

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE

Statement of Decisions

Tuesday 3 July 2012

Present:-

Councillor Peter Edwards (Chair)
Councillors Denham, Fullam, Hannaford, Mrs Henson, Martin, Sheldon and Sutton

Also Present

Chief Executive, Strategic Director (KH), Strategic Director (MP), Assistant Director City Development, Assistant Director Finance, Assistant Director Housing and Contracts, Corporate Manager Policy, Communications and Community Engagement, Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support and Member Services Manager

Major Grants and New Homes Bonus Panel

(Minute 67)

The Assistant Director City Development introduced the minutes of the first meeting of the Major Grants and New Homes Bonus Panel held on 14 June 2012. The Panel had considered three applications for funding from the Local Infrastructure Fund.

Topsham Rugby Club had applied for £70,000 from the Fund and the Panel had recommended to Executive a grant of £50,000 towards Phase 1 of the project, principally comprising new changing facilities, subject to conditions. An email and letter from the Club together with a letter from the Rugby Football Union (RFU) had subsequently been received and these were circulated to members of Executive. These informed the Council that, whilst grateful for the award of £50,000, the shortfall from the requested £70,000 had placed the Club in some difficulty since the RFU had stated that any additional funding would only be available at the end of the project. They informed the Council of their proposal to trim the project by £53,000 to reduce the funding gap.

Councillor Leadbetter attended the meeting and spoke on this item under Standing Order 44, highlighting the problems the shortfall would create for the project and querying why the full amount applied for had not been awarded.

The Portfolio Holder Sustainable Development and Transport responded that all three applications considered by the Panel had been excellent projects which the Panel had discussed at length. The percentage reduction made to the Rugby Club application was in line with that of another application considered. The Panel had been mindful that the Club had stated in their presentation that their target was to raise between £100,000 and £150,000 from internal fundraising but they had only included £80,000 from this source in their latest calculation.

The Chair expressed his support for the worthwhile work undertaken by the Topsham Rugby Club. The Club was not precluded from making a further application for funding at a later stage.

Other members acknowledged that there were many other deserving projects in the city and it was important to ensure that they all had a fair opportunity to apply for funding rather than allocating it on a "first come, first served" basis to the more organised communities. They

were also conscious that sporting facilities often benefitted from a greater range of potential funding sources than community projects.

Members were reminded that this Council had made the decision to use New Homes Bonus funding to support community infrastructure projects, unlike many other authorities who were using the funds to plug gaps in their revenue budgets.

Executive resolved that:-

- (1) the recommendations made by the Major Grants and New Homes Bonus Panel in respect of the three applications to the Local Infrastructure Fund be supported; and
- (2) the minutes of the meeting of the Major Grants and New Homes Bonus Panel held on 14 June 2012 be received and, where appropriate, adopted.

Declarations of Interest

(Minute 68)

The following personal interest was declared:-

Councillor	Interest
Hannaford	69 (personal interest as Trustee of Exwick Community Association).

Capital Monitoring 2011/12 and Revised Capital Programme for 2012/13 and Future Years

(Minute 69)

Councillor Hannaford declared an interest in this item as a trustee of Exwick Community Association.

The report of the Assistant Director Finance was submitted, advising Members of the overall financial performance of the Council for the 2011/12 financial year, in respect of the annual capital programme. Approval was also sought for the 2012/13 revised capital programme, including commitments carried forward from 2011/12.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources considered the report at their meeting on 20 June 2012 and the support of members was noted.

Executive recommended that Council notes and approves:-

- (1) the overall financial position for the 2011/12 annual capital programme; and
- (2) the amendments to the Council's annual capital programme for 2012/13.

Overview of Revenue Budget 2011/12

(Minute 70)

The report of the Assistant Director Finance was submitted, advising Members of the overall financial position of the HRA & General Fund Revenue Budgets for the 2011/12 financial year.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources considered the report at their meeting on 20 June 2012 and the support and comments of members were noted.

Members were pleased to note the reduction in debt over 30 days old. The Assistant Director Finance reported that the Council proactively managed debt, achieving recovery through the courts where necessary. In response to a question regarding housing benefit overpayments, he reported that these arose for a number of reasons including changes in claimants' circumstances. About 90% of this amount was recovered which was very high in comparison with other authorities.

Executive recommended that Council:-

- (1) approves the net transfer of £727,999 to Earmarked Reserves as detailed in paragraph 3.11;
- (2) approves supplementary budgets of £138,260 as detailed in paragraph 3.11;
- (3) notes Earmarked Reserves at 31 March 2012;
- (4) notes the Council Tax account and collection rate;
- (5) notes the outstanding sundry debt, aged debt analysis and debt write-off figures;
- (6) notes the creditor payments performance;
- (7) by taking into account the overall financial position of the Council as set out in paragraph 3.14, approves the General Fund working balance at 31 March 2012 at £4,258,425; and
- (8) approves the Housing Revenue Account working balance at 31 March 2012 at £5,765,423 and the Council Own Build working balance at £28,207.

Treasury Management 2011/12

(Minute 71)

The report of the Assistant Director Finance was submitted, reporting the overall performance for the 2011/12 financial year and the position regarding investments and borrowings at 31 March 2012.

In response to a question regarding assumptions made about interest rates, the Assistant Director Finance reported that the Council used the services of a Treasury Management Adviser. He reported that the Council continued to take advantage of the very low interest rates through short-term borrowing.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources considered the report at their meeting on 20 June 2012 and the support of members was noted.

Executive recommended Council to approve the Treasury Management report for the 2011/12 financial year.

Annual Governance Statement

(Minute 72)

The report of the Assistant Director Finance was submitted, setting out the proposed Annual Governance Statement that will accompany the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts for 2011/12. This statement also incorporated the Council's Code of Corporate Governance which is published on the Council's website. The Assistant Director drew particular attention to the steps that had been undertaken during the year to further improve the Corporate Governance arrangements.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources considered the report at its meeting on 20 June 2012 and the support of members was noted.

Executive recommended to Council to note and approve the Annual Governance Statement to be included within the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts for 2011/12.

New Approach to Managing Building Contracts - Total Project Delivery Initiative

(Minute 73)

The report of the Assistant Director Housing and Contracts was submitted, seeking approval to continue the initiative for the delivery of the housing kitchen, bathroom, gas central heating and boiler replacement for up to four years, following a successful six month trial period. Approval was also sought to examine the practicality of extending the initiative to cover working budgets in respect of PSL's, Extralet and disabled adaptation programmes.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources considered the report at their meeting on 20 June 2012 and the support and comments of members were noted.

Members welcomed the new approach which was designed to spread risk by letting a number of smaller contracts. They acknowledged the significant contribution of the former Head of Contracts and Direct Services to the initiative. They particularly welcomed the consequent benefits to the local economy of using local firms.

The Portfolio Holder Housing and Community Involvement commended the scheme and reported the support of the Tenant and Leaseholders Committee. The Chair commented on the high standard of work of which small firms were capable and requested the Assistant Director Housing and Contracts to ensure that current contractual procedures did not preclude them from competing for work.

Executive supported the proposal for an interim report to be made to the Committee after two years to enable the success of the initiative to be monitored.

Executive resolved that:-

- (1) initial progress made on the Total Project Delivery pilot be noted; and
- (2) the continuation and extension of the scheme be supported for up to four years, or until respective budgets involved are exhausted, with an interim report to Executive after two years, subject to annual review and approval by the Assistant Director Housing and Contracts.

Laings Home Refurbishment Review

(Minute 74)

The report of the Assistant Director Housing and Contracts was submitted, informing Members of the outcome of an internal review of the Laings property refurbishment programme. The review had been conducted as a consequence of an issue highlighted by Sovereign Housing Association connected to the use of Recycled Capital Grant Funding (RCGF) to fund the refurbishment of Laings homes. The Assistant Director reminded members of the history of the homes which had been designated as defective and the partnership agreement between the Council and Sovereign Housing Association which had refurbished them.

Councillor Leadbetter spoke on this item under Standing Order 44. He queried the three long term empty Laings homes, in the context of the City's housing shortage. In response, the Portfolio Holder Housing and Community Involvement referred to the enormous efforts

made by the Council to return vacant homes to use and the excellent track record of the Empty Homes Service.

Executive noted the proposal of the Sovereign Housing Association to charge 80% of open market rent rather than the current rent. Members considered the options available and supported Option 1 whereby the Council would retain ownership of the remaining 21 properties and undertake the refurbishment works itself. It was noted that this would include energy efficiency measures.

Executive resolved that Option 1 as set out in the report be adopted; namely to end the trickle transfer of Laings homes to Sovereign Housing Association, for the Council to retain them as part of their Housing Revenue Account portfolio and for a programme of refurbishment to be put in place as and when Laings homes become available.

Land at Pinbrook Road, Exeter - Civic Amenity Site

(Minute 75)

The report of the Assistant Director Economy was submitted, considering a request from Devon County Council to vary the terms of the change of use consent covering the new Civic Amenity Centre in Pinbrook Road to extend the hours of operation for a trial period.

Executive resolved that:-

- (1) the Property Manager be authorised to agree an extension of the Sunday opening hours of the Pinbrook Road Civic Amenity Centre until 6pm until the end of September 2012; and
- (2) should there be no significant concerns raised during this period of operation, the Property Manager be authorised to agree a permanent extension of operating hours on Sundays thereafter.

Apprenticeship Scheme

(Minute 76)

The report of the Strategic Director (MP) was submitted, setting out proposals for the development and implementation of an Apprenticeship Scheme for Exeter City Council and seeking a decision on the funding in order to take forward the proposal. The scheme would initially be based around school leavers and it was planned to recruit six apprentices to start in September 2012. The areas for placement had been selected on the basis of suitable courses offered by local colleges.

Councillor Leadbetter attended under Standing Order 44 and spoke in support of the proposal which he considered to be an excellent idea. He hoped that the scheme would be extended beyond the initial one-year period.

Councillor Crew, attending under Standing Order 44, also strongly supported the proposal. He drew attention to the fact that the public sector was currently under-represented in respect of apprenticeship schemes and welcomed the opportunity for this Council to lead by example. He noted that an Ofsted report had indicated that apprentices who had previously undertaken work experience had particularly benefited and requested that the Council should look to extend work experience opportunities wherever possible.

All members of Executive strongly supported the Apprenticeship scheme. Whilst the initial 12 month pilot was designed to enable the Council to review the effective operation of the scheme, the intention was for it to continue beyond this period. Members particularly welcomed the new perspective that young people often introduced to organisations and

proposed that the apprentices should be invited to reflect on their experience and provide feedback to a Scrutiny Committee in due course.

Executive resolved that:-

- (1) the establishment of an Apprenticeship Scheme on the terms and conditions set out in the report be agreed and that a budget of £50,000 be allocated to this scheme; and
- (2) a review of the Council's work experience policy and procedure be undertaken in due course.

Building a Stronger Sustainable City: Corporate Plan 2012-2014

(Minute 77)

The report of the Strategic Management Team was submitted, seeking approval to the Council's Corporate Plan for 2012-14. The Chief Executive introduced the report informing Executive that changes to the performance and inspection framework had enabled the publication of a shorter, more accessible corporate plan.

Councillor Leadbetter spoke on this item under Standing Order 44. He congratulated officers on the Plan, particularly welcoming the links with the business sector, and looked forward to its delivery.

Executive welcomed the clear and concise style of the document. Members noted the new focus on purposes, emerging from the systems-thinking review, which formed the framework of the Plan as a means of linking Council activity to the needs and preferences of citizens and customers. Executive supported the key actions identified in the Plan, acknowledging the financial challenges facing the Council in their delivery.

Executive recommended to Council to endorse the draft 2012-14 Corporate Plan.

Update on the Localism Act 2011

(Minute 78)

The report of the Chief Executive was submitted, updating on progress with the various provisions of the Localism Act and identifying issues for the Council.

Executive noted the current position in respect of the provisions of the Localism Act. They supported the procedure proposed in respect of the Community Right to Challenge, noting that this was based on statutory guidance but requested that the Panel's recommendations on expressions of interest are submitted to Executive for approval. Members noted that the procedure could be reviewed, if necessary, in the light of experience.

Executive resolved that:-

- (1) progress on the various provisions of the Localism Act be noted;
- (2) the proposal in paragraph 12.4 to not set a timeframe for expressions of interest under the community right to challenge be supported, subject to review of this position every 12 months; and
- (3) the Council's draft guidance on the community right to challenge, as set out at Annex A of the report, be approved, subject to the Panel's recommendations on expressions of interest being submitted to Executive for approval.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public

(Minute 79)

Executive resolved that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Corporate Support Unit - Restructure

(Min 80)

The report of the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support was submitted, requesting approval to the restructuring of the Corporate Support Unit within the Office of the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support. The restructure involved a decrease in the overall number of staff in the unit, the voluntary redundancy of three members of staff and the consequential severance payment for the current postholders, together with other subsequent staffing changes in the remaining Corporate Support Unit.

Executive supported the proposed restructure.

Executive resolved that:-

- (1) the restructuring of the Corporate Support Unit as detailed in this report be approved; and
- (2) the payment of compensation to the holders of posts CE01104, CE02127 and CS07186 be approved in accordance with the Council's agreed redundancy policy under the provisions of the Local Government (Early Termination) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.00 pm)

The decisions indicated will normally come into force 5 working days after publication of the Statement of Decisions unless called in by a Scrutiny Committee. Where the matter in question is urgent, the decision will come into force immediately. Decisions regarding the policy framework or corporate objectives or otherwise outside the remit of the Executive will be considered by Council on 17 July 2012.