Corporate Plan 25-28 consultation: Second Stage Findings

Context

Information gathered from a Residents Survey and Budget Consultation exercises carried out in 2024 Both these exercises used market research techniques and the data from them can be found here on the Council's website, (Budget consultation results - Exeter City Council), helped Executive Members of the Council to develop the new Corporate Plan for 2025 to 2028. The draft plan was subject to further consultation with the public and partner organisations during March and April 2025. This was done to capture the views of the target audiences to understand how the four priority areas of the proposed Corporate Plan would positively impact them. This report presents the findings of the survey.

Quantitative Information

The below points summarise the quantitative aspects captured from the council run survey. The survey was available on the council website and promoted through social media and emails to networks and partner databases. A total of 53 respondents completed the survey. The key demographic information related to those respondents is displayed below:

Respondent demographics	Percentages
Connection to Exeter	• 52% live in Exeter • 33% both live and work in Exeter • 12% live outside of Exeter but work in the city • 4% lives and work outside of Exeter, but regularly visit the city
Age	• 65-74 (13) 26% • 55-64 (11) 22% • 35-44 (8) 16% • 45-54 (8) 16% • 75+ (6) 12% • 25-34 (1) 2% • Prefer not to say (3) 6%
Gender	• 52% female • 44% male • 4% preferred not to say
Ethnicity	• 92% of respondents were from white backgrounds • 2 % were of a mixed ethnic background • 6% preferred not to say

Respondent demographics	Percentages
Long-Term Health Condition/Disability	• 61% did **not** had a long-term health condition • 35% had a long-term health condition • 4% preferred not to say
ECC Housing Services Tenant	• 96% were not a tenant of ECC housing services • 4% preferred not to say

Summary of Respondent Demographics

Demographically, the survey data largely captured the views of older citizens and those from a White ethnic background. Very few young people participated and involvement from those identifying themselves as being from a non-White ethnic background was limited. Additionally, the views of people who are a tenant of ECC housing services were not represented in the 53 participants. Therefore, the data captured – whilst valid – has limitations in that representative views of the entirety of Exeter's population are not fully represented.

Summary of Qualitative Information

Below is a summary of the qualitative information gathered from the survey, which was specifically linked to the four priorities of the proposed Corporate Plan 2025 to 2028.

1. Focus Area: Local Economy

Both positive and negative perceptions were expressed in the survey in relation to the local economy. Positives are outlined below:

- Better retail and leisure options will have an incentive to visit the City Centre more often, reducing the need to travel to other towns/cities.
- Better and wider choice of independent shops and shopping options; increased footfall; better shopping experience; vibrant and thriving high street/city centre; economic growth.
- Live in a city people are proud of; better place to live and shop; make Exeter a more attractive city if achieved.

Negative perceptions, as captured by the survey, are outlined below:

- Independent shops are often niche, expensive and may not increase footfall.
- Some have stated that outcomes and proposed evidence of success are too vague and not measurable.
- Some people do not / no longer visit the City Centre and prefer online shopping; adding that rent, rates, taxes, and NI are high and unaffordable for businesses.

- Some respondents expressed negative views towards the proposals, indicating they are unrealistic and not achievable.
- Car parking costs is a significant barrier to people shopping in the City Centre.

2. Focus Area: People

Both positive and negative perceptions were given in the survey in relation to people. Positives are outlined below:

- Vibrant culture offer makes Exeter a better, healthier, and interesting place to live; more things to do; creates jobs; attracts businesses; better prosperity.
- Live in a city people are proud of; better place to live and shop; make Exeter a more attractive city if achieved.
- Better city can lead to skilled people and their families moving into the area.
- Make Exeter City Centre thriving, diverse and resilient.

Negative perceptions, as captured by the survey, are outlined below:

- Some have stated that outcomes and proposed evidence of success are too vague and not measurable.
- A common theme within the survey responses was people had safety concerns especially at night. This was quite prominent especially with women.
- Spending is the only way to monitor impact on ‘vibrant culture and tourism offer,’ no measure on impact to people’s lives or local economy.

3. Focus Area: Homes

Both positive and negative perceptions were expressed in the survey in relation to homes. Positives are outlined below:

- More/better housing can enable people working in Exeter, but living outside of Exeter, to live within the city.
- More housing will reduce street sleepers; fewer homeless people; leading to nicer environment to be in.
- Better city can lead to skilled people and their families moving into the area.
- Reduce housing waiting lists.
- More secure population.

Negative perceptions, as captured by the survey, are outlined below:

- Some respondents were critical expressing they are unhappy about the level of new-build housing development feeling this is excessive due to reduction in greenspace, for example parts of Grace Road Playing Fields being sold off for development and overdevelopment/congestion.

- This is supported with the perception that facilities people need – like hospitals, dentists, police, recycling, GP services, schools, parking – cannot keep up with the increased demand due to higher population levels.
- Some respondents indicated that more housing does not necessarily mean lower rents and there needs to be better focus on building homes that are fit for purpose, rather than just small co-living pods.
- Some respondents were unhappy about purpose-built student accommodation.

4. Focus Area: Sustainable Environment

Both positive and negative perceptions were expressed in the survey in relation to a sustainable environment. Positives are outlined below:

- Becoming carbon neutral, if achieved, has positive perceptions like better air quality; a greener, healthier, and safer environment to reside in and enjoy.
- There were additional comments that green spaces and allotments being maintained would enhance this.

In terms of negative aspects, some respondents indicated that the idea of carbon neutral / Net Zero is not realistic to implement, citing the following aspects:

- Public transport and cycling routes were criticised by respondents.
- Car parking costs are perceived as a significant barrier to people shopping in the City Centre.
- UK global emissions at 1% will have negligible effect on the rest of the world.
- Increased pressure and cost to decarbonise.
- Some thought proposals were unrealistic and not achievable.
- Carbon neutral too ambitious by 2030 with some citing historical ambitions not being achieved, so questioning if it will be achieved this time.
- Some believe the council does not have the finances to maintain green spaces to help become carbon neutral.
- Excessive costs to implement.

Conclusion

Respondents did not suggest changes to the Corporate Plan priorities, but nevertheless both supported and criticised aspects. As is often expected with open surveys of this nature, the findings were quite mixed and varied in relation to the City Council's Corporate Plan. Both enthusiasm and criticism were received throughout the survey.

Some key themes are outlined below:

- In relation to the **local economy,** respondents perceived a varied and diverse City Centre as a positive thing. However, the viability of achieving this, especially from an economic perspective, was questioned.

- The **people** aspect, in relation to a vibrant cultural offer, was mainly seen as a positive thing in terms of people being healthier and having more interesting things to do. However, safety concerns, especially for women at night, is a serious factor.

- In terms of **housing,** a higher volume of homes is seen as a positive thing in terms of reducing housing waiting lists and homelessness. However, respondents largely had a negative view about exactly *where* new housing was being built and concerned that green spaces would be lost. Respondents also highlighted infrastructure constraints as more housing means a larger population needing existing services (GP's, schools etc.) that are not necessarily increasing capacity.

- Outcomes relating to **sustainable environment** received the most critical feedback in terms of public transport and cycle routes not being what people want; people needing their vehicles yet car parking a financial challenge; pressure and cost to decarbonise; Exeter's efforts alone having minimal global impact; viability to achieve etc. However, there were positive perceptions like better air quality and greener/healthier space, but some people felt it is more about *if* this can be achieved rather than *when.*