

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

REPORT TO STRATEGIC and CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Date of Meetings

Strategic Scrutiny: Thursday 23rd January 2025

Customer Focus Scrutiny: Thursday 30th January 2025

Report of COUNCILLOR Laura Wright, Lead Cllr for Corporate Services (including Digital Transformation) & City Centre Strategy.

Council Committees: Executive and Council

Board member/Trustee (council appointments): InExeter, Exeter Canal and Quay Trust

Member of: Devon and Cornwall Police & Crime Commissioner's Panel

Member of: Vision Zero South West Board

Member of: Exeter Community Safety Partnership including working groups; ASB and Gender Safety

Devon & Cornwall Police Cllr Advocate

Relevant training and CPD undertaken this year;

LGA Conference, Harrogate, October 2024

Completion of LGC Next Generation Leadership programme

ECC online certified training; County Lines, Domestic Abuse, Equality Diversity and Inclusion, GDPR, Introduction to Safeguarding Thematics, Misogyny and Incel subculture, Risk Assessment, Serious violence and Knife Crime, FGM.

Other relevant training: Level 2 Safeguarding, Prevent

1. Delivering our strategic priorities: as per our published Corporate Plan 2022-26 which is under revision for updating

1. Contributing to the aspirations of the Exeter Vision 2040

2a Prosperous local economy

City Centre Strategy

The development of a new City Centre Strategy is continuing, the first round of consultations with local businesses and key stake-holders and then with ECC and DCC elected Members has concluded.

Once the City Council Corporate Priorities are in the final stages a public consultation will take place using the same framework as the consultation with business and Members.

The strategy will address many areas – including (but not limited to) a prosperous local economy. The strategy will be finalised by ECC after involving input from key stakeholders who will take ownership of aspects of the resulting Action Plan.

InExeter (the Business Improvement District, also referred to as 'the BID') had a successful vote November 2024, with 90% of participating businesses supporting the BID's renewal. Businesses voted overwhelmingly in favour of renewing InExeter for a third five-year term, allowing for continued investment in city centre improvements and initiatives until March 2030. A total of 334 businesses participated in the vote, achieving a 48% turnout. Of those who voted, 90% supported the BID by number, and 96% by rateable value.

The Business community voted in support of the 2025-2030 InExeter Business Plan, which will guide activity going forward: https://inexeter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/InExeter_Business_Plan_2025-30_D.pdf

Private sector events relevant to the City Centre and local business

1. The purchase of Princesshay by The Fraser Group provides confidence in Exeter, the City Centre and its long term economic success. <https://frasers.group/press/news/frasers-group-acquires-over-1-million-sq-ft-retail-assets> The Fraser Group also have control over the shops in Paris Street and some in Sidwell Street which form part of the City Point regeneration opportunity, identified in the emerging Exeter Plan. There will be further discussions between the Fraser Group now that Crown Estate are no longer involved.
2. The purchase of the Royal Clarence by Nooko, provides additional confidence in the city centre and Exeter <https://nooko.co.uk/news/press-release-nooko-acquires-historic-royal-clarence-in-exeter-for-exciting-residential-and-commercial-development/> . Nooko is also developing Paternoster House and Concorde House, in the city centre, for high quality urban living apartments.
3. Prior to Christmas there were a number of retail openings within the city centre including ProCook and Knoops.

2b. Healthy and active city: *including safety*

Community Safety & Anti-Social behaviour

The Exeter City Centre PSPO is due for renewal June 2025 <https://exeter.gov.uk/clean-safe-city/community-safety/safer-exeter/pspo/> Work has started in consulting with local statutory bodies.

A new **Community Safety Team** has been established, with 4 officers temporarily employed to patrol the city centre, supporting D&C Police in their hotspot policing initiative. The team also cover city parks and green spaces, as well as collecting and addressing stray dogs. The team have recently undertaken community safety accreditation scheme (CSAS) training. This gives them a range of powers usually only available to police, such as the authority to issue fixed penalty notices for certain offences. The main purpose of the scheme is to contribute to community safety, to combat crime and disorder, public nuisance and other forms of antisocial behaviour in co-operation with the police.

The areas covered by the hotspot policing include; Sidwell Street, High Street, Cathedral Yard, Queen Street, South Street and Mary Arches Street.

Outputs & outcomes for the month of November 2024

- Community Safety Team patrols delivered: 30
- Police intelligence submitted: 4
- Premise visits: 355
- Individuals engaged: 735
- ASB incidents attended: 24

CCTV and Control Room

There have been many notable successes in the increase in safety and in aiding the police in bringing perpetrators of crime to justice. The Control Room team have recently been awarded a commendation from the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall, for their work. Just one example of many, is detailed here [News Article - Devon & Cornwall Police \(devon-cornwall.police.uk\)](https://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/news/news-article-devon-cornwall-police)

Community Safety Partnership

ECC is the convenor of this statutory partnership, and with the support of partners we will continue to tackle priorities related to community safety and ASB.

The work of the partnership so far has been to bring key stakeholders together to share information, create specific focus groups to bring forward objectives, and to facilitate bids for relevant Home Office Funding for community safety. Through this, we have been able to attain funding for the new CCTV cameras and infrastructure and associated projects such as the 'Need help?' signage around the city centre.

2c. Housing and building great neighbourhoods and communities - N/A

2d. **Net zero carbon city – N/A**

2e. **Thriving culture and heritage – N/A**

3. Leading a well-run council

Internal Audit

- SWAP have begun rolling out AuditBoard, the Audit Management system used to track actions and progress in addressing internal control weaknesses;
- the Audit Plan is on track for completion;
- the s151 Officer and Head of Service – Finance meet monthly with SWAP to discuss progress and highlight any issues; and
- a new process for monitoring action plans and progress has been introduced at a Senior Management level.

HR

- A successful recruitment process completed in November 2024 resulting in the appointment of Strategic Director and Head of Service roles.
- A further campaign commenced for Head of HR and other Head of Service roles, all planned to be completed by end of January 2025.
- A detailed review of HR processes has been requested by Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee, which will be forthcoming within 6 months, following the appointment of the new Head of Service and allowing time for the implementation of the HR Improvement Plan (of October '24).
- A comprehensive review and updating of policies has begun, prioritising the core policies and procedures. This has included the launch of the new Drug and Alcohol Policy and roll out of training and testing equipment.
- EDI Improvement Plan in place following recommendation from mini peer review with senior management task and finish group overseeing delivery. Briefing note on mini peer review recommendations and action plan provided to all members.
- Development of Sexual Harassment Training in line with Equality Act 2010, roll out planned January 2025.
- Employee focused campaign to update emergency contact details, and EDI information via iTrent, strong level return rate across all areas.
- iTrent data cleanse - across Council in line with new operating model and hierarchy structure: work agreed within Strata 25/26 Business Plan for replacement/upgrade of ITrent in 25/26
- Occupational Health Audit commenced December 2024
- Payroll Audit to commence February 2025
- Development of Leadership Competency Framework - to support identification and priorities in relation to Leadership Development: external partner to be secured by February 2025 to support the CEX in the Senior Management Leadership Development

Legal Services: *No updates at present*

Democratic Services

- A firm timeline for the Constitution review will be forthcoming, with an expectation for completion by July this year.
- Administrative improvements to the accessibility of the current Constitution are being made removing duplication, updating named officers to provide job title only, and to include digital links to each section and other relevant documents.
- Work on amendments to the Constitution content will take place initially with the Director and Head of Service and Portfolio Holder, and then be brought to a sounding-board/working group before coming to the relevant committees and then Council for adoption.
- Other non-constitutional improvements to the service – a list of ideas and suggestions that have been made by Members to myself, has been compiled and has been brought forward to the Director for Corporate services for consideration with the Head of Service and Monitoring Officer for inclusion in the constitution review (where applicable). Some examples are;

- I. Aligning the timings of Audit & Governance and Scrutiny Committee agenda content with Executive Committee meetings to improve the process of recommendations reaching Executive to aid decision making.
- II. Monitoring the number of agenda items for Committee meetings (particularly Planning) to avoid evening meetings lasting for more than 3 hours. When decisions are time sensitive, an extra meeting may be called.
- III. To provide refreshments for evening meetings.
- IV. To cap speeches to an agreed timing (as is done in many other councils) with exceptions being at the discretion of the Chair.

AV committee room project - Following feedback from members and staff in the Democratic Services and SMB teams, the new Head of Service, Digital and Data commissioned Focused Vision to carry out an audit of the equipment in the Bad Homburg and Rennes committee rooms. Changes will be made to the AV equipment, with the installation of new speakers, amp, hearing loop, and a camera to record meetings. This will be installed between the 5 and 18 March 2025. The Democratic Services Team have relocated any meetings due to take place in these rooms between those dates. These improvements will improve the experience for Members and those attending committee meetings in Civic Centre.

Digital Transformation

Digital Customer Strategy implementation: A detailed report on progress towards the goals set out in the Digital Customer Strategy approved in November 2023 is being prepared for February/March committee cycle. This will set out progress to date both within the council and through the digital enabling work of Strata. This will also set out the priorities that are being focused on for delivery in 25/26 and 26/27 which will form the basis of the workplan for One Exeter. This will be led by the Head of Service Digital and Data and the Corporate Digital and Data team.

Data Strategy: The draft Data Strategy will also be coming for formal approval in the Feb/March committee cycle. This is a crucial enabling strategy that sets our principles for effective use and management of data. These principles will underpin how we implement new data architecture through critical projects such as SharePoint.

Cllr Training and IT:

- The Councillor Development Steering group will meet on 13 February 2025. Attendance statistics for councillor development sessions will be provided at that meeting.
- To date, a total of 33 training and briefing sessions have been held since May 2024.
- We continue to enforce the mandatory training requirements as set out under Article 8 of the Constitution.
- Cllr training and briefing sessions have been broad and comprehensive this year. Although sometimes there seem to be a lot of briefings, feedback is that members are appreciating training and briefing sessions.

Equality and Diversity

- EDI and Safeguarding Policy Office has been transferred to sit within the HR department.
- A new policy/guidance on corporate parenting for Members will be undertaken soon, following some cross-party member talks I have held (notably with Cllr Palmer).
- EDI Improvement Plan in place following recommendation from mini peer review with senior management task and finish group overseeing delivery.
- Briefing note on mini peer review recommendations and action plan provided to all members.

Corporate Health & Safety:

- Bespoke, onsite accredited Health and Safety at Work training for OMB is being undertaken in January 2025
- Strategic Director for People and Communities and Operations have jointly commissioned an expert external review of H&S at work strategy, policy and delivery resourcing to aid further organisational change linked to implementation of the Senior Leadership restructure.

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

covered in the sections above

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

Devolution and LGR

CCTV

A tender is being worked on to develop a maintenance contract for the CCTV network, as the current warranty ceases in 2025.

A new commercial income generating contract has been signed, for the Control Room to monitor an external CCTV network. Additional contracts are in negotiation.

Homecall is starting to show an increase in customer numbers following a two-year slow decline. This is a result of a marketing campaign to create better awareness of the service.

The new **Community Safety Team** are funded until 31 March 2025 by the City Council, InExeter and D&C Police. Funding has been confirmed by InExeter from April onwards, we are awaiting funding confirmation from D&C Police. Having this team in place has impacted on the car park service, as some of the officers have moved over from car parking.

4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered

1. Digital transformation – *as per the Digital Transformation report*
2. Staffing levels review in the CCTV Control Room: to ensure sufficient provision 24/7 to respond to calls, city centre incidents, monitoring the CCTV network and fulfilling external commercial contracts. This 'pinch point' was expected to come when the tension between accepting new external CCTV monitoring contracts and staff workload reached a point of investing in new posts.
3. As part of senior management review, support for the Exeter CSP is moving from the Head of Service Environment and Waste to the Head of Service for City Centre & Net Zero, with oversight from the Strategic Director, Place

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

1. **ECQT** - Governance review. Following an independent report and recommendations to the Trust, a full trust meeting was scheduled to discuss. Due to the publication of the Government White paper on Devolution, this has been postponed for the near future.
2. **Devon & Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner Panel**
There has been an uplift in funding for the UK Police forces, and Devon & Cornwall will benefit from additional Home Office funding (6.9% increase), including funding to off-set the rise in National Insurance contributions.
The rise in council tax base across Devon & Cornwall as a result of the new 2nd homes council tax legislation will bring an increase of approximately 4.64% for the council tax base across Devon & Cornwall (Exeter at 2.07%).

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