

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 5 November 2024

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)
Councillors Wright, Allcock, Asvachin, Foale, Vizard, Williams, R and Wood

Councillor Jobson (as an opposition group Leader);
Councillor Moore (as an opposition group Leader); and
Councillor M. Mitchell (as an opposition group Leader).

Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Place, Strategic Director for People and Communities, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Head of Service - Housing, Interim Head of Service - Customer & Communities and Democratic Services Officer (PMD)

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ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE LEADER

The Leader informed Members of the passing of Gerald Foggin, husband of Alderman Olwen Foggin. On behalf of the Executive, he expressed his condolences to Alderman Foggin and her family.

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2024, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

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QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 19

No questions from members of the public were received.

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HOUSING RESIDENTS' VULNERABILITIES POLICY

The Executive received the report on the revised Housing Residents' Vulnerabilities Policy 2024-2027 for adoption by Council. The Council, as a responsible landlord, was required to have a policy ensuring that social landlords 'treated tenants with fairness and respect' and that reasonable adjustments were made to services to ensure vulnerabilities were taken into account. The policy would ensure that the Council was compliant with the requirement of the Regulator of Social Housing

Cllrs Jobson, Mitchell and Moore spoke as opposition group leaders on the item and raised points and questions, which were responded to by the Head of Service – Housing as follows:-

- in instances of conflicts between policies, each case would be taken on its own merit and a desktop review would take place; and
- people had a right not to share information but, by understanding what people's vulnerabilities were, Exeter City Council was able to tailor its services to meet their needs and make reasonable adjustments.

Councillor Jobson also suggested that the Domestic Abuse Act be added to the references, as it was referred to in the report.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the adoption of the new Housing Residents' Vulnerability Policy.

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HOUSING DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

The Executive received the report on the revised Housing Domestic Abuse Policy 2024-2027 for adoption by Council. The policy contained details of how the Council would manage reports of domestic abuse relating to Exeter City Council tenants and was a requirement of the Regulator of Social Housing.

During the discussion, Councillor Wright felt that it should be noted that, for once, the EQIA had a positive effect rather than a negative one as was often the case.

In response to questions and points raised by Councillor Wood, the Head of Service – Housing advised that the issue of legal permissions and information was a complex area but clarified that ECC would always do what the person wanted.

The Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the adoption of the new Housing Domestic Abuse Policy for the period.

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EXETER CITY COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICES ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB) STRATEGY AND POLICY

The Executive received the report to adopt the revised Exeter City Council Housing Services Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy and Policy following a review and consultation. The Council was required by the Regulator of Social Housing to provide an Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and Policy, detailing how reported anti-social behaviour, relating to Council tenants would be handled.

Councillor Moore, speaking as an opposition group leader, suggested that, as well as a first point of contact, people be provided with a summary of procedure as well as an idea of what they could expect.

Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- Councillor Asvachin thanked the Head of Service – Housing for the three reports he had produced and presented; and
- referring to the Government's new action plan, Councillor Allcock asked how much Exeter would benefit from Government support.

In response to questions and points raised by Members, the Head of Service – Housing advised that:-

- a paragraph would be added on the website detailing the Council's action plan as well as what actions would be expected from tenants; and
- he was not yet aware of how much funding would be coming to Exeter from the Government's new action plan.

The Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the adoption of the new Housing Services Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and Tenancy Policy.

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COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAMME 2025/26

The Executive received the report setting out the proposals for the Community Grants Programme 2025/26 and funding of Wellbeing Exeter beyond March 2025 using the Neighbourhood portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (NHCIL).

The report also provided an update on the progress of the transition of Wellbeing Exeter and the Community Grants Programme and made recommendations for priorities and spending in 2025/26 and 2027/28.

Responding to a query from the Leader, the Strategic Director - People and Communities clarified that the "External Funding" amounts in the Wellbeing Exeter Funding Strategy table [page 101 in the Executive agenda] were minimum contributions that Exeter City Council would expect, with Wellbeing Exeter now stabilised.

Councillors Jobson, Mitchell and Moore spoke on the item as opposition group leaders and raised the following points and questions:-

- it was concerning that the business plan for the investment in Wellbeing Exeter, the evaluation strategy and the fundraising plan would not be coming forward until next year;
- a few issues raised in the report ought to be looked at in a strategic way, involving the Grants Panel;
- community builders were doing excellent work;
- clarity was needed about where responsibility lay within the Council for the funding of Wellbeing Exeter;
- CIL regulations were clear about the need to report back and consult with communities;
- precision was needed about the outcome model and value-for-money of Wellbeing Exeter; and
- on the subject of evaluation, it would be useful to know how many people were being signposted and how successful the signposting was.

Executive Members made the following comments:-

- a summary of Wellbeing Exeter success stories would be welcome;
- both CoLab and Wellbeing Exeter needed security;
- it should be noted that Exeter's city grants supported development in the city; and

- the report of the Strategic Director - People and Communities was rich and extensive.

In response to questions and points raised by Members, the Strategic Director for People and Communities advised that:-

- the terms of reference for the Grants Panel were very clear and there was no role for the Grants Panel in strategic decision making in relation to the Neighbourhood CIL;
- there was already a Wellbeing Exeter business case, called 'A Case for Support', which was published by the Council in 2023 and was still available on the public website;
- Wellbeing Exeter was one of the most evaluated projects given there has been a continuous requirement from external funders since its inception to allocate a percentage of grant funds on evaluation. The most recent was the Wellbeing [Exeter Impact Report](#) published in March 2024 and more information could be found on the [Council](#) and the [Devon Community Foundation](#) websites; and
- Wellbeing Exeter was not a single organisation but an alliance of several VCSE organisations under the leadership of CoLab.

The Leader invited Members to submit all further questions to the Strategic Director - People and Communities in writing.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RECOMMENDED that Council:-

- (1) note the progress update of the transition of Wellbeing Exeter and the Community Programme as requested by the Executive in September 2023;
- (2) note the match for Wellbeing Exeter agreed with Sport England;
- (3) allocate £340,000 and £371,000 from the NHCIL reserve to contribute to the funding of Wellbeing Exeter for financial years 2025/26 and 2026/27;
- (4) allocate £72,000 of the ring-fenced Wellbeing Exeter reserve to contribute to funding Wellbeing Exeter for the financial year 2026/27;
- (5) grant delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder and Strategic Director to adjust the funding downwards should anticipated receipts in the NHCIL reserve fail to materialise; and
- (6) grant delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director to consult with residents on the continued use of the Neighbourhood Portion of the CIL for funding Wellbeing Exeter and the Community Grants Programme beyond 2026/27.

The Executive received the Report of the Devon Housing Commission, which set out key recommendations for addressing the housing challenges in Devon and how the Council could take some of the recommendations forward to address housing issues in the city.

The Leader praised the report and made reference to the size of Exeter's housing stock and the unique differences of all district councils within Devon before making the following points:-

- the report of the Devon Housing Commission had been commissioned by all Devon districts; and
- ECC was not handing over the running of its stock to another authority; instead, it was collaborating with the Combined County Authority (CCA).

Councillors Jobson, Mitchell and Moore spoke as follows on the item as opposition group leaders:-

- clarity should be given about what would happen to the report and specifically how the points raised in the report would be addressed, both by ECC and by the CCA;
- the recognition of community land trust was important; and
- the Council needed to do more than “to note the report” as per the recommendation.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- while the report was good, it was surprising that Exeter as a city only warranted one page in it, whereas the section on Exeter University students was four pages long;
- clarity should be provided on the whether the decrease in the number of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), as noticed nationally, had resulted in an increase in the number of houses paying council tax, especially in Exeter where the impression was that HMOs were on the rise;
- Exeter was unique in Devon in terms of housing provision and housing challenges;
- Members needed to be clear about how many of the recommendations would be addressed;
- housing was still the remit of district councils;
- it was essential for ECC to work collaboratively with partners;
- the Leader would discuss the points raised in the report with the Chief Executive and the Strategic Director for Place.

In response to questions and points raised by Members, the Strategic Director for Place advised that:-

- while the imbalance in length of reporting between ‘Exeter’ and ‘Student Accommodation in Exeter’ was noticeable, it should be noted that this was an external report;
- extensive detailed evidence had been provided by Exeter City Council to the Devon Housing Commission;
- the recommendations in the report covered district councils as well as the CCA and Central Government;
- a Shadow Advisory Group had been proposed, details of which would be presented to at the Executive meeting in December;
- a huge volume of work was taking place in Exeter to address housing challenges; and
- he would welcome the opportunity to inform Members on how ECC would respond to the Commission.

On the last point, the Leader suggested that, at the very least, a Members Briefing should be held. The Chief Executive advised that she would have a conversation on the subject with the Devon County Council Chief Executive on 19 November.

The Leader moved the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RECOMMENDED that Council note the content of the Devon Housing Commission report including its recommendations in the context of addressing housing challenges in Exeter.

(The meeting commenced at 5.32 pm and closed at 6.30 pm)

Chair

The decisions indicated will normally come into force 5 working days after publication of the Statement of Decisions unless called in by a Scrutiny Committee. Where the matter in question is urgent, the decision will come into force immediately. Decisions regarding the policy framework or corporate objectives or otherwise outside the remit of the Executive will be considered by Council on