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Niall Macleod
Exeter Community Forum Steering Group

By email:
niall.macleod@me.com

Please ask for: Joanna Yelland
Direct Dial: 01392 265226
Email: jo.yelland@exeter.gov.uk
Our ref: JY/JW
Your ref:
Date: 4 October 2018

Dear Niall,

Thank you for your email to Dawn Rivers. I am happy to clarify the council position in relation to the four questions you pose:

- 1 - does Exeter City Council support the work of ECF?
- 2 - does the council value continuing collaborative working with ECF?
- 3 - does the council wish ECF to continue?
- 4 - will ECC continue to fund infrequent and low cost hall hire.

Of course the work that has been done to establish ECF and the resulting Exeter Community Strategy which the Council adopted in 2016 is valued and important. I would like to draw your attention to the new City Council Corporate Plan that has just been launched. <https://exeter.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-information/corporate-plan-2018-21/>. In this the council sets out its commitment to working alongside partners and communities to achieve its aims in the context of the continuing impact of reductions in funding from Central Government and wider austerity measures. This may be helpful to you in confirming the Council's commitment to the promotion of community-led development which is, as I understand it the purpose of the ECF.

As I hope you will see the Corporate Plan sets out that Council believes community-led development is vital to strengthen civil society by reflecting the importance of the views and actions of communities, when making policy and delivering actions. This is why we have started to improve the ways we inform and engage communities: some recent examples are the engagement process on the South Street Development Plan; the consultation process on the Air Quality Action Plan and the independent listening exercise we have commissioned as a starting point for the Community and Arts Grants Review.

Members remain keen to see that the implementation of the Exeter Community Strategy continues and that it does achieve the stated outcomes of supporting communities to deliver effective actions: increase the effectiveness of CIL spend, and increase the sustainability of projects supported. We have appreciated the time and commitment from individual volunteers in establishing the Grass Roots Grants application process and panel. As set out in the Exeter Community Strategy we remain committed to working with ECF and others on a revised action plan for 2019/2022. As in any plan, there have been notable achievements (in addition to the Grass Roots Grants we have now implemented the Exeter Community Strategy objective around community building) but other areas have not been successful. It will be good to hear from the Forum, and other signatories to the Strategy, ideas for how the current action plan might be reviewed and a new one developed.

An area of particular concern to us is better engagement with a wider variety of community groups and organisations. It is great to have access ECF as a mechanism to meet groups that 'represent their neighbourhood' but I am sure we all agree that it is important for the Council to also develop effective links with all types of community groups, (particularly for marginalised and minority groups) in the city and ensure that we do this in a transparent and equitable way. This is a key development area for us as we don't yet have robust connections with other community based groups for example sports groups/uniformed groups/activity groups/special interest groups and we wish to remedy this to ensure that all groups have a voice and access to funding and other support from the Council.

As part of the commitment to the Exeter Community Strategy, and for the reasons above, we are, as you know, in the process of undertaking a fundamental review of our approach to community grant giving. Our internal audit processes have highlighted a number of concerns which has led us to believe that, across the entirety of the councils wide ranging grants programme built up over many years, we have a great opportunity to modernise and better align our grant giving to the underpinning principles of asset based community development and the delivery of Exeter Community Strategy.

You specifically asked if the Council would continue to pay for room hire and refreshments for ECF meetings. I understand that some custom and practice has developed around this, probably from the early days of the Council providing CIL funds for the creation of the Forum. I can understand that there is an assumption that the Council can continue to do this but I am sorry this is not the case. The Council does not provide direct funding to support any other community network to meet. I realise that you may not have access to cash as a Forum but I did wonder if, given that Forum meetings take place in member run buildings, you might agree to waiver charges for your own meetings? If this is not possible do please come back to me as we may be able to offer Council meeting rooms (without charge) for the Forum to meet in if you are unable to resolve this for yourselves.

I hope that this is useful to you in answering your questions and clarifying the commitment from the Council to continuing to work with ECF and others in the delivering of the principles set out in the Exeter Community Strategy.

Yours sincerely



JO YELLAND
Director

c.c. Cllr Phil Bialyk
c.c. Dawn Rivers