

COUNCIL

Tuesday 18 February 2025

Present:

Councillors Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Begley, Bialyk, Darling, Foale, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Jobson, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Parkhouse, Patrick, Pole, Read, Rolstone, Sheridan, Snow, Vizard, Wetenhall, Williams, M, Wood and Wright

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services Manager, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

1

MINUTES

The minutes of the Ordinary meeting of the Council held on 17 December 2024 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as correct.

The minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of the Council held on 9 January 2025 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as correct.

2

OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Lord Mayor advised that he had attended the following:

- Filipino Community Association Christmas Party;
- Grandisson Service at the Cathedral
- was involved with the Kings Award for Enterprise Presentation;
- Butler Service at @34 Restaurant in aid of Force;
- Councillor Richard Branston's Aldermanship Ceremony;
- Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January;
- CoLab to meet HM the Queen Camilla; and
- Year of the Snake Hongkonger Celebrations along with the Chief Executive.

The Lord Mayor conveyed sad news of the death of former Councillor John Landers and sent condolences from the Council to Councillor Wardle on the recent death of his mother.

3

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Lord Mayor reported the receipt of one question from a member of the public.

Question from NP to Councillor Vizard

“Please could Exeter Council follow the lead of 34 towns and cities worldwide, including Edinburgh, Belfast, Norwich, Exmouth, Haywards Heath, Lambeth by endorsing the Plant Based Treaty and developing a plant-based food strategy to help to normalise and expand access to plant-based foods.”

Response – Councillor Vizard

“In December 2022 this Council passed a motion committing to have plant-based food at internal meetings and this is due for review. Many thanks for bringing the Plant Based Treaty to our attention, it looks an interesting initiative, and we will look into this further with our partners across Exeter.”

In a supplementary question the member of the public asked if the Portfolio Holder would meet with the Plant-Based Community Team to which he agreed.

4

PLANNING COMMITTEE - 16 DECEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Planning Committee 16 December 2024 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Planning Committee of 16 December 2024 be received.

5

PLANNING COMMITTEE - 13 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Planning Committee of 13 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 2 Planning application no. 24/0911/mdo - the Harlequin Centre, Paul Street, Exeter EX4 3TT**, Councillor Read asked what the £2 million upfront for affordable housing would be invested in and Councillor Palmer asked what specific effort the Council was making to provide social and affordable housing in the city centre. Councillor Knott responded stating that these were not Planning issues but rather matters for the Executive to consider.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Planning Committee of 13 January 2025 be received.

6

PLANNING COMMITTEE - 27 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Planning Committee 27 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 9 Planning Application no. 23/1007/out - Water Lane (South), Exeter, EX2 8BZ**, Councillor Moore asked how the Planning Committee considered the lack of affordable housing in the Water Lane application. Councillor Knott responded stating that the Planning Committee had come to a unanimous decision having seen and heard the presentation and hearing from the developer that further detail would be brought forward in the future.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Planning Committee 27 January 2025 be received.

7

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 27 NOVEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee 27 November 2024 were presented by the Deputy Chair, Councillor Jobson and taken as read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held 27 November 2024 be received.

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 28 NOVEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 28 November 2024 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Parkhouse, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 42 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order No. 20**, Councillor Read asked for clarity about the direction of travel regarding moving away from fossil fuel powered vehicles. The Leader responded stating that there were a number of decisions to be taken and divesting out of fossil fuels would be the preferred option but procurement processes must be followed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 28 November 2024 be received.

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 30 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 30 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Parkhouse, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 49 Update on Exeter Community Lottery first year of operation**, Councillor Moore asked if the issue raised of 52p not 60p in the pound going to good causes would be investigated as a matter of urgency. Councillor Vizard as Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the Community Lottery advised that officers, , were reviewing the issue as a matter of urgency and would report back to scrutiny.

In respect of **Minute No. 47 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order No. 20**, Councillor Wetenhall asked if electric vehicles would be purchased as the budget meeting suggested not. The Leader stated that he would endeavour to get an answer outside the meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 30 January 2025 be received.

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 5 DECEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee of 5 December 2024 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Pole, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 49 City Wide Net Zero programme of work and update on delivery**, Councillor Harding asked if the Portfolio Holder could confirm if there was a deadline for the item on active travel for those with a disability to be heard by the Transport Working Group. Councillor Vizard committed to check the schedule for Transport Member Working Group and respond outside the meeting.

In respect of **Minute No. 49 City Wide Net Zero programme of work and update on delivery**, Councillor Moore asked if it was sufficient to wait for the grid to decarbonise. Councillor Vizard responded stating that there were many actions and challenges but that the university was top in the world for this type of work and that the Council would prioritise securing a net zero budget for the years ahead and look to increase its outward-looking approach.

RESOLVED that this minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee of 5 December 2024 be received.

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 23 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee of 23 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Pole, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 58 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order No. 20**, Councillor Moore asked how the energy plant would contribute to net zero ambitions given that it would be reliant on fossil fuels. Councillor Vizard responded stating that a presentation had been given last week and the potential of the energy plant would be huge and without it the same could not be achieved. This would remain a low carbon project and organisations would otherwise have to invest hugely themselves.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee held on 23 January 2025 be received.

EXETER HARBOUR BOARD - 12 DECEMBER 2024

The minutes of the Exeter harbour Board of 12 December 2024 were presented by Councillor Rolstone, in the absence of the Chair, and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 103 Exeter Port User Group Update** Councillor Read asked what more the Council might need to do given that Dawlish Warren was in danger and what had been learnt from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and Teignbridge as the Harbour Master had met with them.

In respect of **Minute No. 106 Harbour Master's Report** Councillor Read asked what had happened following advice from the fire service that best practice would be to leave the ferry which had been alight to burnt out in situ.

Councillor Rolstone responded stating that these issues could be addressed at the next committee.

In respect of **Minute No. 103 Exeter Port User Group Update**, Councillor Banyard asked if the Portfolio Holder would obtain detailed information from the Environment Agency on their plan for Dawlish Warren and if that could be made public. The Leader responded stating that it would not be for the Portfolio Holder to contact the Environment Agency but rather the reverse but that the message regarding there being a plan would be shared with the Portfolio Holder.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Exeter Harbour Board held on 12 December 2024 be received.

LICENSING COMMITTEE - 28 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Licensing Committee of 28 January 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Snow and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 7 Licensing Fees and Charges for 2025/26**, Councillor Mitchell asked if the Licensing Committee would consider making a recommendation to Government regarding the upper limit for Gambling licenses given that this had been reached a number of years ago. The Leader responded stating that he would discuss this with Directors.

Councillor Snow moved and Councillor Begley seconded the recommendation and following a vote, the recommendation was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Licensing Committee held on 28 January 2025 be received.

14

STRATA - JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 28 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Strata – Joint Executive of 28 January 2025 were presented by the Leader and taken as read.

The Leader drew attention to **Minute No. Strata Business Plan 2025/2026** which contained a recommendation to adopt the Strata Business Plan 2025/26.

In respect of **Minute No. Strata Business Plan 2025/2026**, Councillor Mitchell asked if there would be an opportunity for early review of the Plan given local government re-organisation. The Leader responded that business as usual must continue despite any uncertainty.

In respect of **Minute No. 6 Strata Budget and Performance October 2025/26**, Councillor Wood asked if there would be savings as a unitary authority. The Leader responded stating that savings were targeted all the time and that the 2019 decision to set up Strata had been a good one as in the main the service was good.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendation of the Strata Business Plan 2025/26 as set out in the report and following a unanimous vote was **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED that the Strata Business Plan 2025-2026 be approved.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Strata – Joint Executive held on 28 January 2025 be received.

15

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 14 JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the Executive Committee of 14 January 2025 were presented by the Leader and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 4 Matter referred by Scrutiny Committees**, Councillor Moore asked if commercial use of public assets could be included in the scope of the review and whether the Council could identify meanwhile uses for community groups where box-shifting was concerned. The Leader responded that he would not be prescriptive on the use of public assets and he would mention this to the team when appropriate and the Council would be open to looking at options for meanwhile uses but must be mindful of maintenance and leases.

In respect of **Minute No. 6 2025/26 Budget Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a vote were **CARRIED**.

In respect of **Minute No. 9 Review and Update of Exeter City Council's Companies, Alternative Delivery Models and Charities**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations.

Councillor Moore moved and was seconded by Councillor Mitchell an amendment to the recommendations in the following terms:

Exeter Business Centre Limited

RECOMMENDED that Council approve:

(2) The initiation of a review of Exeter Business Centre to consider how it may best meet the objectives set for it when originally established, options for its future and the role of Council as Shareholder.

In presenting the amendment Councillor Moore stated that this would ensure that a review looked at all options.

Councillor Mitchell spoke in support of the amendment.

Councillor Patrick spoke against the amendment stating that the substantive recommendation did not exclude the possibility of closing the premises if it was not viable.

The Leader as mover of the substantive recommendation spoke against the amendment making the following points:

- he did not believe the recommendation would narrow the options for the review;
- there had been and would continue to be engagement with the Business Centre; and
- he would wait to see what the officer's report contained.

The Leader did not accept the amendment and following a vote was NOT CARRIED.

Councillor Banyard asked if the £1.5million raised through Science Park buying of land being converted to shares rather than cash would reduce the percentage Exeter City Council held which stood at 20%. The Leader committed to giving a detailed response outside the meeting.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Executive Committee held on 14 January 2025 be received.

16

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 4 FEBRUARY 2025

The Lord Mayor stated that the recommendations seen at Minute Numbers 18 to 21 inclusive, would be considered and voted on as part of the budget setting meeting of the Council on 25 February 2025.

The minutes of the Executive Committee of 4 February 2025 were presented by the Leader and taken as read.

In respect of **Minute No. 14 Amendment to the Procurement Contract Procedure Rules**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

In respect of **Minute No. 15 Annual Pay Policy Statement 2025/26**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

In respect of **Minute No. 16 Gender Pay Gap Report**, the Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

In respect of **Minute No. 17 Updated Local Development Scheme 2025**, the Leader presented the report. Councillor Moore asked when there would be an SPD regarding co-living and the Leader agreed to respond outside the meeting.

In respect of **Minute No. 22 Local Council Tax Support Scheme**, Councillor Harding asked what could be done to identify more households eligible for Pension Credit. Councillor Asvachin, as Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services responded stating that the team had undertaken work in January to make contact with residents, which had an 80% contact rate, and there would be further follow-up.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendation which following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

In respect of **Minute No. 23 Household Support Fund Scheme 7**, the Leader presented the report and during debate Councillor Moore stated that she supported the fund but asked how support could be provided given that many residents were living in poverty, rather than the crisis management provided by this fund. Councillor Vizard, as Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities responded highlighting the work of Wellbeing Exeter in tackling social and health issues and also the community grants scheme.

Councillor Wright agreed with Councillor Moore in regard to their shock at the areas of deprivation within the city but stated that targeting support where possible could be seen and committed to consider a briefing on the areas where this work could be seen.

In summing up the Leader stated that there had been discussion when this was debated at the Executive Committee and he wished to reassure opposition leaders that this was not specific to Exeter but rather a nationwide theme which had been raised in meetings with Ministers.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendation which following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Executive Committee held 4 February 2025 be received.

17 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 8**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 8, the following question was put by Councillor Wetenhall to the Leader:

“The Council's Charter says we will publish results detailing the responses received and explaining how we have taken these into account in arriving at a decision. This does not appear to be happening in a reasonable timescale. What does the Leader believe is a reasonable timescale for the publication of consultation results, after the consultation closes?”

The Leader responded stating that the timing of publishing responses to public consultation would vary according to the nature of each consultation activity and he was guided by officers on this. He would expect consultation responses to be published on our website around the time any related decision was likely to be taken. For example, the results of both the Budget consultation and the new

Corporate Plan Priorities consultation which closed in mid-January 2025 were both published on the Council Website on 4th February 2025 to align with the budget setting process.

Consistency in the approach to publishing consultation feedback reports was a priority for the Strategic Director for People and Communities now responsible for ensuring the spirit of the consultation Charter was met. To ensure there are sufficient resources to enable this, the Director had redesigned resources to create a new post of Consultation and Engagement Manager reporting to the Head of Service Customer and Communities and Ben Langston had started in this new role on 10th February 2025. The Director had assured the Leader that a priority for the new role would be to ensure that consultation feedback reports were uploaded on the Council website in a timely and consistent manner.

In a supplementary question Councillor Wetenhall asked how the failure identified by internal audit was taken into account and would this be part of the remit of the new Consultation and Engagement Manager. The Leader responded stating that he was satisfied that the Council would carry out what was in the Charter and that responses would be taken into account in the making of decisions.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 8 the following question was put by Councillor Banyard to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services:

According to the minutes of the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group for South Street and Cathedral Green, a representative from St Petrock's stated that Exeter has 20-30 rough sleepers on any given night, yet the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) only provides 8 additional beds. When temperatures drop to freezing, how does the council ensure no one is left without shelter in severe weather?

Councillor Asvachin responded stating that the estimates of actual numbers of clients rough sleeping in Exeter on any given night could vary and the figure quoted may include clients who used St Petrock's services for showers, food etc. and may not be rough sleeping, albeit in precarious accommodation situations. The monthly data the Council return to the MHCLG, the intelligence from our commissioned Outreach services of Julian House and our annual count figure continues to confirm numbers were in the low teens.

SWEP was limited by the amount of accommodation the Council and partners had to offer. Some clients would regularly refuse an offer to come in and some clients with accommodation still chose to sleep rough. If a client wanted to come in during cold weather of course the team would do all they could to try to find them a bed.

In a supplementary question Councillor Banyard asked if there were any plans to increase SWEP beds and Councillor Asvachin responded that the team were hoping to work with St Petrock's and other partners to see what could be done to ensure no-one was left without accommodation.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.26 pm)

Chair