

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 March 2025

Present:

Councillor Josie Parkhouse (Chair)
Councillors Rees, Begley, Darling, Harding, Holland, Miller-Boam, Moore, Patrick, Pole and Wardle

Apologies:

Councillors Fullam, Hussain and Read

Also present:

Senior Housing Needs Team Lead, Head of Service - Housing, Head of Service - Customers and Communities, Strategic Director for People and Communities, Strategic Director of Operations, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Head of Service - City Centre and Net Zero, Legal Advisor and Democratic Services Officer (LS)

In attendance as Portfolio Holders:

Councillors Asvachin, Bialyk, Vizard, Williams, R.

53 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 30 January 2025 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

54 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

55 Questions from the Public under Standing Order No. 19

The Chair reported that there were no questions from the public.

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

The Chair reported that there were no questions submitted in advance from Members and invited questions to the Portfolio Holders present in accordance with Standing Order No. 20.

Councillor Vizard, Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities responded to a question from a Member making the point that he considered how charities who did not receive any money could be supported and asked the Head of Service Customers and Communities to respond. The Head of Service Customers and Communities stated that 'Gatherwell' had a suite of marketing tools which would be used.

Councillor Vizard also responded to a further question from a Member stating that the website would be updated with the additional information provided following the previous meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee.

57 Scrutiny Work Plan

The Chair proposed that this item be heard next rather than in the order it appeared in the agenda.

The Chair reminded Members that following discussion at the last meeting the item "Performance and service provided to customers and stakeholders of Stagecoach Southwest in Exeter" had been passed to the Scrutiny Programme Board to determine at which committee it is best heard.

The Chair explained that there were two proformas to be scoped with ASB in city centre being the first and she invited Councillor Mitchell, as proposer to come to the table as he had submitted a request under Standing Order No. 44 to attend and speak on the item.

Councillor Mitchell in presenting the request stated that the item was as outlined on the proforma and that he would suggest that the committee look at causations, how it presents itself in Exeter, was there anything unique to the city and look at possible solutions.

The Chair stated that similar to the previous theme of safety of women at night she would suggest that the whole committee address this topic so as not to exclude anyone.

A Member suggested that it may be useful to invite the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Wright in order to better understand the situation.

The Scrutiny Programme Board could also discuss invitees, and July was considered a good time to schedule this item as this would coincide with almost a year of the community safety team which would be extended and linked to Devon and Cornwall hotspot policing.

The Chair clarified that the issue to be considered on a proforma would look at the city centre, but a wider area could be considered at a later date.

The Strategic Director People and Communities made the following comments in support of scoping the item:

- the Strategic Director for Place would be the relevant officer;
- she cautioned against correlating street attachment and rough sleeping with ASB;
- there was a library of international evidence about cause and effect, reports of which could be made available to help identify what would be expected from partners;
- she could provide information about the organisation who commissions drug and alcohol services.

Councillor Moore suggested that witnesses were ask the following:

- What were the key things they offer which are unique;
- What they thought the Council could do better or stop doing to impact ASB and work better in partnership with them.

The Chair suggested that a small number of key witnesses were asked to give a short, written report and present on ASB in the city centre, its causes and possible solutions, in the first instance, to include Police, InExeter, the university, drug/alcohol services.

Following a vote the scoping of the item on ASB in the city centre was AGREED unanimously.

The Head of Service – City Centre and Net Zero suggested that the InExeter boundary be used as this was well-defined.

In scoping the item on Key People Activity across the Council the Strategic Director for People and Communities made the following points:

- Last year the Chief Executive had commissioned a review of HR;
- Information had been taken from the review to create an HR Improvement Plan which it would be helpful for scrutiny to look at;
- The timeframe set out was a welcome opportunity to set out what the review had detailed, the actions taken and things which remained outstanding;
- The new Head of Service had been in post for one month so the time frame given would give time for delivery of the Improvement Plan to be pushed forward;
- Use of temporary staff had not been part of the review but could look to share information in relation to whether this had made things easier or produced budget savings.

Following a vote the scoping of the item on Key People Activity Across the Council was AGREED unanimously.

The Chair proposed seconded by Councillor Rees that the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee approve the Work Plan as submitted with Portfolio holder report for July removed and tenants Passivhaus item moved to September. Following a vote, the recommendation was CARRIED unanimously.

58 **Portfolio Holder Report - Portfolio for City Management (Cllr Ruth Williams)**

The Portfolio Holder for City Management, Councillor Ruth Williams, presented her report which was taken as read.

The Portfolio Holder, Strategic Director for People and Communities, Strategic Director for Operations and Head of Service Operations responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- the government website issued advice and guidance to packaging producers regarding the new legislation, but the related funding remained unclear;
- investment in the MRF would improve the recycling rate and Exeter was in the top 10% for residual waste and the Council was good at selling some recyclables but this maybe affected by the new legislation;
- reduction in the amount of waste produced remained the aim;
- the tender for work on the Heavitree paddling pools had been unsuccessful as the funds on offer were insufficient for the work required, stage 2 consultation was planned and being designed;
- electric vehicles for food waste did not currently exist and the position was the same for large street cleansing vehicles;
- the cost of an electric waste collection vehicle was £0.5million with an equivalent diesel costing £0.25million but shorter leases would be considered;
- it was hoped that in 2026 electric vehicles could operate for 2.5 days before charging was needed;
- whole fleet electrification would be difficult to manage due to infrastructure and scheduling given the capacity of the charge, how far the vehicles travel and how heavy they are. Growth in stages allowed learning to be had;

- food waste rounds could be adjusted rather than extra vehicles obtained in order to maximise efficiency;
- recruitment was not a single service-area issue and a number of routes in were being considered and expertise could be difficult to source;
- apprenticeships were a key area being considered within the HR Improvement Plan and it was acknowledged that the current website did not always make it easy to make a job application or take into account a wide range of needs;
- video applications were being trialled as well as looking into methods used by other councils;
- a strategy in regard to career pathways would be brought forward;
- consultants would be appointed in the near future and would support procurement with regard to the MRF. The building and infrastructure would go ahead in tandem and an update to Members would be provided in the summer;
- recycling rates were not the most important metric, reducing waste produced was;
- manufacturers using less packaging should help reduce the amount of waste collected and the amount the council recycled;
- the recycling rate could be improved by including garden waste collection which could be misleading;
- education was still needed to help residents to understand as there remained residents who did not recycle, including some students who struggled to understand the system.

59 **Update on Street Cleaning**

The Head of Service Operations presented the report on the Update on Street Cleaning and responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- that a methodology which maintained objectivity was used to select sample roads. This involved a twelve-month rolling programme where wards were selected cyclically with 5% being re-inspections for consistency;
- Grade C issues were addressed between 24 and 48 hours and cleared and those areas would be re-inspected within the next month, on a different day and time. It was possible that these could be one-off issues or not. If there was aggregated or accumulated waste, then additional solutions could be considered;
- volunteer and community litter-picking schemes were part of the solution and measures would be seen as adequate if maintained by volunteers;
- street cleansing was responsible for litter and detritus arising on the kerb however there could be biomatter and metals from vehicles and Devon County Council(DCC) would be responsible for drainage and their programme of works did not correspond with that of the city council;
- street parking was an issue and there was no capacity to suspend parking across the whole city in order to cleanse. However, DCC would permit 24-hour parking suspension if there were particular issues;
- DCC was responsible for weeds, but some may inadvertently be cleared when deep cleaning. Persistent issues would not be addressed by the city council;
- the standard litter form on the council website should be used to report issues;
- all litter bins not in play areas were for mixed use, meaning that dog foul could be put in and the waste to energy plant would process this;
- self-compacting litter bins were being trialled at Bromhams Farm, and these could be useful in rural communities and Valley Parks as they had a larger capacity;
- there was work to be done on education and to get schools involved at an early stage;

- further data collation was required, and the online forms would provide this but current lack of digitisation meant it was more difficult to gather evidence and data;
- enforcement for littering was difficult as those dropping litter must be seen to do so;
- fly-tipping was a waste issue rather than street cleansing and related to large bulky items;
- there was a programme of work with Devon County Council and other districts with regard to waste collection and fly-tipping. Cameras were being considered in problematic areas.

60 **Six-monthly update on Homelessness Strategy**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Customer Services, Councillor Asvachin, presented the report which was taken as read.

The Portfolio Holder, Senior Housing Needs Team Lead, Head of Service – Housing and Strategic Director for People and Communities responded to questions from Members in the following terms:

- targets to end rough sleeping were aspirational and it could be more realistic to end rough sleeping as a norm;
- terms of reference for a mid-term policy review, later in the year, were being written;
- the Howell Road pods were operational with two of the four successfully occupied albeit with some repairs required;
- the portfolio holder was working with St Petrock's and the methodology for the count was on the agenda;
- the date of the count was countywide and agreed with partners and reassurance was given over accuracy as the team carried out weekly counts and monthly returns to Government with an average of 13 reported at present;
- officers had carried out extensive work responding to the consultation and working with the LGA on a lobbying piece of work, which had included briefings for local MPs. There was a consistent message across the country;
- the number of people living in campervans were unknown at present but would be obtained;
- the number of people who had approached the Council to make homelessness applications was 2023/24 1053, 2024/25 1079;
- it was difficult to say if attrition rates had an impact;
- trend data would be provided in future;
- the outreach team were commissioned to reach out to those sleeping in vehicles;
- the need for toilets overnight would be noted in the review of services;
- the council worked with Public Health and Devon County Council at a strategic level regarding drug use and were operationally co-located with a range of other services. Identification of those at risk was undertaken on a weekly basis. There was a high number of drug-related deaths, but the majority were housed;
- the outreach team were trained and able to respond to those experiencing overdose;
- the impact of interventions would be brought to the portfolio Holder; and
- individuals may have a range of types of contact with the Council, but outreach was face to face.

61 **Results of 2025/26 Budget Consultation**

The Strategic Directors for People and Communities and Place presented the report and responded to questions from Member in the following terms:

- On reflection the market research was carried out by a professional company using representative samples including young people, but the online survey reached an older demographic which was interesting;
- Whichever methodology was used in future the same EDI information requests would be made in order to build a data set around knowledge and insights;
- Specific attempts were made to engage with young people with care experience through Devon County Council users' groups but there had been no interest which would be reflected on, and other methodology would be considered;
- All the information would be on the website;
- This was early in the journey of objectivity about engagement with citizens as this was the second of this type of survey and knowledge and data would be built;
- Professionals were used to advise but there was more still to do;
- It would be up to Members how this was used in policy;
- There would be consultation on the impact of not accepting cash payments and this would focus on those identified who might be most disadvantaged including taking information from research on digital exclusion and feedback would be provided to Members before a final decision was taken.

One Member felt that the summary page could misrepresent the data held within the report. They felt that 3 of the 5 areas there was a clear priority – People feeling safe in the city, cleaning streets and reducing litter and a well-run Council, however, this was not the same for People and Homes. Furthermore, the online group put museums, theatre and art as a second choice, yet this showed lowest in the summary.

Another Member stated that they were assured that officers would bring proposals and that results of this type of surveys would inform ideas and strategies in future.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.35 pm

Chair