EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Community Engagement Working Party

Notes of the meeting held at 4pm on Tuesday 4th August 2026 in the Town Hall Committee Room

Present

Dianne Conduit	DC	ETC Councillor (Chair)
Nicky Nicholls	NN	ETC Councillor
Daniel Wilson	DW	ETC Councillor
Louise Venables	LV	ETC Councillor
Steve Gazzard	SG	ETC Councillor
Tim Dumper	TD	ETC Councillor
Andrew Woodward	AW	ETC Councillor
Graham Deasy	GD	ETC Councillor (ex-officio)
Lisa Bowman	LB	ETC Town Clerk
Mark Devin	MD	ETC Deputy Clerk
Lisa Greenway	LG	ETC notetaker

Apologies

Aurora Bailey	AB	ETC Councillor
Brian Bailey	BB	ETC Councillor

1. Election of Chair

LB welcomed everyone to the meeting and requested nominations for the election of the chair of this working party. NN nominated DC, and this was seconded by LV. No further nominations were received. Members were asked to vote, and DC was duly elected as chair.

2. Welcome, introduction and apologies

DC welcomed members to the meeting and apologies were noted.

3. Community Engagement: Current Position and Strategic Direction: Recap of the TAFF's concluding report on community engagement, establish a shared understanding of what community engagement means for Exmouth Town Council, and identify priorities for future development

Following the work that emerged from the TAFF, DC prepared a number of discussion papers, which were circulated with the agenda, to help members establish a shared understanding of what community engagement should mean for Exmouth Town Council.

SG explained that the purpose of the Working Party is to consider how the Council communicates effectively with all residents, regardless of age, ethnicity or background. It is important to identify organisations and sections of the community in Exmouth that the Council is not currently reaching.

NN commented that the discussion papers were excellent and provided a clear definition of Exmouth Town Council's role in engagement, listening and accountability. NN added that a

Community Engagement Officer should only be appointed when the Council has first decided how it wished to engage with residents.

TD agreed that community engagement is important and said the Council needs a framework to guide its approach going forward. With Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) underway, there remains uncertainty about what a future Unitary Council will look like and which duties may transfer. Residents are often unclear about the role of councillors and the functions of the Town Council.

AW asked members whether they believed a Community Engagement Officer was needed. Members expressed mixed views on whether such a role would be required in the future.

LB stated that the Council first needs to define what it would expect a Community Engagement Officer to do. The Council already engages with a wide range of residents and organisations, with officers including Zoey and Rons regularly liaising with external bodies and members of the public. Any Community Engagement Officer would require a clearly defined role, and affordability would need to be considered, particularly in light of LGR. For example, if the Council takes on responsibility for public toilets and other services, this will create additional costs. As responsibilities increase, the precept is likely to rise, making effective communication with residents even more important.

GD advised that the Council should identify both what it currently does well and what gaps exist in its community engagement activities. Councillors should make greater efforts to attend public events and engage directly with residents. A Community Engagement Officer could support councillors in this work. DW agreed. GD added that many residents remain unclear about the responsibilities of Exmouth Town Council.

DC emphasised that listening to residents is essential, particularly understanding their concerns and expectations. It is important for residents to understand what the Town Council is responsible for and what matters it can influence and any issues raised with councillors should always be followed through.

LB noted that Exmouth has a population of approximately 40,000 residents and questioned the most effective ways of reaching such a large community. The Neighbourhood Plan process provided an example of extensive community engagement and identified resident's aspirations for the town. As the current surveys are now several years old, a refresh of the Neighbourhood Plan may be required. The Council previously employed a Neighbourhood Plan Officer, and further engagement work would provide valuable evidence on resident's priorities. LB highlighted that the Neighbourhood Plan is independent of LGR and remains an important document. Previous engagement included surveys delivered to every household and ward-based meetings with councillors.

TD referred to the recent Brixington election, where voter turnout was approximately 24%, suggesting this reflected wider public perceptions and engagement levels.

LB informed members that the Council currently holds Silver Status under the Local Council Award Scheme and would like to achieve Gold Status in the future. However, there is currently insufficient capacity to undertake the work required. GD asked whether councillors could assist in progressing the Gold Status application. LB responded that much of the preparatory work had already been completed but a missing component is a strategic plan with measurable objectives and action points. LB did not feel that this should fall exclusively to the Town Clerk to develop. The plan also needs to be user-friendly, clearly setting out what the Council does

and its future objectives. LB also suggested the idea of workshops to bring the strategic plan to fruition.

LV suggested that increased engagement with faith groups and schools would be beneficial. LB agreed and highlighted the importance of ensuring the Council's Working Parties align with the aspirations and objectives identified within the Strategic Plan and Neighbourhood Plan.

LV queried who decides the town's priorities, LB explained that the resident surveys used to inform priorities are now around five years old and may need to be repeated. Engagement methods could include drop-in events, paper surveys and workshops. The results would help shape both the Neighbourhood Plan and Working Party priorities, ensuring they reflect resident's aspirations.

DC stated that if the Council wishes to raise awareness of Exmouth Town Council, it must empower local people and provide them with support, LB referred to the need for a clear roadmap for future work.

NN questioned whether the Strategic Plan falls within the remit of this Working Party, DC responded that, to ensure alignment with Full Council priorities, the Working Party should have oversight of the relevant part of the action plan. LB added that all Working Parties would contribute to action plans relevant to their areas of responsibility. DC concluded that this Working Party's work programme should focus on the community engagement elements of the Strategic Plan.

NN queried who would have the capacity to take this work forward, TD commented that the outcome of future elections should not adversely affect community engagement if residents are properly empowered and have a clear understanding of the Town Council's role. TD asked whether Chetna could lead this work. LB replied that Chetna currently works three days per week and is likely to be heavily involved in LGR-related matters, making it unlikely she would have sufficient capacity. Instead, the Council could consider appointing an external facilitator to develop the Strategic Plan and undertake community consultation. Funding could be allocated for this purpose, and three quotations could be sought.

SG emphasised the importance of ensuring any consultation is presented in a clear and simple format.

Agreed Action

- Obtain three quotations from external facilitators to support the development of the Strategic Plan and associated community consultation process.
- Ensure future consultation and engagement materials are clear, accessible and easy for residents to understand.

4. Engagement with Young People: To consider how the Council can better engage with children and young people, understand their priorities, and increase opportunities for participation in local decision-making and community initiatives; (to include verbal update from initial youth council exploratory meeting)

The Exmouth Youth Focus Opportunity Brief and Young Adults Summary was circulated to members prior to the meeting.

DC presented a list of priorities focused on young adults, highlighting the student perspective of university life. Key themes included understanding which organisations young people feel

comfortable joining, ensuring they feel welcomed within volunteer groups, and fostering a sense of belonging within the community.

A proposal was discussed to establish a self-managing youth group that would enable young people to develop valuable skills, gain practical work experience to enhance their CVs, and contribute to the formation of a Youth Council.

LB reported that Okehampton Town Council's Youth Council continues to grow successfully and is going from strength to strength. Several organisations, including Esteem Team, Open Door, Heads Up, Exmouth Community College, and Hive, are working together to consult with young people and explore opportunities for creating a local Youth Council.

LV asked whether a voluntary scheme for young people could be endorsed, in response, LB noted that there is already a youth worker in post through SPACE. In addition, work is underway to explore whether Exeter College offers a suitable course that could be aligned with an apprenticeship programme. This is currently being investigated to identify potential opportunities and support that could be provided.

LB also highlighted the work of the Poverty Truth Commission Network, which brings together people with lived experience of poverty and decision-makers, including the Poverty Commissioner, to influence change. There are aspirations to establish a local Poverty Truth Commission, and the network is currently seeking another town to participate. This may present an opportunity for involvement locally.

It was suggested that Exmouth Town Council could provide practical support, such as meeting rooms or access to laptops, and it was agreed that the Council would be well placed to contribute to and support this initiative.

5. Age Friendly Communities: To explore opportunities for supporting and developing an Age Friendly Community approach in Exmouth, ensuring older residents are able to participate fully in community life and access local opportunities and services

A link to the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities/Centre for Aging was circulated to members prior to the meeting.

DC expressed support for Age Friendly Communities becoming a Dementia Friendly Town and will be working with Councillor Fred Cagill to advance this objective.

6. Community Engagement Action Plan: To identify key actions arising from the discussions and establish responsibilities and timescales

DW highlighted the importance of identifying local businesses that the Council could support through direct engagement. Building trust is key, and businesses need to believe that Exmouth Town Council can either deliver support or signpost them to the appropriate organisation. LB explained that this is already undertaken through the Visit Exmouth website, the Exmouth Town Guide, which has a wide distribution, and through the Tourist Information Service (TIS), which regularly signposts visitors to local businesses.

Regarding the Placemaking Masterplan, LB noted that EDDC currently has no budget available for additional signage, and that brown tourist signs are particularly expensive.

LB also reflected on the Town Management Officer role, which existed until 2018. While the role focused on business engagement and economic development, participation from local businesses was limited, making it difficult to achieve sustained outcomes.

DW observed that businesses often experience increased trade during events held on The Strand. LB acknowledged this but noted that the Town Council also receives numerous complaints from businesses in The Strand when events take place, indicating mixed views on their impact.

DW suggested organising a "Shop Local" weekend to encourage residents and visitors to support local businesses. LB welcomed the idea but suggested that it should be discussed at a separate meeting. LB also highlighted that events require significant staff capacity and resources, limiting the Council's ability to increase the number of events currently delivered.

It was agreed that the forthcoming Strategic Plan process could be used to better understand the needs and expectations of local businesses and identify what support the Town Council can realistically provide.

LB suggested establishing separate focus groups within the working party to gather views from local businesses, older residents and young people. This would help ensure that a broad range of perspectives inform the Strategic Plan.

DC asked for confirmation regarding the upcoming meeting with the town traders, DW confirmed that the meeting is scheduled for Thursday and noted that it would provide an opportunity to gather further information directly from local businesses.

DW also suggested exploring the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS), which provides accredited individuals with limited but targeted powers to help tackle crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour, and the Police and Security App (PAS), an intelligence-sharing platform that allows retailers to report information directly through an app that can be accessed by the police. A representative from PAS will be attending a further meeting of town traders and the scheme is free for the first year and costs £10 per year thereafter.

LB noted that Exmouth Town Council previously funded a shop radio scheme; however, around 80% of participating shops did not actively use the radios. DW advised that a retailers' WhatsApp group is currently operating successfully, although police officers are unable to participate due to operational limitations.

Further discussion took place between LB and DW regarding communication and partnership working between businesses and the police.

LB recalled that the former Town Team organised community street clean-up events involving volunteers and local business owners, who took responsibility for cleaning the areas immediately outside their premises. DW suggested that EDDC is considering using Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which enables local authorities (EDDC) to issue notices requiring landowners or occupiers to improve sites where the condition of land or buildings is adversely affecting the amenity of the area. A specific concern was raised regarding the former Job Centre building, which was described as being in a poor condition and negatively impacting the local environment, DW will follow this up.

Action: Consider the appointment an independent facilitator to support the development of a Strategic Plan. This work will also contribute towards the Council's ambition to achieve Gold Status under the Local Council Award Scheme.

7. Date of next meeting

Members discussed the possibility of meeting on a monthly basis going forward, LB advised that we do not have the office capacity to facilitate monthly meetings at present although 6 weekly meetings may be possible. LG will check Calander dates to schedule a possible meeting in 6 weeks.

The meeting closed at 17.34

.