

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 June 2024

Present:

Councillor Josie Parkhouse (Chair)
Councillors Rees, Fullam, Holland, Hussain, Miller, Moore, D, Pole, Read and Wardle

Apologies:

Councillors Darling, Harding and Patrick

Also present:

Chief Executive, Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management, Service Lead - Environmental Health & Community Safety, Service Lead, Legal Services & Interim Monitoring Officer, Service Lead Housing Needs & Homelessness and Democratic Services Officer (PMD)

External presenters:

Supt. Antony Hart, Mat Jarratt, Insp. Nathan Johnson, Jeanie Lynch and Peter Scargill

In attendance:

Councillor Atkinson

In attendance as Portfolio Holders:

Councillors Asvachin, Bialyk, Vizard and Wright

18 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 28 March 2024 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

19 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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

The Chair reported the receipt of two questions from members of the public under Standing Order No. 19:-

Question from Ms Marilyn Spurr

“Given that Exeter City Council has declared a climate emergency I would expect that this would be to the forefront of any policy. What consideration has been given in the Treasury Management Strategy to the impacts of climate change, specifically in relation to the Carbon Footprint (environmental) implications?”

The Chair asked Councillor Vizard, Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities, to answer Ms Spurr’s question. Cllr Vizard gave the following response:

“Exeter City Council’s Treasury Management Strategy is compliant with Secretary of State Investment Guidance which emphasises the security and liquidity of any investment, followed by yield. There is currently no requirement to produce a policy that addresses climate emergency, Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG), or ethical investment issues. Authorities can implement such a policy but are not permitted to prioritise these considerations above security, liquidity or yield. Whilst the Council does not specifically refer to ESG considerations in its Treasury Management Strategy, managing the ESG risk is part of current treasury management practices, as the Council uses mainstream rating agencies to assess counterparty creditworthiness – they now more formally incorporate ESG risk alongside more traditional financial risk metrics when assessing counterparty ratings. The Council has previously used the Standard Chartered Sustainable Deposit where the rate is the same as the standard fixed term deposit so there has been no impact on security, liquidity or yield. Our Treasury Management advisers state that “The deposit guarantees that investment is referenced against sustainable assets, both existing and future. The investments are referenced against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; thus funds are put to work addressing some of the world’s biggest long-term threats including, but not limited to, climate change, health, financial inclusion and education.”

In a supplementary question, Ms Spurr asked the Portfolio Holder why an emergency could not be prioritised. Cllr Vizard offered to reply to Ms Spurr in writing.

Question from Mr Chris Hill

“The Council's corporate plan says that it aims to reach Net Zero by 2030 as part of its Climate Emergency strategy. What assessments have you made of the banks used by the council and those banks' investments and how they align with the goal of Net Zero?”

The Chair asked Councillor Vizard, Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities, to answer Mr Hill’s question. Cllr Vizard gave the following response:

“The Council seeks external treasury management advice from the Link Group. Link provide regular counterparty lists and suggested investment durations and notify us of any creditworthiness changes. These counterparty lists are based on credit ratings from the three rating agencies (Fitch, Moodys and Standard & Poors), and the rating agencies take Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) risk into account when they make their assessments.”

In a supplementary question, Mr Hill asked the Portfolio Holder if he agreed that the carbon footprint caused by investing in the exploitation of fossil fuel needed to be taken into consideration when choosing a bank. Cllr Vizard offered to write to Mr Hill in writing.

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

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following question was submitted by Councillor Read in relation to the Portfolio of Councillor Asvachin, who attended the meeting:-

“At the previous meeting, we heard that the Great Western Hotel was at maximum occupancy and providing some breakfasts. Communal kitchens were also discussed. What is the current state of play at Great Western Hotel

regarding occupancy and progress to communal kitchens? Is this a priority to pursue and, if so, when can we expect it to happen? And can the Portfolio Holder let us know the exact number of children in the Great Western Hotel?"

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services gave the following answer:-

"Exeter City Council has 30 'block-booked' rooms at the Great Western Hotel as of today: 18 occupied, four prebooked, two in void (repairs) and six ready to let. Typical average occupation is between 25 and 29; however, there is an unusually high number of vacancies at this specific time.

A small kitchen is available with microwaves at this time. Work on a shared kitchen has begun, with plumbing and other services to be installed along with partition walls. Completion is estimated to take approximately 6 weeks.

Exeter City Council does not place children at the Great Western Hotel. However, the owner does use a few rooms for this purpose for private clients. There are 2 families at Great Western Hotel, accommodated in a different part of the hotel. Family 1 consists of Mum, Dad and 1 child. Family 2 also consists of Mum, Dad and 1 child."

In a supplementary question, Councillor Read asked:-

- what would be provided in terms of kitchen facilities; and
- how long the families in question were expected to stay at the Great Western Hotel.

Councillor Asvachin informed Councillor Read that she would reply to her in writing.

22 **Work of the Community Safety Partnership to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls at Night**

The Chair explained that, as the originator of the proforma requesting a Scrutiny item on "Local Measures to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls", Councillor Atkinson had been invited to sit with the Committee for this item and would be allowed to ask the first question after the presentation.

The external guests (Peter Scargill, Jeanie Lynch, Mat Jarratt, Supt. Antony Hart and Insp. Nathan Johnson) introduced themselves to the Committee, then talked Members through the presentation, which included:-

- Purpose of the Exeter Community Safety Partnership
- Partners
- Areas of Focus 2020-2025
- Funding
- Improving Safety for Women in Exeter
- CoLab Women
- Women's Centre for Exeter
- Best Bar None
- Safe Space
- Police Overview
- Evening and night time economy (ENTE) Locations and Patterns
- Bystander Intervention Programme
- Network of High-Definition Cameras

Community Safety Partnership

Peter Scargill (the only non-statutory Chair of a CSP in Devon) noted the uniqueness of the set-up. Jeanie Lynch praised the breadth of the partnership as well as the breadth of commitment across the city.

CoLab Women and Women's Centre

Jeanie Lynch stressed how important the Safer Streets Funding had been. She also highlighted the need for a women's hub in Exeter.

Best Bar None and Safe Space

Mat Jarratt remarked that these two projects did not exist in isolation, adding that:-

- it was crucial not to consider best-case scenarios but real-life experience; and
- the statistics for the Safe Space were inspiring.

Police Overview

Supt. Hart made reference to:-

- the improved intelligence at Devon & Cornwall Police's disposal;
- the importance of internal as well as external culture; and
- hotspot policing in Exeter.

Insp. Johnson, remarking that the night time economy had changed, talked Members through the four "Tier 1" hotspots and stressed the importance of foot patrols.

Portfolio Overview

Councillor Wright remarked that members of the LBGTQ+ community were also vulnerable within the NTE context. She also praised:-

- Tony Cox for being responsible for many ideas aimed at improving the safety of women in Exeter;
- street pastors; and
- the work of everyone involved in the implementing the CCTV network, reminding Members that this was not a statutory duty.

Finally, she introduced the "Need Help" sign with the aid of which women who feel at risk can direct police operatives to the nearest camera.

The Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management praised the wide variety of representatives in the room and noted that the spirit of cooperation demonstrated in Exeter was the envy of all CSPs, adding that the Exeter model was recognised as best practice by the College of Policing.

Councillor Atkinson thanked all participants for their contributions but felt more detail could have been provided about:-

- Serious Violence Duty;
- Cause of Violence
- Partnership Working across Devon; and
- the deployment of staff to alert to VAWG.

The Service Lead - Environmental Health and Community Safety assured Councillor Atkinson that Exeter was fully involved in work taking place across the South West Peninsula. He acknowledged that more detail and/or topics could have been covered but explained that a conscious decision had been made to keep proceedings to one hour. On the issue of Serious Violence Duty, he referred to the link with neighbouring CSPs. Peter Scargill advised that the Safer Devon Plan was reviewed by the Safer Devon Partnership and that everyone was sighted on the Plan. Mat Jarratt highlighted that bar culture applied to both patrons and staff; he offered to meet up with Councillor Atkinson.

During discussion, Members made reference to:-

- the daytime economy (especially around South St and Cathedral Green);
- the need for a clear action plan with tangible outcomes;
- the importance of communication around good work being done, and the role Councillors could play in this respect;
- the need for conversations to take place in the men's realm and for recognising that VAWG meant specifically Men's Violence against Women and Girls; and
- the feeling of insecurity felt by passengers at taxi ranks.

The external guests provided the following responses to questions from Members:-

- the CSP had a sub-group set up specifically to deal with anti-social behaviour (ASB);
- it was essential to marginalise the behaviours of perpetrators rather people themselves;
- ASB constituted the bulk of complaints made to police in Exeter;
- there was a detailed action plan;
- there was no budget for communication and a lot had been achieved through sheer goodwill;
- it was important not to mislead people into thinking that Exeter was unsafe;
- staffing costs were the largest obstacle to the opening of a Women's Centre in Exeter, and securing premises would be a significant first step;
- for every pound spent on a Women's centre, £5 would be saved to the public purse;
- a total of 53 venues had signed up to the voluntary Best Bar None scheme, including bars on the university campus;
- Devon & Cornwall Police were acutely aware that VAWG was under-reported;
- it was crucial to engage with young men to make them realise the damage caused by VAWG and pornography;
- the Safe Space had been financed through one-off funding (Safer Streets 4) and a business case was needed for its continuation;
- the two-hour slot between 10pm and midnight - before the opening of the Safe Space - was largely covered by street pastors (who started work at 10.30pm);
- taxi rank marshals had made a significant difference to problems at taxi ranks, which were paid for by the trade itself;
- problems in Sidwell Street and Fore Street were well and truly on the radar of Exeter police; and
- under-reporting was always a hindrance.

The Chair thanked all participants and Members noted the presentation.

23 Scrutiny Work Plan and Proposals Received

Members discussed the Work Plan and Scrutiny Proposals submitted.

Performance and service provided to customers and stakeholders of Stagecoach South West in Exeter

The Chair advised that she had met the Managing Director of Stagecoach, adding that, although she was one of the proposers, her personal preference would be for this item to go the Transport Working Group first. Councillor Moore welcomed the proposal to invite Stagecoach to the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee and made reference to:-

- the Bus Impact Plan; and
- the fact that the new Combined County Authority would have Transport in its remit.

Councillor Holland remarked that Transport was still currently a County matter and wondered if someone from HATOC should be invited. Councillor Wardle clarified that, while Stagecoach representatives could be invited, they did not have to accept the invitation.

It was moved by Councillor Parkhouse and seconded by Councillor Rees that the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee agree in principle to add this Scrutiny proposal to the Work Plan, with timescale and scoping to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee. Following a vote, the recommendation was CARRIED unanimously.

Update on Exeter Community Lottery first year of operation, amount raised for good causes

Members noted that Exeter Community Lottery was on the agenda of the September meeting of the Executive and felt that the November meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee (instead of October) would allow for more precise scoping for this piece of work.

It was moved by Councillor Parkhouse and seconded by Councillor Rees that this item be put on the Work Plan for 28 November 2024, with timescale and scoping to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee (3 October). Following a vote, the recommendation was CARRIED.

Anti-Social Behaviour in the City Centre – its causes and possible solutions

While Councillors Read and Moore supported the proposal, with Councillor Moore singling out street attachment as an issue of importance, Councillor Wardle felt that the proposal would add little to what had been presented earlier in the meeting. Councillor Holland agreed with him and reminded Committee members of the importance of the Police Neighbourhood Meetings. Councillor Miller suggested a March 2025 slot as an option for this item.

Councillor Wardle proposed, and Councillor Pole seconded, an amended to defer any discussion on the subject until the January 2025 meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee. Following a vote, the amendment was CARRIED.

Budget Scrutiny proposal

Councillor Moore referred to the recent meeting of the Combined Customer Focus and Strategy Committee and sought clarity on how to progress the scrutiny of the

budget process. She proposed that the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee should receive a report from relevant Portfolio Holders on options for approaches to achieve a balanced budget, followed by three spotlight reviews (i.e. one meeting) to consider each of the following:

1. HR: staff pay, skills gaps, use of contractors and use of apprenticeship levy
2. Progress of income generation strategy/income generations
3. Impact of options on environment, inequality and protected characteristics

The Chair made the point that, while she agreed that Scrutiny should exercise finance monitoring, the remit of this committee was to scrutinise process; she also reminded Members to be mindful of the capacity of the Democratic Services team.

The Interim Monitoring Officer remarked on the complexity and the operational nature of the areas of scrutiny proposed by Councillor Moore. He further felt that the timescales were not realistic and called on Committee members to look at Scrutiny in the longer term.

Councillor Rees called on members of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee to share their ideas and suggestions with the Chair, stressing the need to have a robust plan in place after the October meeting.

It was moved by Councillor Parkhouse and seconded by Councillor Wardle that this item be put on the agenda for the 3 October 2024 meeting for further scoping and to allow for more clarity. Following a vote, the recommendation was CARRIED.

External witnesses

Councillor Rees called on members of the Committee to email the Chair and Deputy Chair if they wished to propose external witnesses and, in instances of witnesses who could be perceived as either partial or non-neutral (e.g. from pressure groups), provide a short biography of the person(s). Councillor Moore expressed unease at this last point, making the point the definition of what constitutes a pressure group may change from one person to the next.

It was moved by Councillor Parkhouse and seconded by Councillor Rees that the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee approve the Work Plan as submitted, with the Six-monthly update on Homelessness Strategy to be added to the 28 November 2024 agenda. Following a vote, the recommendation was CARRIED unanimously.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.39 pm

Chair