

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 7 September 2017

Present:

Councillor Wardle (Chair)
Councillors Branston, Foggin, Hannan, Hannaford, Holland, Morris, Thompson and Vizard

Apologies:

Councillor Foale

Also present:

Director, Service Lead Housing Assets, Housing Needs Strategy and Partnership Lead,
Principal Accountant Corporate, Technical Accounting Manager and Democratic Services
Officer (Committees) (HB)

In attendance

Councillor Emma Morse	- Portfolio Holder for People
Councillor Hannah Packham	- Portfolio Holder for the Housing Revenue Account
Councillor Phil Bialyk	- Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Communities and Sport

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held on 1 June 2017 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

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DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

ITEM FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

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FIRE SAFETY MANAGEMENT POLICY (HOUSING)

The Service Lead Housing Assets presented the report recommending a new Fire Safety Management Policy in respect of the Council's housing stock and requesting whether escape routes should be managed under a "managed" or "clean and clear" approach, the fire service having recommended the latter from a tenant safety and efficient use of resources perspective and for best ensuring statutory compliance as it would maintain escape routes in the safest condition and remove uncertainty about what was permitted. A light touch would be used in introducing the new approach starting with a consultation period followed by education across the 437 locations. Aside from additional work necessary from inspecting and enforcing, an inspection regime would need to be carried out methodically to effectively cover all the locations on a monthly or weekly basis.

There was an extensive list of items not permitted such as carpets, tables and mobility scooters but these were items most often found.

A “managed” approach would require clear requirements to be imposed on residents that they must follow, which in turn, would require a regular system of inspections and enforcement actions to ensure that the Council was not in breach of its obligations. A “clean and clear” policy would require at least one extra FTE employee for the enforcement stage. This was because monthly inspections would be the minimum practicable precaution to ensure escape routes were kept sterile, maintain dialogue with tenants and take enforcement when necessary. This was likely to be evaluated as a Grade 6 at a cost of £26,280. A further report would be submitted to Executive regarding the resources required for the pre-implementation stage

Some Members abstained from supporting the proposal, suggesting that a managed approach would be better. They felt that requiring all tenants to remove their property was too draconian and that many would simply leave pushchairs etc. behind their front doors which was a fire risk in itself.

The Portfolio Housing for People explained that advice had evolved over the years with the experience of both the Lakanal House fire in Southwark and, more recently, Grenfell and that the Council would be following the recommendations of the Health and Safety Executive, the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority as well as Local Government Association guidance. She stated that the Council intended to improve genuine communal area, such as at Rennes House, and would also seek to encourage larger families in communal flats to move to larger houses. She remarked that mobility scooters left in communal areas were both a physical impediment as well as being likely to exacerbate problems of smoke inhalation should a fire occur. New builds incorporated facilities for those with scooters.

Responding to a Member, the Director explained the responsibilities of the Council and the need to ensure that that it was not in breach of its statutory duty and was meeting relevant legislation and accompanying guidance material.

People - Scrutiny Committee supported the report and requested Executive to:-

- (1) recommend Council adopts a new Fire Safety Management Policy meaning that designated escape routes and alternative routes which could be used for escape should be maintained free from all obstacles in order to secure tenant safety and the Council’s compliance with statutory duties;
- (2) note that the approach to implementing the policy would be phased over time to include awareness raising, consultation on storage requirements and fire safety education; and
- (3) recommend Council approves the additional funding required to implement the adopted option for the management of the Council’s Housing Stocks, those costs to be met from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), as set out in the report.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - BUDGET MONITORING TO JUNE 2017

The Technical Accounting Manager 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 2017 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 surplus of £725,335 in 2017/18. This represented a significant movement of £3,212,950 compared to the revised budgeted deficit of £2,487,615 for 2017/18 with, most notably, £2,700,000 attributable to delays with the St. Loyes Extra Care Scheme.

The total amount of HRA capital expenditure for 2017/18 showed a total forecast spend of £11,607,625 compared to the £19,999,900 approved programme, a decrease of £8,392,275.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

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PEOPLE BUDGET MONITORING TO JUNE 2017

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 2017 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 £28,570 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital. This represented a variation of 1.03% from the revised budget and included supplementary budgets of £178,300.

The 2017/18 Capital Programme, including commitments brought forward from 2016/17, was £1,697,210, as set out in the report.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

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EXETER SLEEPSAFE

The Housing Needs Strategy and Partnership Lead presented the report reviewing the 2016/17 SafeSleep Shelter in Market Street, Exeter.

The operational cost of SafeSleep was £60,000, the Council's contribution being £28,000 with the remaining £32,000 costs met through rental income, housing benefit payments and grants from Devon County Council and the Exeter Community Safety Partnership. The Exeter City Council budget contribution for 2017/18 would not be changed. The following statistics were provided:-

- SafeSleep had opened from 21 December 2016 to 20 March 2017 providing 1,909 bed nights of accommodation to 36 women and 107 men;
- averaged occupancy had been 21 per night with a high of 31 and a low of 12;
- 78% of those accommodated were local - Exeter (63%) or Devon (15%);
- clients ranged in age between 17 and 73, with 76% of clients 18-44; and
- 65 clients (45%) achieved positive move on to more settled sustainable accommodation, 34 clients had negative outcomes and 44 unknown outcomes.

The concern that the facility would prove a magnet for others outside the area had been unfounded.

For the forthcoming winter, the service was currently out to tender, bids to be assessed in early October. The internal resources needed to monitor this and administer housing benefit to an external agency to be reviewed at the end of the scheme to compare to the 2016/17 experience. It was hoped that the bidders would be able to identify a venue with officers currently also assessing potential locations.

Responding to a Member, he confirmed that the increasing number of homeless young people was a concern with shared housing identified as the likely solution. A shared housing network project group had been set up jointly with neighbouring authorities to stimulate shared housing and the need to improve clients' skills to cope with shared living would also be important. A further challenge would be to cater for both males and females in any venue identified, one Member suggesting if two different locations could be the solution

The System Lead Housing reported that 25-40 were homeless on Exeter's streets at any one time and that over the next eight weeks, four teams would be carrying out hotspot counts on given days. He reported that Homeless Link, a London based umbrella charity representing organisations on the frontline of homelessness, had requested a case study report to share with other local authorities etc.

Scrutiny Committee - People supported the report and noted its contents and the recommendations that would be used to inform future service delivery.

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**EXETER HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD - MINUTES OF THE MEETING
HELD ON 11 JULY 2017**

People - Scrutiny Committee noted the minutes of the Exeter Health and Wellbeing Board of 11 July 2017.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.20 pm)

Chair