

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 8 November 2016

Present:

Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillors Bialyk, Bull, Denham, Hannaford, Morse, Owen, Pearson and Sutton

Apologies:

Councillor Leadbetter

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Deputy Chief Executive, Assistant Director Customer Access, Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support, Innovation Exeter Programme Director, Service Lead Housing Customers, Service Lead Housing Assets, Service Lead Performance, Strategy and Resources, Senior Housing Development Officer, Service Improvement Lead (Benefits) and Democratic Services Manager (Committees)

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 23 August, 13 September and 11 October 2016 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bialyk declared an interest in respect of Minute 126 (Zero Energy Buildings Catalyst Project) as a European Structural Investment Fund Committee Member.

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

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STAFFING WITHIN THE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT TEAM

The report of Assistant Director Housing was submitted which set out a proposal to increase the staffing establishment within the Housing Development Team for an additional full time Housing Development Officer on a fixed term contract to 31 October 2017 to assist with the delivery of new affordable housing.

The Senior Housing Development Officer advised Members that there had been additional pressure on staffing resources within the Housing Development Team due to two secondments. The net overall employee costs would not increase as the funding for the post would be met from a combination of savings from a current vacancy and not backfilling a secondment.

RESOLVED that a temporary increase in the establishment of the Housing Development Team of a Housing Development Officer Grade 8 until 31 October 2017 be approved.

The report of the Assistant Director Customer Access was submitted which sought Members' views on the local Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme for working age residents for 2017-18. The local CTS Scheme started in April 2013 and Members were required to agree the Scheme rules annually. The report also sought approval of the revised Exceptional Hardship policy to take effect from 1 April 2017. The Equality Impact Assessment and consultation indicated that impact on individuals was likely to be limited and that any resulting hardship could be managed through the Exceptional Hardship Fund.

The Assistant Director Customer Access advised that the changes proposed had been presented to the Devon Local Government Steering Group meeting on 15 April 2016 by Devon County Council and District Heads of Finance. The preferred option at that meeting was to make a series of administrative changes to the CTS Scheme from April 2017 and introduce a Minimum Income Floor (MIF) for self-employed claimants. This option was felt to provide sufficient financial savings for the County Council - mostly through the introduction of MIF – and help to keep the CTS scheme in line with changes to national schemes. Since that meeting, the Devon Benefit Officer Group (made up of Revenues and Benefits officers from Devon districts, Plymouth and Torbay as well as finance representatives from the major preceptors) had worked to progress the preferred option.

The Service Improvement Lead (Benefits) advised Members that the proposals were intended to help align the Council Tax Support scheme with changes already confirmed for Child Tax Credit from April 2017 and introduced to Housing Benefit in April 2016 and/or Universal Credit and reflected the increased understanding of Universal Credit as roll out continued.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Access proposed the following amendments:-

- removal of (2) a) - Removing the Family Premium for all new applicants
- amendment of (2) b) –to read as: - to reduce “good cause” backdating to one month as originally proposed and to link the CTS date of claim to the date a claimant is first made liable for Council Tax where the delay in issuing a bill is not caused by the claimant.

These were agreed unanimously by the Committee.

People Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting on 3 November 2016 and it was noted that People Scrutiny supported the removal of the Family Premium for all new applicants.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:-

- (1) the revised Exceptional Hardship policy be approved;
- (2) the following changes to the local Council Tax Support Scheme be approved;
 - a) to reduce “good cause” backdating to one month as originally proposed and to link the Council Tax Support date of claim to the date a claimant is first made liable for Council Tax where the delay in issuing a bill is not caused by the claimant
 - b) Using a minimum income for self-employed earners after 1 year's self-employment
 - c) Reducing the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to 4 weeks

- d) Removing the Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the entitlement for new applicants
 - e) Removing entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) for looking after them
 - f) Removing entitlement to the additional earnings disregard for Universal Credit customers in work;
- (3) the implementation of change 2e) above be delayed to 1 April 2018 if the policy is introduced to Housing Benefit from a date after 1 April 2017; and
 - (4) limiting the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Support to a maximum of 2 not be adopted.

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DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY

The report of the Assistant Director Customer Access was submitted to seek Member's approval for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) policy that allowed the Council to make awards of DHP in a fair, lawful and consistent way.

People Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting on 3 November 2016 and its comments were reported.

RECOMMENDED to Council to approve the Discretionary Housing Payments policy.

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CREATION OF PART TIME TEMPORARY POST FOR HOUSING NEEDS ADMINISTRATION

The report of the Assistant Director Customer Access was submitted which set out the reasoning for and the funding arrangement of a temporary part time administration post in the Housing Needs Team.

The Assistant Director Customer Access advised Members that the post would cost £3,400 for 12 months and that the costs would be covered by current vacancies within the Team.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the creation of a temporary part time post in the Housing Needs Team be approved; and
- (2) the post uses existing funding from within the department.

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PROPOSED GREATER EXETER GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

The report of Chief Executive & Growth Director was submitted which sought support for the establishment of formal joint governance arrangements for economic development and strategic planning and infrastructure project management and delivery for the Greater Exeter area to ensure that this functional economic area had the capacity to grow both regionally and nationally.

The Innovation Exeter Programme Director advised Members that the proposed Joint Committee was intended to be an effective vehicle for areas of cross boundary working and strategic projects that promoted the interests of the area that couldn't

otherwise be pursued by any of the authorities acting on their own. The neighbouring authorities were at different stages in progressing the proposals. Devon County Council were not yet prepared to support this arrangement.

The Leader expressed his disappointment that the County Council were not yet prepared to support this joint committee.

The Portfolio Holder for Place and Portfolio Holder for Customer Access confirmed that they would raise the issue of the County Council not being prepared to support the joint committee at the next County Council meeting.

Members welcomed and supported the establishment of formal joint governance arrangements with East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) an in principle setting up of the proposed Greater Exeter Growth and Development Board together with the local authorities covering the Greater Exeter functional economic area, namely East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council, Mid Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council be approved. The Board will be a Joint Committee under s101 (5), 102 Local Government Act 1972 and s9EB Local Government Act 2000 and pursuant to the Local Authorities (Arrangement for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012; and
- (2) the unwillingness of Devon County Council to support this step at present be noted.

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REVIEW OF STAFFING - DEMOCRATIC & CIVIC SUPPORT

The report of the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support was submitted to provide a business case which examined the need to increase the staffing provision within the Democratic Services (Committees) team to ensure that the services provided could be delivered in the most effective and efficient way.

The Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support advised that Members had approved the creation of a part time Administrative Assistant post in the Democratic Services at Council on 18 October 2016. Since the initial report, further work had been undertaken on the needs of the team and it had been recognised that it would be preferable if the post was full time. This would ensure greater flexibility and enable the successful post holder to gain a suitable and relevant qualification whilst in the post.

Members supported the proposal for a full time post.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:-

- (1) the Administrative Assistant post within the Democratic Services (Committees) team be extended to be full time; and
- (2) the Council's budget be adjusted accordingly.

URGENT DECISION - ZERO ENERGY BUILDINGS CATALYST PROJECT

Councillor Bialyk declared an interest as a European Structural Investment Fund (sub-committee of the Local Enterprise Partnership) Committee Member. He left the meeting during discussion of the item.

The Service Lead Housing Assets updated Members on the need for the urgent decision to allow the Council to enter into a partnership agreement with Department for Communities and Local Government in respect of the Zero Energy Buildings Catalyst (ZEBCat) project, which was aimed at developing an innovative approach to low carbon building retrofit and to commit a capital budget of £480,000 in 2018/19. This was a pilot project which would involve six existing Exeter City Council Houses to demonstrate how whole building net zero energy retrofit could be delivered. This approach would need to be considered with other methods including Passivhaus EnerPHit Standard for retrofit.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture commented that Exeter City Futures were collecting data on projects like this and the results from this pilot could be incorporated into its Acceleration Programme. This data could then be compared with alternative pilot schemes of low carbon retrofits.

Members supported this pilot and requested that a report on the results be brought back to Members.

The Service Lead Housing Assets stated that retrofit would not only provide energy savings for the tenants it would also prolonging the life of the housing stock.

RESOLVED that the urgent decision be noted.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 - EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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, 2, 3 and 4 of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Act.

THE FUTURE OF OLDER PERSON'S SERVICES FOR HOUSING

The report of the Assistant Director Housing was submitted to advise Members of the final business case detailing the proposed changes to the way the Council delivers housing and housing-related support services to tenants in its older persons' accommodation.

The Service Lead Performance, Strategy and Resources advised that the draft business case was presented to Executive in July 2016. All the tenants affected were then sent a letter and there were consultation meetings with both tenants and officers. The feedback from the consultations had informed the content of the final business case.

Members supported the way forward.

RESOLVED that the:-

- (1) feedback from the consultation process on the draft business case and the petition from some residents of Rennes House, together with officers' responses be noted;

And the following be approved:-

- (2) the final Business Case and the proposals it contains for the restructure of Exeter City Council's older persons' housing and housing-related support services;
- (3) the ending of the warden service from 31 March 2017;
- (4) the appointment of three Older Persons' Property Services Officers to provide an enhanced management service to the Council's older persons' housing from 1 April 2017 and the levying of an appropriate service charge to pay for these posts; and
- (5) the continued provision of an emergency alarm system to those tenants who currently benefit from such an arrangement and who do not pay for it until such time as a change of tenancy takes place.

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

Chair

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 13 December 2016.