

**Lyons Enquiry Focus Group
28 February 2006
6.00pm-8.00pm
Transcript**

Introduction

The Lyons enquiry has been set up by the government to look at how local government works and suggest changes. The Council has been invited to put forward its ideas and to consult local people for their views and submit them. As part of this a focus group was completed.

Brief methodology

The focus group was recruited using people who had taken part in the Councils' previous citizens' panel. When the members were retired they were asked to complete a form if they would like to be contacted for further consultation events. Those where interested were entered onto a database along with their demographics and interests. A query was run to find those how had said there interests were 'general council issues' and/or 'local democracy'. From the list that was generated people were rung to see if they would be interested in attending, when doing this demographic representation was taken into account. Once twelve people had agreed to attend postal invitations were sent out, ten people attended on the night.

A topic guide was written based on the guidance issued from the Lyons Enquiry. The focus group was held from 18.00 – 20.00 on 28 February 2006 in one of the council's meeting rooms.

Demographics

Ward	Gender	Age	Occupation	Disability	Ethnicity
Exwick	Male	59	Personnel Consultant	No	White British
Duryard	Male	64	Training advisor	No	White British
Topsham	Male	69	HM Forces/Civil service	No	White British
Heavitree	Male	51	N.H.S Manager	No	White British
St Thomas	Male	47	Police Sergeant	No	White British
Alphington	Female	56	State Enrolled Nurse	Yes	White British
Priory	Female	62	Corporate Events Manager (Florist)	No	White British
Heavitree	Female	56	School escort (handicapped children)	No	White British
St Leonards	Female	69	Nursing	No	White British
Alphington	Female	71	Guest House Proprietor	No	White British

Focus groups are never representative only indicative due to the small numbers of people involved. As can be seen from the demographics everybody was aged over forty. Unfortunately it can be difficult to get younger people in Exeter to engage in focus groups, although younger people were phoned we were unable to get any to attend. However, there was a good representation of both genders and occupations. The wards across the city were also well represented. Exeter has a total of eighteen wards and nine were represented. Everyone who attended had the same ethnicity of White British, although Exeter does have a BME population it is relatively small and it can be difficult to reflect this in a focus group of ten people.

Understanding the transcript

The transcript has been broken down to match the topic guide, which reflects the guidance issued by the Lyons Enquiry. Hopefully this will allow for easy reference and analysis.

- The two main sections of the focus groups are indicated by large grey text boxes.
- The start of a new Topic is indicated by a white text box.
- The start of a new question is in bold.
- Prompts are also in bold but are not separated from the text as the questions are.

Strategic Role of Local Government

Variation 1 – City vs rural

Explore how distinct people think their community is compared to other areas

How similar do you think Exeter is to other areas of Devon? Would you say it is similar to or different to neighbouring areas of Devon such as Teignbridge, East Devon and Mid Devon?

- Exeter is very different it is not a rural area with things more spread out
- The University makes a lot of difference as it brings in a young culture
- It has more of a bustle about it and has more interest for people

Do you think Exeter has similar or different needs to other areas of Devon such as Teignbridge, East Devon and Mid Devon?

- Yes, it has the culture that comes with the University.
- There is much more late night entertainment, more of a volume of entertainment.
- There are more late night drunken problems, some of the infrastructure is starting to crumble and there is more and more pressure on the city centre.
- Rural areas have different needs, you don't expect as much when you live in a village or small towns. You, don't expect the cinemas and swimming pools.
- If you live in a rural area you expect to go to the city to get what you need.
- The city is a focal point for the rural areas especially as we have big shops.
- There is more of a pull to the city and there is more of a transient population such as the homeless or people with drug and alcohol problems. You expect to be able to get help with these problems in the city rather than the rural areas.
- It is difficult to compare the city with a seaside resort.
- The transport's breaking down in Exeter it's awful
- If you have a bicycle you are all right.
- I have a bike but I wouldn't cycle down Topsham Road, you have to be brave to do that.
- If you want to go shopping you need to choose your moment to go.
- Cars should be banned from the city centre as they cause pollution, I don't like being on my bike behind the exhausts.
- The Park and Ride is a good thing but cars should be banned or there should be a charge.

Is there anything you can think of that Exeter City Council or Devon County Council do in the city, which are not necessary?

- The public art in the high street is a waste it cost a lot of money and people must look at it and think 'that's were my council tax goes'. It has already been damaged and is not very useful.
- Some people like the art
- I'm not saying they should not do art. In art galleries yes, but in the high street it was unnecessary.
- There doesn't seem to be any trees in the high street and it all looks very clinical. Almost looks like its been done to save management, why has it been done?

I think it has been done make it more vandal proof.

- If you say it been done to make it more vandal proof, just while we were waiting outside some boys were jumping up the steps what's worse nobody was stopping them, they were quite intimidating especially at night.
- Doesn't it depend what services you are talking about? For example refuse could be cheaper on a large scale. I suppose you are talking about should Exeter City Council being a unitary.

What we're trying to find out is if there are any services either of the councils are providing that you don't think we should be? Things that aren't necessary.

- Private enterprise could look after tourism better than local authorities, there are so many different tourist boards. Its all about attracting the companies that are putting on the events should be organising the tourism.
- Were does the money come for caring for asylum seekers?

Most of the costs are reimbursed from central government after the council has paid for them.

Are there things that Exeter City Council or Devon County Council don't do which you think they should to better meet the needs of Exeter?

- More control over the city centre in the evening. It's a no go area once you're over 25 in the evening.
- Provide places for young people to go.
- They are not interested in having anywhere to go though.
- They don't currently use the leisure places as its too expensive there needs to be somewhere cheap.
- Look at more measures to protect the environment, Exeter City Council is doing a good job with the recycling but there needs to be more control over air pollution, tree planting and traffic.
- Buses and bicycles should not be allowed in the city centre.
- Sometimes you get six buses idling parked in the city centre for 10 minutes or more causing a lot of fumes.
- Someone needs to take responsibility for the roads and footpaths. They are the first thing you come across when entering the city and so play an important part in giving people their first impression of the city. There are lots or trees roots that are cracking the pavements and the roads are patchy.
- A solution needs to be found for the congestion, there are constantly empty bus lanes.
- I am disappointed that there is nothing to attract families into the city centre of an evening. I would not bring my family in, as I don't feel they would be safe and there would be nothing for them to do, however, I would walk along the cost of an evening.

What would make it more attractive of an evening?

- If it was safer, more cafes that would bring chairs out onto the pavements as the shops are closing.
- I think its wrong that County imposes traffic management schemes on the City Council such as the bus lanes and other inappropriate things but they don't care as the City Council is there to pick up the pieces.
- I assume that the government has funded all the cycle lanes, which are great, but sometimes they are very short and impractical.
- I would like to see some signs put up, I live in Topsham right the way down into the basin using the cycle lanes which is good but I see so many cyclists on the road along side the paths not using them. It makes you wonder if this money is being wisely spent on them.

Variation within the city

Explore how distinct people think their community is compared to other areas

Think about the area of city in which you live. Would you say it is similar or different from its neighbouring areas?

- I would say Topsham is different.
- Heavitree is not that different but I would say it has different needs. The High Street there is full of charity shops and takeaways. It is causing a lot of rubbish and Heavitree is losing its identity. People should have more say about the types of shops that are there.
- In my area we have people who keep the paths clean but no one keeps the river clean it is full of plastic bags and other rubbish. This is also not a good first impression of the city. Also, do we have a dog warden, as it is dreadful for dog mess?

Yes, the City Council does have a dog warden.

- Well I was wondering what they could do about it as people use places where it can't be seen.
- If you don't have a name you can't report them.

If you see a particular person regularly doing it you can contact the warden and give them a description of the person and the times it is happening.

- It's interesting that if you were to ask anyone now how to complain nobody would know how. There is a lack of information, you get newsletter with the numbers on but you throw it away as you constantly have lost of paper coming through.
- But you get this in their paper.
- Yes, but they never seem to come in a form were you think 'I would like to keep that.'

The A-Z of services is produced in the Council newspaper in a form designed to fold inside your BT phone book.

- I live next to the river and there were beavers building a dam in the bit at the foot of my garden. I phoned the Council's Countryside Warden they told be to ring county, county told me to ring the environment agency, the environment agency say it isn't them who would deal with it. Nobody knows who does what, its rubbish. You need to be able to get answers from one place there are too many different organisations.

Are there any other things that you feel your part of the city has but others don't? Or are most of the issues common across the city?

- On the cycle tracks people walk with dogs in dark they can see me but I can't see them and they don't put their dog on the lead. It causes a lot of problems especially when cutting through from Alphington up to Topsham Road.
- Cowick street is becoming a no go zone. The petrol station has gone, the post office has gone and there are charity shops everywhere. There are issues with what is going to happen to County Ground. The local residents don't seem to have any control over what is going on. There should be more power at local levels, Councillors complain but that doesn't seem to do anything and the closed petrol stations are becoming an eyesore. There needs to be more consultation at a local level.
- Something like a parish council but instead for wards where people can talk and put their views forward.
- When you have focus groups where does the information go. How much action is there, for example you could fill out Wavelength but not see any changes happen. Is consultation been done as it is seen to be good or required or does anything happen as a result?

Wavelength reports goes to the Council's management team and to the Executive where all political parties are represented. Managers take note of what is said at

and build improvements into the services. Sometime if budget is involved it may have to wait until a budget proposal can be submitted and so it may take a while for anything to happen which can be frustrating.

- Funding is not always needed, you just need to see that something is being done it can be simple like seeing more people or some kind of legislation i.e. see more dog wardens or community police about.
- I was involved in the Customer Centre consultation, initially I was very cynical at the start, however I was very impressed by the feedback and what has happened.
- I was involved in the health service up to a couple of years ago there used to be locality planning teams, there was about 13, they brought together all strategic and voluntary agencies and any interested parties. There was no budget put you could hold people to account. It fizzled out though as due to so much constant reorganisation. I can never keep track with the reorganisation.

We do currently hold a community forum which brings all the agencies together five times a year at Guildhall.

- The point is that's not local it may satisfy the need to consult on wide subjects but you're not going to get someone from Topsham coming in to Exeter to listen to wide debates.

Your City

*Identify what is most and least important to people within the city
(Unprompted flip chart Exercise)*

Notes from flip chart session 1

What makes Exeter a good place to live?

The location

No huge buildings

You can still see the green hills around the city

A good hospital

Low crime rates and safe

Cathedral Green

The airport (since its been expanded)

Princesshay, how it used to be, but looking forward to see how it will be

The river, quay and canal (when clean)

It's a university town

The Parks

The bus service

The Farmer's Market

What could be improved in Exeter?

Parking both in the city centre and residents parking (especially residents parking in Topsham)

The amount of traffic

More Park and Rides (What happened to the one which was supposed to be at Cowley Bridge?)

Control of water and air pollution

Cemetery maintenance

Litter – the amount of bins provided and the businesses that create the litter should be responsible for clearing it.

Road surface and pavements, sometimes the ridges at the end of the pavement are too deep and can cause people to trip over.

The amount of NHS dentists.

The rents and business rates for independent shops, they are far too high.

Is there anything outside of the city that would attract you to relocate there?

Better bus service

Less traffic congestion and pollution

The diversity of shops and a good indoor market, like can be seen in Exmouth.

More variety of shops.

Accountability*Flip chart and OHP exercise***Notes from flip chart session 2**

There are two flip charts on them are lists of services that the councils provide, on one you need to tick who is responsible for each service, Exeter City Council or Devon County Council. On the other who you think should be responsible.

Who provides which service?

	Exeter City Council	Devon County Council	Both	Actual provider
Libraries	0	8	1	DCC
Housing benefits	9	0	0	ECC
Road gritting	0	8	0	DCC
Domestic rubbish collection	9	0	0	ECC
Meals on wheels	0	8	0	DCC
Evening classes	4	5	0	DCC
Collection of bulky waste items	8	1	0	ECC
Cycle routes	6	3	0	DCC
School transport	1	8	0	DCC
Consumer protection	8	1	0	DCC
Road sweeping	9	0	0	ECC
Home helps	0	9	0	DCC
Leisure centres and pools	9	0	0	ECC
Road maintenance	0	9	0	DCC
Electoral register	9	0	0	ECC
Schools	0	9	0	DCC
Improving road safety	2	7	0	DCC
Pest control	8	1	0	ECC
Child protection	1	8	0	DCC
Council housing	9	0	0	ECC
Traffic calming	0	9	0	DCC

Who should provide which service?

	Exeter City Council	Devon County Council	Both	Actual provider
Child protection	1	9	0	DCC
Collection of bulky waste items	5	5	0	ECC
Consumer protection	9	0	0	DCC
Council housing	9	0	0	ECC
Cycle routes	5	5	0	DCC
Domestic rubbish collection	7	2	0	ECC
Electoral register	8	1	0	ECC
Evening classes	5	4	0	DCC
Home helps	1	8	0	DCC
Housing benefits	6	2	0	ECC
Improving road safety	1	8	0	DCC
Leisure centres and pools	9	0	0	ECC
Libraries	4	5	0	DCC
Meals on wheels	4	5	0	DCC
Pest control	8	1	0	ECC
Road gritting	1	8	0	DCC
Road maintenance	0	9	0	DCC
Road sweeping	8	1	0	ECC
School transport	3	6	0	DCC
Schools	5	4	0	DCC
Traffic calming	9	0	0	DCC

OHP exercise

(Using Lyons check lists)

The group were shown the following list of issues and asked if they think their council should be able to them with the issues when they have a complaint.

Council services:

Poor service from Council
Poor refuse collection
High council tax
Council wastes money

Crime/security:

Young people hanging around/groups of teenagers
Too many pubs/drinking in the streets
Drugs
Car theft
High crime rate/don't feel safe

Environment:

Noisy
Air pollution
Poor condition of pavements
Poor parking facilities
Too much traffic/speed of traffic
Road works/poor condition of roads
Dogs' mess
Streets not clean enough
Not enough street lighting
Too much street lighting
Vandalism/graffiti

Housing:

Poor quality housing
Shortage of housing
Homelessness
Expensive housing

Local facilities:

Poor shopping facilities
Poor public transport
Poor access to local services/local services not accessible
Poor schools
Poor health services
Not enough parks/open spaces
Poor leisure facilities
Not enough play areas
Lack of childcare for working parents
Lack of facilities/things for young people to do

General/other:

People/type of people
Problem families/neighbours
Lack of community spirit
High unemployment/poor job opportunities
Don't know the area

the list when

they have a complaint, although particular emphasis was given to the following:

- High council tax
- Council wastes money
- Young people hanging around/groups of teenagers
- High crime rate/don't feel safe
- Air & light pollution
- Road works/poor condition of roads
- Dog's mess
- Shortage of housing
- Homelessness
- Poor shopping facilities
- Lack of facilities/things for young people to do
- Lack of community spirit

Other issues that were suggested were:

- Animal welfare
- Elderly welfare
- Anything to do with quality of life

Role of Council

Explore whether people identify with their local council and what role they would like the council to play in their local area

Is there anything further that you think Exeter City Council should be doing which it is not at the moment?

- Put pressure on the police.
- Consult more and publish the results better even if it is ongoing and there have been no immediate changes. Have an on-going dialogue with people.
- Give solar panel grants and grants for other sustainable technology.
- Create a sustainable city population, lots of people are attracted to the city but there is a limit to how much it can take.
- Attract a range of industries not just service industries for example more manufacturing industries.

Do you associate Exeter/your local area of Exeter with Exeter City Council?

- Yes
- To a point, Devon County Council is more prominent at the moment, but I often think of the two together.
- Some people have no idea who does what there should be more information in free papers so people know who to complain to.
- People know who deals with the main services, its the smaller ones that people are not sure about.
- If some of the confusion was gone at election time you may get different election results.

Would you like Exeter City Council to play more of a role at community level?

- Yes, provided there is consultation with people who live there
- They should facilitate local debate but stand aside and let locals lead it.
- There's a recently incident were rubbish has been constantly tipped into a private garden. The person complained and there was no action, the Councillor complained and there was no action was taken. Today I went and took photos so they could be handed in to the council to get something done.
- There needs to be somebody to move it along and take responsibility.

Trust and Satisfaction

Explore the barriers to public confidence in local authorities

On a scale of one to ten, one being very dissatisfied and 10 very satisfied how satisfied are you with Exeter City Council?

- Five people said six
- Three people said seven
- Two people said eight

On a scale of one to ten, one being very dissatisfied and 10 very satisfied how satisfied are you with Devon County Council?

- Three people said six
- Two people said five
- Two people said three
- Three people they were unable to rate how satisfied they were

What things would increase your satisfaction with Exeter City Council?

- More responsive
- More consultation
- More information and feedback, if something can't happen then say why

What things would increase your satisfaction with Devon County Council?

- It's very big
- More confidence that your voice will be heard.
- There are too many non jobs
- They don't listen enough

On a scale of one to ten, one being no trust and 10 complete trust how much do you currently trust Exeter City Council to do what is best for Exeter As a whole?

- Two people said eight
- Two people said seven
- One person said nine
- One person said six

On a scale of one to ten, one being no trust and 10 complete trust how much do you currently trust Devon County Council to do what is best for Exeter As a whole?

- Three people said five
- Two people said three
- One person said four
- One person said they don't trust them
- One person said that they don't represent Exeter

What things would increase your trust in Exeter City Council?

- More visible accountability, people owning up when things go wrong.
- Exeter Citizen is all good news, it never has somebody saying sorry it has gone wrong.
- More honesty.
- There are certain councillors that stand up and say no that's wrong but there's other Councillors that you never here a thing from and the are supposed to be the people standing up for you.

- The thing is that when somebody says I'm sorry you know you've got your message across.

Is it the same issues for Devon County Council?

- No
- I think they would have to apologise a lot more.
- I think its because it so big, you don't feel its Exeter, its Devon. You don't feel they are really working for Exeter.
- Its almost like leave Exeter out of it and just deal with the rest of Devon.
- The trouble is the City Council looks after local things and county looks after much wider things.
- Its easier for Devon to hide behind the other councils.

Who should be responsible for setting priorities are for your area? Central Government, Regional Government or the Local Authority.

- Nationally as everybody wants the same.
- For example this recent thing with Herceptin, that's a postcode lottery. Surely it should be 'yes' everybody gets it or 'no' nobody gets it.

But do you think that everything should be nationally set?

- No, but some things should be, it depends what it is.

OHP exercise

(Using Lyons check lists)

The group were shown the following list of services and were asked which should central government be able to set minimum standards for all local areas to meet and which should be decided by the local area.

	Central Government	Local government
Childcare and nursery		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Environmental services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Fire and community safety		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Health Services (e.g GP)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Housing		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Immigration		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Leadership and place making	Group not sure what means	
Libraries	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Licensing		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Local enterprise		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Local transport		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Planning		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Police	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Roads	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Schools/education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Social services		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sport and culture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Street Cleaning		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Trading standards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Youth Services		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Note: if both boxes are checked it means people thought there should be a mix of local and national targets.

- I don't trust central government when there setting standards as they are trying to compare Exeter to cities such as Newcastle or Birmingham which are very different from Exeter. The South West gets forgotten.

National and Local Priorities

Tiers of governance

Explore people's view on which tiers of governance should be responsible for setting standards. In particular are there any areas where people would like to see variation in services if it meets the needs of their area better.

If more money were to become available to spend on public services in your area, do you think central government or local government should decide where the money is spent?

- Local government

If public services in your area were going to be cut to save money do you think central government or local government should decide where the money is spent?

- Local government

Efficiency

Explore what people's views are on value for money and how more efficiency can be built into the system by reviewing what roles councils play in an area.

Is there anything that Exeter City Council or Devon County Council currently does that they could stop doing?

- Tourism
- Pay rises
- Non jobs
- Non frontline jobs

Are there any additional services that you would like Exeter City Council or Devon County Council to provide?

- How involved is the Council with the prison and magistrate service? I think they should become more involved so that sentences meet the crimes and have local influence.
- Bring back the cycle proficiency test.

Which of these would you be willing to pay more money for?

- It depends what it is, things like the proficiency test you could pay when you use a bit like the garden waste scheme.

On a scale of one to ten, one being very poor and 10 very good, how good is Exeter City Council at providing value for money?

- People thought between eight and seven.

On a scale of one to ten, one being very poor and 10 very good, how good is Devon County Council at providing value for money?

- People thought between three and five.
- One person said they did not have much faith in the way Devon County spend money.

What do you think would increase value for money?

- More police on the street.
- One port of call, one-stop shops.
- More cost effective services
- Unnecessary staff and wastage.
- It's about showing accountability, when the councils make savings they need to tell people.
- Smarter working, work more efficiently and don't fill a vacancy straight away see if it is needed for a few months first.
- Give out information about the savings.
- Ask where people think the savings should be made.
- Don't cut too many staff, as it will affect the quality of customer service.

Any closing comments?

- Duplication between departments should be stopped, when I made a planning application it went to about five different departments. If there was to be a time and motion study on this I'm sure improvements could be made. Look for areas where there is duplication.
- The one stop shop is good as it is a sign that the council is becoming more client focused there is a better system for people to work in and it shows.
- How far does Teignbridge come into Exeter?

The boundary is approximately the M5 Exminster Marshes is Teignbridge. The canal and some of the estuary is Exeter even though we are the harbour authority for all of it.

- I think it's wrong that national government can impose planning regulations on local government. For example, John Prescott saying there has to be three thousand new houses at Tedburn St Mary even though there are ten thousand objections against it.