

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 2 June 2016

Present:-

Councillor Wardle (Chair)
Councillors Foale, Branston, Foggin, Hannan, Holland, Packham, Robson and Vizard

Also Present

Assistant Director Customer Access, Assistant Director Housing, Service Improvement Lead (Benefits), Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer, System Lead Housing, Scrutiny Programme Officer, Principal Accountant Corporate, Technical Accounting Manager and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

In attendance:

Councillor Emma Morse	-	Portfolio Holder for Customer Access
Councillor Keith Owen	-	Portfolio Holder for the Housing Revenue Account
Councillor Paul Bull	-	Portfolio Holder for Communities and Neighbourhoods
Councillor Philip Bialyk	-	Portfolio Holder for Sport and Health and Wellbeing
Christine Fraser	-	Exeter Community Forum

1

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Newby.

2

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee - Community held on 1 March 2016 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

3

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

4

TERMS OF REFERENCE - PEOPLE SCRUTINY

The following terms of reference for People Scrutiny were noted:-

To review the implementation of existing policies and to consider the scope for new policies with regard to all aspects of the Council's functions concerning benefits, collection of council tax and business rates, housing including advice and the Housing Revenue Account.

The Portfolio Holders reporting to this Committee will be those for Customer Access, the Housing Revenue Account, Communities and Neighbourhoods and Sport and Health and Wellbeing.

ITEM FOR EXECUTIVE

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EXETER COMMUNITY FORUM - GRANTS PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE REGARDING NEIGHBOURHOOD PORTION OF THE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

The Chair welcomed Christine Fraser of the Exeter Community Forum who explained the background to the creation of the Forum and advised that the Forum had been charged with setting up a Grants Making Panel. The Communities Involvement and Inclusion Officer further set out the proposed terms of reference for the Panel, led by Exeter Community Forum, that would make future recommendations to Council on how the neighbourhood portion of the CIL should be spent.

In March 2016, Executive had approved the Exeter Community Strategy as a living document that would inform the allocation of the neighbourhood portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and a proportion of the New Homes Bonus. It had been agreed that £150,000 of New Homes Bonus funding be used over the next two to three years to support capacity building work with community groups across the city requiring investment to enable them to access the CIL neighbourhood funding in future years.

The proposed Panel would comprise:-

- The Exeter Community Forum Chairperson;
- up to four other community representatives drawn from different community organisations which are full members of Exeter Community Forum;
- the Council's Portfolio Holder for Communities and Neighbourhoods;
- the Council's Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer or nominated substitute (non-voting member); and
- when established, a member of the Exeter Community Youth Forum to attend panel meetings and have voting rights.

Christine Fraser and the Communities Involvement and Inclusion Officer responded to Members queries:-

- a basic goal of the grant making process would be to stimulate and support new community activity and care would be taken to ensure that applications for grant support were not repetitive and/or from the same groups and organisations;
- all applications would be scored and assessed against criteria set out in the terms of reference;
- during the creation of the Forum, a collaborative, cross City approach had been evident and, as such, applications based on a City wide perspective would be welcomed and encouraged. Work in Wonford and Exwick by Community Organisers, for example, could be extended across the City;
- a further challenge was to develop a multiplier effect to increase the available funds and obtain investments from other sources e.g. through cloud funding; and
- applications would require a solid evidence and need to refer to locally produced community plans. Support would be available to help communities produce a community plan for their area.

People Scrutiny Committee:-

- (1) welcomed and approved, in principle, the terms of reference of the Grants Panel led by Exeter Community Forum;
- (2) request Executive to recommend Council welcome future recommendations from the Grants Panel as to how to spend the neighbourhood portion of the CIL and the New Homes Bonus taking account of the availability of funds;
- (3) request Executive to recommend Council to require future consultation with the local authority, as appropriate, on the future review of the purpose, function and outcomes of grants awarded to ensure that the panel is working effectively and in the interests of both the Council and Exeter Community Forum;
- (4) request Executive to recommend to Council that, through its Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer, the Council retain accounting responsibilities in relation to the neighbourhood portion of the CIL; and
- (5) Councillor Bull, as the appropriate Portfolio Holder, be nominated to serve on the Panel as the Council's representative.

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' STATEMENTS

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEES PORTFOLIO HOLDERS YEAR END UPDATE 2015/16 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2016/17

The Chair reported that should Members have any queries on Portfolio Holder updates on the priorities for 2015/16 these should be put in writing. The reports set out targets and milestones showing the aims of the Council during the year and what had been achieved by May 2016.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Access highlighted the following achievements for 2015/16:-

- development of the Homelessness Strategy in conjunction with Teignbridge District Councils and other agencies, thanking officers for their hard work on developing the draft Strategy;
- completion of the Hub at Wat Tyler House; and
- introduction of a "One View of Debt" approach now renamed the Payments and Collection Team.

The Portfolio Holders for the Housing Revenue Account (Councillor Owen), Communities and Neighbourhoods (Councillor Bull) and Sport and Physical Activity and Health and Wellbeing (Councillor Bialyk) presented their priorities for 2016/17. These would be published in the Council's Corporate Plan 2016/17.

The Portfolio Holder for the Housing Revenue Account highlighted the following areas:-

- set up a HRA Management Board
- maximise value from contractors
- ensure that the efficiency and effectiveness of the housing function matches, or aims to match that of best-in-class providers

- propose and consult on a new model for supporting residents of our older persons' accommodation
- undertake a comprehensive survey of the social housing stock in order to understand future investment requirements and inform budget

He announced that the City Council's Housing Team had been shortlisted in the Municipal Journal's Annual Local Government's awards under in the category of Best Council Service Team. Out of other South West local authorities, the Council led in providing new Council Homes. With the loss of £8million from the imposed rent cuts, new build would no longer be possible within the HRA, but the Assistant Director Housing advised that other mechanisms would be examined such as a housing development company which would sit outside the HRA.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Neighbourhoods highlighted the following areas:-

- further development of the Exeter Community Forum in conjunction with ICE and Exeter City Futures with the Grants Panel to be operational by Autumn. The City Council Executive maintained ultimate authority on awarding grants;
- exploration of how Asset Based Community Development could be introduced across the Council following on from seminars for Senior Councillors and Officers and partners facilitated by Cormac Russell;
- implementation of the Council's Equality and Diversity policy
- renewal of Exeter's Fairtrade City Status
- increasing profile for dementia awareness

He also advised that the first meeting on developing Youth Strategy for Exeter had been held in response to an Exeter Board's recommendation and that he would meet with the Portfolio Holder for Customer Access to agree on further progressing the ICE project.

The Portfolio Holder for Sport and Physical Activity and the Health and Wellbeing highlighted the following:-

- take forward the St Sidwell's Point and bus station developments, including procurement of operators
- improve cycle routes and provide more cycle parking
- sign off and help implement the City Sports Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy;
- continue working with partners to make Exeter the most active city in the South West by 2018; and
- he would become a Member of the Exeter Health and Wellbeing Board to build on the good work of his predecessor

He emphasised the importance of, and his commitment to, consultation in bringing forward the Leisure Complex and Bus Station development and referred to the groups he would shortly be meeting. Such meetings would help inform the detail of reserved matters to be put to the Planning Committee. The choice of operator was a key consideration and it would be important to ensure a strong commitment to ethical issues, including staffing matters. Further, added value would be sought in terms of the operation of the other City Council maintained leisure centres in the City. He would also consult with the various interested bodies in respect of the Exeter Canal and waterways.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the reports of the Portfolio Holders.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

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ANNUAL SCRUTINY REVIEW REPORT – 2015/16

The Scrutiny Programme Officer presented the report providing an annual update as to the Scrutiny work achieved during the Municipal Year 2015/16. She advised that a meeting of the annual Scrutiny Review Working Party would be held on 13 July and encouraged Members to give consideration to potential topics for review.

People Scrutiny Committee noted and approved the Annual Scrutiny report.

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UNIVERSITY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Councillor Owen attended the meeting and spoke on this item having given notice under Standing Order No. 44.

Councillor Brimble and the Scrutiny Programme Officer presented the report on the findings and recommendations of the University Task and Finish Group. A series of recommendations were presented for comment, the report and the views of this Committee to be considered by the Place Scrutiny Committee for approval.

Councillor Owen raised the following issues having served as a member of the Task and Finish Group:-

- the Council should seek a more robust response from the operators/management of the purpose built student accommodation in the City Centre to address anti-social behaviour from the student residents;
- pressure should be brought to bear on landlords and letting agents to take greater responsibility in ensuring that their tenants remove waste in the proper manner;
- the University itself should take a firmer approach to ensure students took waste receptacles out responsibly; and
- the City Council should bring further pressure to bear on the University to provide more purpose built student accommodation on campus.

A number of Members supported the latter point and requested that a direct approach be made to the University on this matter. It was noted that the Planning Member Working Group at its next meeting would be briefed on the implications of the Public Inquiry Decision in respect of land north of Exeter Road. The decision had been reached with regard to student housing needs and the approach to the University would therefore be informed by the views of the working group.

Members raised other matters including a review of licensing hours as students contributed to anti-social behaviour as part of the night time economy and parking problems in areas of student residential congregation – one Member reporting that despite contact with the Police and Rory Cunningham at the University problems in the Pennsylvania area, for example, remained severe. The significant amount of student volunteer work was mentioned for example in Wonford and at Eaton House and it was felt that greater publicity should be given to this aspect of the University's impact on the City.

Councillor Brimble, as Chair of the Task and Finish Group, responded to the issues raised, thanking Members for their input. He highlighted the work in developing a landlord/accreditation scheme to prevent some of the issues surrounding student accommodation matters and also stated that many of the issues raised came under the "Place" heading and would, as such, be considered by that Scrutiny Committee. He advised that the Task and Finish Group had received presentations

from both Will Page on the volunteering work undertaken by students and from Amy Hill who was preparing a Sustainable Transport Strategy. The existing Strategy was some eight years old and a new document to encompass Green issues was important and the Scrutiny Programme Officer confirmed that this matter had been further pursued with Amy and would be brought before Members. With regard to student accommodation, following input by the Planning Member Working Group and a further approach to the University, he agreed that this could be further progressed through a Task and Finish Working Group.

He advised that the report of the Working Group had been considered by the Vice Chancellor.

He thanked the Scrutiny Programme Officer for help with the Group's work.

The following recommendations were supported:-

Topic 1: Retention of Graduates

The Council:-

- 1) Facilitates a meeting between the Federation of Small Businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, Exeter University and the Council's Economy Department to encourage a joint approach to retaining graduates in the City.
- 2) Shares the list of companies (particularly tech companies) with Exeter University to develop the aim mentioned in Recommendation 1.
- 3) Facilitates a networking event to encourage and support a good relationship between key organisations, businesses and Exeter University and Colleges.
- 4) Explores the opportunities available to support the Innovation Centre in increasing the number of start up weekends held and developing them into a regional network that involves Exeter residents.

Topic 2: Anti-social behaviour

The Council:-

- 5) Encourages the Students' Guild to expand the "big street party" event to cover different areas across the City.

Topic 3: Waste, recycling and littering

The Council:-

- 6) Explores the opportunities for sponsorship and provision of cardboard bottle carriers to student households which also advertise where recycling facilities are located.
- 7) Explores the possibility of a pilot scheme where temporary recycling facilities are situated in highly populated student areas at the end of term.

- 8) Enquire whether student wardens are able to support the educational work of the Council's Recycling Team in visiting student houses identified as a priority.
- 9) Encourage the students, with the support of the Students' Guild, to make a promotional, educational video on effective waste and recycling which other students can easily access on line.

Topic 4: Volunteering

The Council:-

- 10) Sponsors a student volunteering award to be presented at the Guildhall and publicised via the Exeter Citizen and Exepose publications.
- 11) Liaise with the Student Opportunities Manager (Students' Guild) to explore buddying community groups with student volunteers.
- 12) Encourages key organisations to highlight and publicise the good work that student volunteers already do for their organisations across Exeter.

Topic 5: Planning and Student Accommodation

The Council:-

- 13) Encourages and supports the Students' Guild to explore the possibility of Co-operative Housing.
- 14) Reviews the level of developers' contributions to infrastructure in respect of student accommodation, should an overall review of the Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule be undertaken in future.
- 15) Positively highlight, through a timely press release, the management requirements that accompany planning approvals on Purpose Built Student Accommodation blocks (PBSA's); the Central Government funding that PBSA's bring to the City and the effect of students moving from Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) to PBSA's.
- 16) Arrange for a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to investigate the possibility of an HMO/landlord accreditation scheme, engaging with key partners to explore the possibilities and how the Council could support work which may already be underway.

Topic 6: Parking

The Council:-

- 17) Supports the University in developing their updated Sustainable Transport Strategy, ensuring, in so far as is possible, the involvement of both Exeter City Councillors and Officers.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – FINAL ACCOUNTS 2015/16

The Technical Accounting Manager advised Members of any major differences, by management unit, between the approved budget and the outturn for the financial year up to 31 March 2016 in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Council's new build schemes. An outturn update in respect of the HRA Capital Programme was also incorporated in the report in order to help provide a comprehensive financial update in respect of the Housing Revenue Account.

The 2015-16 financial year had ended with an overall net deficit of £667,862. This represented a decrease of £2,291,320 compared to the budgeted deficit of £2,959,182. A projected under-spend of £1,678,116 had previously been reported to Scrutiny Committee – Community as part of the quarterly budget monitoring updates, therefore the variances in the final quarter of the financial year had resulted in further savings of £613,204.

The total amount of HRA capital expenditure for 2015/16 was £7,885,279, which equated to 94% of the revised approved capital programme.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

PEOPLE – FINAL ACCOUNTS – 2015/16

The Principal Accountant advised Members of any major differences, by management unit, between the approved budget and the outturn for the financial year up to 31 March 2016 in respect of People Scrutiny Committee. An outturn update in respect of the People Capital Programme was also incorporated in the report in order to help provide a comprehensive financial update in respect of the People Scrutiny Committee budgets.

The final outturn has been calculated and the report highlighted the major differences by management unit from the approved annual budget after adjusting for supplementary budgets. The total variance for the year showed a surplus of £81,287 after transfers from reserves, as set out in the report. This represented a variation of 2.36% from the revised budget.

The People Capital Programme showed a total spend of £764,891 in 2015/16 with £299,559 of the programme deferred until 2016/17.

The People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

ITEMS FOR EXECUTIVE

JOINT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2016-2021

The Assistant Director Customer Access presented the report setting out the Joint Exeter and Teignbridge Homelessness Strategy. The Strategy had been developed through a cross-Party Task and Finish Group comprising Members from Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council and local partners. It identified how the proposed plans addressed the priority issues identified by residents, key partners, Members, and stakeholders through the response to consultation.

The System Lead Housing summarised the background, recent achievements and plans for the future within the strategy through a presentation covering rising demand for Housing Advice services, rough sleeping and street attachment in the City, investment in homelessness, access to services and money matters. There were over 3,500 sleeping rough nationally with 27 individuals recorded in Exeter at

the November count. With regard to health and wellbeing, there was a strong link between homelessness and mental health, with Exeter's statistics being notably higher than the national average and had increased significantly since 2010. Further research on this issue was being undertaken as it was hoped that the establishment of Integrated Care Exeter (ICE) and the re-alignment of the health, social care and housing services would lead to an improvement in collaborative working.

Members remarked on the high percentage of former military personnel amongst the homeless, the varying nature of mental health and that the homeless cohort encompassed varying strands of society including the young and professionals. It was also noted that the majority of the Exeter homeless were local in origin and the belief that a high percentage from outside the area gravitated to Exeter was a misnomer.

The System Lead Housing explained that the Government's intention was for local authorities to assume complete responsibility for homelessness but that budgetary support was presently unclear. Exeter was working with other authorities in trialling a model system.

People Scrutiny Committee:-

- (1) endorsed the content and aims of the draft Joint Homelessness Strategy for Exeter and Teignbridge 2016-2021, for consideration by Executive and Council;
- (2) noted the findings of the Business Impact Assessment; and
- (3) noted the process and outcomes of the "You said, we did" consultation exercise:-

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WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The Assistant Director Customer Access introduced the report on the effect of Universal Credit roll-out on Council services advising that further reform was to come and that, as the cumulative impact of reductions in benefits are felt, the amount of Administrative grant given by Government to run the service may not be sufficient and that, in future years, Members would be asked to determine options for future support.

The Service Improvement Lead (Benefits) provided further detail on the Welfare reforms and the impact on the City Council's customers and how the increasing volume of work undertaken in the "Help me with my financial/housing problem" system would put pressure on staff resources. The report included detail on universal credit, the household benefit cap, the freezing of benefit rates and the removal of the family premium from housing benefit. There was a risk that the Authority would face more demand for discretionary help and support than could be met by resources. The Council would continue to work with partners in the Department of Work and Pensions and Exeter Money Advice Partnership to offer co-ordinated help at the earliest point.

Members thanked the officers for their hard work in the introduction of the changes. They noted that many of the welfare changes affected the more vulnerable households in the community. The disabled, large families and, in limited cases, the elderly, could all face more financial difficulty and housing insecurity as a result of reduced benefit incomes and migration to Universal Credit.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report, particularly around the effect of Universal Credit rollout on Council services.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.52 pm)

Chair