

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 1 September 2016

Present:-

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

Also Present

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Assistant Director City Development, Assistant Director Housing, System Lead - Finance, Principal Accountant Corporate, Service Improvement Lead (Customer Support) 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

13

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Packham and Robson.

14

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held on 2 June 2016 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

15

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

16

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION ISSUES

The Assistant Director City Development presented the report summarising and updating information provided to the Planning Member Working Group on 21 June 2016. The data included changes in the total number of students at the University of Exeter, in the present and future projected stock of purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) and in the number of Council Tax exemptions due to homes being entirely occupied by full time students.

The report showed how accommodation issues were affecting supply and demand in the housing market and communities in parts of the City. The report also sought to assess the existing and future effectiveness of the current planning policy approach to student accommodation. The report included a list of PBSA schemes that either had planning permission or had been subject to pre-application discussions. The University had significant potential to bring forward PBSA on its own land, notably the Streatham Campus.

Members referred to the growing problem of students bringing cars to the City, as it was estimated that some 10%-15% did so. One Member referred to the repeated concerns of residents in the Pennsylvania area in particular. He highlighted the specific problem of cars parked along roads which had resulted in Stagecoach

withdrawing a direct service between the Pennsylvania area and St Peter's School in Broadfields, students of St Peter's School now required to change buses in the City Centre to continue their journey to school. He called on the University to implement a policy of preventing students bringing cars to the City. He referred to the issue of residents' parking in relation to student cars and another Member called for a joint City Council and County Council review of residents' parking in general.

The Assistant Director responded that the University had updated its 2010 Sustainable Transport Policy in 2016, a draft of which had been considered by the Planning Member Working Group. A survey of students indicated that 9.3% brought cars at the beginning of term but that it was unclear whether these remained in the City. Although management plans were a requirement for new PBSA's they did not cover transport plans. The management plan itself usually required operators to advise students of the City's transport modes as opposed to car use but the discouragement of the latter could be more vigorously pursued and this should be raised further with the University and the operators.

Members commented on the public perception that, from an accommodation perspective, the City seemed, in some areas and on some issues, to be overwhelmed by the student presence. Reference was made to students directly replacing non student tenants in private accommodation and to concerns that available land was increasingly dedicated to PBSA's rather than new housing for the wider market. The latter, however, were also often occupied by students. The positive impact the University had on the City was acknowledged but, given that a significant proportion lived in private rented accommodation, it was felt that more dialogue was necessary to achieve a balanced approach to accommodation provision.

Members noted the dilemma that, when students lived in PBSA's, they were less integrated into the wider community but have less direct adverse impacts than more students occupying shared houses. Students preferred to congregate in areas where other students live. If the imbalance in communities from high proportions of shared houses was to be addressed then there would be a need to change the traditional student undergraduate culture where PBSA's were occupied in the first year with living out in subsequent years.

In terms of the growth in Council Tax exemptions for students, the Assistant Director advised, that ultimately, the Government intention by 2019/20 was to eliminate all revenue grant to Councils. It was also unlikely to remove the exemptions.

A Member referred to the impact on primary schools of increasing number of children who did not have English as their first language or were unable to speak English at all, many of whom were the children of post graduate students at the University. In some cases, this had led to the engagement of interpreters at a cost to the schools. Given that the University benefited financially from overseas students he suggested that a form of financial recompense by the University could be appropriate and suggested dialogue on the issue of additional funding with the University and the County Council. In terms of the social impact, another Member remarked that, in his experience, the addition of different nationalities to a school roll was positive and a cause for celebration.

The Assistant Director commented that about a quarter of University of Exeter students came from overseas. The issue raised had not surfaced at the regular meetings with education authority representatives but could be discussed at the next meeting and raised with the University itself, if considered appropriate.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report, in particular:-

- student numbers in Exeter were likely to continue to increase;
- the imbalance in communities, that were popular student areas, caused by shared student houses was only likely to reduce if new PBSA was brought forward in excess of the total increase in student numbers;
- even where new market private housing was provided in popular student areas (such as Central Station Yard) it tended to be occupied by a high proportion of students;
- the potential advantages of emerging proposals for significant amounts of additional PBSA at Streatham Campus; and
- students' accommodation preferences tended to be close to the University, City Centre and other students which meant that a more dispersed pattern of student accommodation was unlikely to be achievable.

and that the issues raised would be relayed to the University through appropriate channels.

17 **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - BUDGET MONITORING TO JUNE 2016**

The Assistant Director Housing advised Members of any major differences, by management unit between the approved budget and the outturn forecast for the first three months of the financial year up to 30 June 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.

During this period, the total budget variances indicated that there would be a net deficit of £168,313 in 2016/17. This represented a minor increase of £26,188 compared to the revised budgeted deficit of £142,125 for 2016/17.

The total amount of HRA capital expenditure for 2016/17 showed a total forecast spend of £14,504,544 compared to the £16,929,819 approved programme, a decrease of £2,425,275.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

18 **PEOPLE - BUDGET MONITORING TO JUNE 2016**

The Principal Accountant advised Members of any material differences, by management unit between the approved budget the outturn forecast for the first three months of the financial year up to 30 June 2016 in respect of People Services. 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 Services budget.

The current forecast suggested that net expenditure would increase from the approved budget by a total of £19,000 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital. This represented a variation of 0.56% from the revised budget and included supplementary budgets of £130,000.

The 2016/17 Capital Programme, including commitments brought forward from 2015/16, was £1,434,540, as set out in the report.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

ITEM FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

19

REVIEW OF EXTENDED OPENING IN THE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

The System Lead - Finance advised Members of a review of extended opening on Mondays and Thursdays in the Customer Service Centre and Call Centre.

Data had been collected on footfall and telephones shows that demand between 5pm and 6pm was very small in relation to the minimum number of staff required to keep the Centre open for this extended time. It was considered that resources should be used more efficiently to protect and increase the Council's income by Customer Service Officers undertaking case working, pursuing debt owed to the Council, processing council tax changes and reviewing discounts and exemptions.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report and requested Executive to consider the efficiency of the service and to amend opening hours to 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday from 31 October 2016.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.02 pm)

Chair