

# REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2024

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### Councillor Matt Vizard: Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change & Communities

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

##### **a. Prosperous local economy**

Despite very challenging financial circumstances, our community organisations continue to provide invaluable support across our city, contributing to our prosperity in the broadest sense. These are supported by the Council through our funding of Wellbeing Exeter, the Community Grants Programme and the Exeter Community Lottery.

##### **b. Healthy and active city**

Wellbeing Exeter (see section 2).

##### **c. Housing and building great neighbourhoods and communities**

The work being undertaken by Wellbeing Exeter, through our community grants programme and Exeter Community Lottery continues to contribute significantly to building great neighbourhoods and communities.

##### **d. Net zero carbon city**

The funding and appointment of the Council's new Programme Manager for City Wide Net Zero is extremely welcome. This role will be crucial in connecting the Council with key stakeholders, businesses and community groups to drive forward our Net Zero ambitions. This is an important aspect of the different strands of my portfolio role, and I look forward to working with our community groups to support, encourage and motivate local projects, education and ideas.

##### **e. Thriving culture and heritage**

Many grants have been awarded through our Community Grants Scheme (both City and Ward Grants), and these and awards from the Exeter Community Lottery contribute significantly to culture and heritage across Exeter.

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

##### **Wellbeing Exeter**

As members will recall, Devon County Council and the NHS withdrew funding and councillors backed proposals for Exeter City Council to commit funding (alongside Sport England and East Devon) to ensure its work continues in Exeter and Cranbrook. Following a procurement process,

CoLab have been appointed as the new operator of Wellbeing Exeter. Strategic Director for People Jo Yelland and I will be meeting with CoLab's CEO Fiona Carden later this month. I am keen to explore ways in which Wellbeing Exeter can support and connect positively with our community organisations.

### **Exeter Community Lottery**

In the first 12 months of the Exeter Community Lottery:

- 121 local good causes have signed up. The top performing local causes are Sylvania Community Stores, Exeter Strollers Walking Football Club, SW Therapy Centre, Heavitree Bowls Club, Devon Family History Society all receiving in excess of £1000.
- The initial annual set up and maintenance costs were £6,558
- The Exeter City Council Central Fund has raised a total of £17,730
- In total £48,378 was raised for local good causes and the central fund

NB:

- 60% of proceeds go to good causes.
- 50% to the chosen good cause and 10p to the Operator (Exeter City Council) community Fund.
- 20% goes towards prizes for players
- 20% to the External Lottery Manager for administration and VAT.

### **Community Grants Programme**

A full officer briefing is attached as an appendix to this report.

Ward grant applications continue to be channelled through the 39 ward councillors. £3k per ward per year with a maximum of £350 per award/project. Members are encouraged to promote the scheme through their networks and communications, and to take ownership of their ward grant budgets and how these are spent, applying the criteria and terms and conditions.

The new City Grants scheme was launched at the end of July. An annual budget of £50k will be allocated over 3 rounds of applications, up to £2,500 per award/project. The cross-party Grants Panel has met twice since the launch, with funds allocated for the first round. A total of £15,750 was awarded to 8 organisations. The balance will be rolled over to rounds 2 and 3 which will open on 7<sup>th</sup> October and 9<sup>th</sup> December respectively.

City Grants in 2024/25 will focus on the following Priority Neighbourhoods:

- Exwick
- Redhills
- St Thomas
- St David's
- City Centre
- Newtown
- Mincinglake
- Beacon Heath
- Whipton
- Wonford
- Countess Wear

The website has full details:  
[exeter.gov.uk/people-and-communities/grants/exeter-grants-programme/](https://exeter.gov.uk/people-and-communities/grants/exeter-grants-programme/)

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

The City Council, charities and community organisations continue to face an extremely challenging financial climate, a legacy of the last 14 years of economic mismanagement and painful austerity. Our city is strong and growing but funding is scarce, and it is clear that all organisations need to adapt, ensure their business models are resilient, and to be proactive in their approaches to fundraising and securing income streams and grant funding.

We are stronger by working together for common goals for Exeter. High among these must be championing and make a positive contribution to the city's Net Zero ambitions. Other priorities continue to be include helping to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, their underlying causes and impacts; creating beautiful spaces; improving health and wellbeing outcomes; alleviating cost of living pressures including warm homes and spaces; public safety; arts; diversity and inclusivity among our communities; and supporting IT skills and inclusion. In partnership with executive colleagues, I will explore how the Council and Wellbeing Exeter can continue to achieve great things for our city and improved outcomes and inclusion for all.

Work continues on budget setting for 2025/26.

In broader council terms, the recent announcement to confirm the Devon and Torbay Devolution Agreement stated:

*“As part of this agreement, and subject to business case approval, Devon and Torbay will receive £16 million in capital funding to support the delivery of local housing priorities, drive net zero ambitions and support green skills, and accelerate wider low carbon business transition across the Devon and Torbay area.”*

This funding is welcome, as is the new Government's commitment to bringing forward its own devolution legislation. We await details of Exeter's funding and how this can benefit our communities. We also await details of what further economic opportunities and powers may come forward for local government over the coming years, especially for Exeter.

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

Consideration is being undertaken around re-purposing the funding available from the vacant Programme Manager post to focus on community engagement and consultation.

I am keen to explore how we can establish links through Wellbeing Exeter with community groups and organisations through our strategic partnership working and in particular, with the new Programme Manager for City Wide Net Zero. This would be with a view to encouraging greater focus on our communities' role in progress towards the city's Net Zero ambitions: reducing carbon emissions; enhancing biodiversity; education, participation and positive change. The Council must take a lead but addressing the climate crisis and its impacts is the responsibility of us all.

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

As well as my regular formal and informal meetings and briefings with the Director and other key officers, I have had meetings with Citizens Advice, St Sidwells Centre, Wonford Community Centre and Alphington Community Centre.

I have liaised with the Council's assets team about council-owned and leased community buildings.

Citizens Advice Exeter (CAE) has presented to members as well as meeting with the Director, Chief Executive and Portfolio Holders. Following the end of the Information, Advice and Advocacy Contract in March 2024, a one-off grant of £70,000 was awarded to CAE, plus a reduced rent was agreed for premises leased from the Council.

In 2024, in response to an open tender process CAE have been awarded a new contract from ECC to support people facing homelessness.

ECC officers will continue to be available to provide support to CAE management and our offer of shared accommodation within the Civic Centre, which has been on the table for several years but turned down, still stands.

There have been conversations between ECC Officers and CAE about long term sustainability planning. CAE have launched and are undertaking an external funding campaign.