

REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 14 November 2024

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Phil Bialyk, Leader

1. Issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities
One Exeter Programme – The One Exeter programme is the council's internal improvement programme and contributes to the corporate priority of Leading a Well-Run Council. Much of the work included in the programme is summarised in the remainder of this report.
Digital Customer Strategy – Work continues with our ICT partner Strata to develop the infrastructure to enable us to deliver on the 10 goals in the Digital Customer Strategy. The first phase of the roll out of Microsoft 365 has been completed along with improved audio-visual facilities in the Civic Centre meeting rooms to aid hybrid working. Detailed work across the 3 councils has been completed on the procurement of a new telephony system to replace the soon to be obsolete Skype system. The new telephony will also offer better customer relationship management and monitoring customer service. Officers are now working on detailed implementation plans to ensure successful roll out in the New Year. A new type of laptop has been designed and is currently being piloted with the aim of rolling this out to staff as line of business systems move to the Cloud. This new technology will provide quicker and more reliable access to business applications. Work is underway through the Contract Centre to introduce "my Accounts" to residents which will, over time, allow people to bring all their transactions with the council into a single account making it much easier.
Residents Survey – We undertook a Residents Survey over the summer based on the LGA approach. The results from the survey are extremely encouraging with most residents reporting satisfaction with waste, recycling, parks, street cleaning, museum and leisure services and over half of residents trust the council and are satisfied with how the council runs things. The results also highlight areas of concern to residents such as car parking, homelessness and anti-social behaviour in some parts of the city. Officers will be working with their portfolios on the details of the findings and using these to agree priorities for service improvements.
Strengthening Strategic Partnerships – as part of the Senior Leadership Review, a new Executive Office has been created. This team will report into the Chief Executive and one of its primary roles will be to have oversight of all strategic partnerships ensuring that partnership work is co-ordinated, delivery plans are in place and that milestones are achieved.

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

Corporate Plan - The Executive have been working with SMB on developing a new, more streamlined Corporate Plan setting out our priorities for the next few years and the outcomes we want to see delivered. We will be consulting with the public on our priorities and aim to publish a new plan in February 2025. Directors are working with their team on identifying key performance metrics for services in the context of the new Corporate Plan. This will form a key part of a new Corporate Performance Dashboard.

HR Review – An independent review of our people functions was completed and there is now an HR Improvement Plan in place setting out clear actions for improving the service and our work on equalities, diversity and inclusion.

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

MTFP update – Following on from the budget, work is being undertaken to understand the implications for the council from the announcements made. Work has continued in respect of options available to balance the budget and a draft consultation document has been developed. It is intended to consult on the budget during November and December to allow responses to be considered prior to the budget being set in the New Year.

4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered

Senior Leadership Review - The Senior Leadership Structure is in the final stages of its completion with final interviews for the remaining Strategic Director and Heads of Service posts taking place in mid-November following a national recruitment campaign. The majority of staff have now moved across to their new directorates and the finance team are working with Directors and Heads of Service to align budgets to the new structure.

Office relocation - The Civic Centre is now too big for the needs of the City Council. With the advent of hybrid working, the Council has moved into a single block and presently this is underoccupied. Efforts to lease out the other two buildings have had some limited success, but it is by no means full and is not achieving the rental income projected. Empty space requires the Council to pay the business rates on buildings it is not occupying as well as heating costs. As a result of this outline plans have been developed to look at alternative workspaces across the city including the Guildhall Shopping Centre, Bradninch Place and Exton Road. This would include a new Customer Service Centre located in the Guildhall Shopping Centre. On 3rd September, Executive agreed to allow detailed plans to be drawn up for the necessary works to be carried out. A project team will be established to take this work forward.

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

County Combined Authority – Central Government has agreed to the proposal for the establishment of a Combined County Authority for Devon and Torbay. As part of the agreement, Devon and Torbay has received £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. The council has been allocated £2m from this funding to decarbonise its housing stock. A Devon and Torbay Housing Advisory Group is also being established to recommend annual priorities, secure investment and design appropriate programmes to address the housing needs of communities across the Devon and Torbay area. The council will nominate a Member to sit on this group.

Programme of disposals – the council has entered into a head of terms for Mary Arches Street Car Park. Bids have been submitted and due diligence has been undertaken at Clifton Hill. Work is progressing on CityPoint through a meeting with council officers and new owners and options are being developed to determine the best method to proceed. A report on CityPoint is going to December Executive. The council is still actively seeking a site for the Open Space depot.

Key Cities – Portfolio Holder for Transport – Key Cities is a cross-party network of 24 local authorities representing cities and urban areas from across England and Wales. In my role as Key Cities Portfolio Holder for Transport, I lead the development of the wider network's position and priorities for transport. This is done by bringing transport items to Key Cities' Executive and Full Group meetings and via other activities such as information-sharing within the network. Each year, the Key Cities Chair asks their portfolio holders to identify their priorities for their portfolio to ensure that Key Cities activity is aligned to the interests of members. For the year 2024-25, my priority is for members of the network to gain a clear understanding of the Buses Bill which will allow local transport authorities to take control of bus services in their area. Over the course of the coming year, Key Cities will provide additional information on the changes proposed by bringing speakers and allowing members to discuss their views on bus franchising. Feedback from members will be used to inform future lobbying on local buses and transport policy more broadly.

Portfolio Holder's Responsibilities:

- ◇ Corporate Plan
- ◇ Corporate Risk Strategy
- ◇ MTFP and Budget Strategy
- ◇ Fees & Charges
- ◇ Combined Authority Agreement
- ◇ Working with Devon Leaders
- ◇ Exeter Civic University Agreement
- ◇ Partnerships and the Sub Regional Growth agenda
- ◇ Commercial, Social Housing Assets & Property Assets (includes redevelopment of Paris Street/Sidwell Street, Exeter City Centre, Car Parks and Matford Centre)
- ◇ Strategic Communications
- ◇ Business Rates Discretionary Grants
- ◇ Procurement Policy
- ◇ Strata Joint Executive Committee

