first college in the country to achieve the highest judgement in both elements of Ofsted's new enhanced inspections.

The Art Council England's Designation Scheme has identified the George Montagu's 19th century collection of molluscs and World Cultures collection as pre-eminent collections of national and international importance at the Council's Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM). The city also has a beautiful Cathedral, four theatres and a popular quayside.

Exeter has many well-known national stores including John Lewis, Next, Zara and Apple. There are also award-winning restaurants and independent stores. The Ivy is among the newest restaurants in Exeter, famous for attracting celebrities to its London eateries. Ikea's 29,000 square metre store is located on the outskirts of the city. The City Centre has an average footfall of 1,500,000 people per month.

Exeter is home to the Exeter Chiefs who play in Premiership Rugby, England's top division of rugby. Founded in 1871, the club play their home games at Sandy Park, which is located on the outskirts of the city. The Chiefs have become one of the leading clubs in the Premiership, winning the championship title twice in 2016-17 and 2019-20. In October 2020, the Chiefs won the Champions Cup, the top prize in European club rugby union. They have won the Anglo-Welsh Cup/Premiership Rugby Cup three times, most recently in 2022/23.

Exeter City Football Club is a professional association football club, which was founded in 1901. Exeter City consolidated their status in League One during the 2023/24 season.

Exeter and Cranbrook are one of only 12 places in England to be awarded Pilot status by Sport England to tackle inactivity in communities and to trail-blaze new ways of getting people active for life. Following the original Sport England award of an award of £4.721m in June 2019 further £1.883m has been awarded to continue delivery of the programme in line with the Sport England strategy 'Uniting the Movement' to March 2025.

Despite the many challenges in recent years, mainly due to the Covid 19 pandemic, there is evidence that the city is bouncing back. Around 30,000 (30%) of Exeter's workforce were furloughed. Universal Credit claimants peaked at 4.2% in May and August 2020, the first time this had been more than 4% since May 1997. The numbers dropped to 2.2% in April 2022 and down again to 2.1% in April 2024.³

³ *CBP-8748.pdf (parliament.uk) Claimant data by constituency: people claiming unemployment related benefits.*

Footfall within the city centre has continued to increase since its dramatic drop during lock down periods and is now recovering, with 2023 figures now above the 2019 pre-pandemic levels.

A key economic transformational opportunity for Exeter and the region is to realise the economic impact of having some of the world's leading experts on climate sciences based in Exeter. Our support for the University of Exeter Innovation Hub, located in the city centre, will help regional businesses and organisations with their climate and environment action plans. It will attract start-ups and entrepreneurs to the region, providing skills development for green and digital transformation and building the Southwest into an international leader in climate action, biodiversity and natural capital. Continuing work on the Civic University Agreement will align ambitions for Exeter to be a globally significant location for addressing the challenges of climate change.

Key challenges for the city are:

- Traffic congestion
- Inward investment in the city centre
- Building Homes in the city
- Maintaining existing infrastructure
- Delivering new infrastructure
- Entrenched health inequalities
- Housing needs and homelessness

About Exeter City Council

There are 39 councillors on Exeter City Council, representing the 13 wards of the city. The political make-up of the Council for 24/25, following May 2024 elections is Labour 24; Green Party 7; Liberal Democrat 4; Conservative 3 and Independent 1. Each elected Councillor is appointed for a four-year term, with a third of the 39 seats contested each year (one seat per ward). The Council has 798 permanent and fixed term employees.

The Council embraces its role as a community leader – as a shaper and leader of place that works successfully with stakeholders in the city, across the region and nationally. We are proud of our record in articulating the needs of the city and its communities, galvanising the support of public and private sectors, securing investment and finding innovative solutions to problems and ambitions.

This often involves expanding our remit beyond that of a typical district council and venturing into areas that many district councils would see as the business of others. But we see this as essential for achieving the social, economic and environmental outcomes that the city, its stakeholders and communities aspire to, and which are spelt out in the Exeter Vision 2040.

“By the time they are an adult, a child born in Exeter today will live in a city that is inclusive, healthy and sustainable – a city where the opportunities and benefits of prosperity are shared, and all citizens are able to participate fully in the city’s economic, social, cultural and civic life.”

In December 2019 the Liveable Exeter Place Board adopted the Exeter Vision 2040. Working together to bring about transformational change and sustainable growth, the Liveable Exeter Place Board is made up of representatives from leading public and private sector organisations from within the City of Exeter and Greater Exeter region.

The Liveable Exeter prospectus highlights how a transformational housing delivery programme can be the means to bring major investment into the city and renew its infrastructure for the 21st Century with the aim of improving peoples' lives and wellbeing. The underpinning principles are being used as a tool for planning officers, members, developers and others discussing and bringing forward proposals for brownfield development within the city. The principles apply to all stages of planning

and design from locating development and identifying projects for infrastructure renewal down to the detailed design of individual buildings.

Although 2023/24 has continued to be challenging for Exeter City Council and the Local Government sector as a whole, below are some of the positive outcomes during the last financial year:

- At the National Unlock Net Zero Awards as part of the Chartered Institute of Housing Conference in Manchester, the Council won the Green Homes Upgrade of the Year.
- The Council's Extra Care scheme, Edwards Court, won the award for Project of the Year (over £5m), awarded at the Michelmores Property Awards 2023. The 53-flat scheme built by Exeter City Council, Edwards Court, was described by the judges as "one of the most interesting and well-designed buildings of its type".
- Exeter's new solar farm and battery storage facility at Marsh Barton was shortlisted in the 2023 RTPi Southwest Awards for Planning Excellence and was a runner up in the EDIE Renewable Energy Project of the year. The Scheme was also a runner up in the APSE Best Climate Action or Decarbonisation initiative.
- The Council has been awarded the Bronze award by the Carbon Literacy Organisation.
- A large grant of close to half a million pounds from the Arts Council has been matched by the Council to replace part of the roof at the Grade II listed Royal Albert Memorial Museum. The scheme when complete will increase the space available for exhibitions or meetings in this unique setting.
- The Council has bought a further four properties (former one-bed council homes) as part of an initiative to end rough sleeping in the city. The homes will go to people who have a current or recent history of rough sleeping and in the future will form part of the Council's wider temporary accommodation offer.
- Through the Local Authority Housing Fund, the Council has purchased 13 homes under the above scheme, costing a total of £4.1 million, mainly funded by grant. The homes have been purchased under the agreement to provide accommodation to Afghan and Ukrainian families along with temporary accommodation. All thirteen have now been purchased and the first seven families have been accommodated. A matching programme is underway to allocate the remaining six homes.
- Ste Sidwell's Point, the first Passivhaus Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre in the UK saw its 2 millionth visitor.
- Two new developments will be completed in 2024 part of the Council's housing development programme. At Hamlin Gardens 21 flats will be completed as will work at Vaughan Road with Phase 1 consisting of 35 affordable homes. All new homes are being built to the Passivhaus environmental standard and form part of the Council's wider plans to create 500 new Passivhaus Council homes in Exeter by 2030.