

## **CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Thursday 28 March 2019

### **Present:**

Councillor Sheldon (Chair)  
Councillors Warwick, Holland, Musgrave, Thompson, Vizard M and Wood

### **Apologies:**

Councillors Lamb

### **Also present:**

Chief Finance Officer and Democratic Services Officer (MD)

### **In Attendance:**

Councillor Peter Edwards - Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development  
Councillor Ollie Pearson - Portfolio Holder for Support Services

## 11 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2019 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct

## 12 **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

No declarations of disclosable interest were made.

## 13 **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 19**

One member of the public, submitted a question under Standing Order 19, in relation to the practical impact to staffing and various savings measures.

Councillor Edwards, as the Council Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development provided a response to the questions. A copy of the question and response is appended to the minutes.

## 14 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER** **20**

In accordance with Standing Order No 20, Councillor Musgrave and Councillor Thompson submitted respective questions on Councillor Compliance with the constitution, redaction policy and funding for the Pinhoe Hub.

A copy of the questions had been circulated to Members, and together with the response from Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development are appended to the minutes.

## 15 **OVERVIEW OF REVENUE BUDGET**

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report for the Revenue Budget for 2018/19, advising Members of the overall projected financial position of the HRA & General Fund Revenue Budgets and for the Members to formally note the Council's projected financial position and to approve additional expenditure required during the financial year.

He explained that work had been undertaken during the second quarter, to prevent the General Fund level from falling below the £3 Million level, which was initially expected to happen. Although the level had not dropped, there was still a requirement to continue to identify means of funding for unexpected financial pressures throughout the year.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA), showed a significant reduction in the amount to be taken from the working balance, and the projected reduction was £396,482, leaving the balance at £9,815,762. Members were informed that the HRA position had been affected by delays from the Capital Programme, which had resulted in a large reduction to the amount to be taken from the working balance. Members noted that there should be progress moving schemes forward.

The General Fund Balance, had remained stable during the last quarter, with an overall net contribution of £1,645,926, leaving the projected year-end balance at £3,046,478, which was marginally above the £3 million minimum level approved by Council. Members were referred to the key variances for Planning Services, noting that there was no £357,000 overspend as this would be funded from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and it was confirmed that without this, the Planning Services would be in surplus.

In response to questions from Members, the Chief Finance Officer responded:-

- The £130K additional consultancy cost for procurement, covered the whole year, and there had been no consultancy spend since October 2018. There had been a temporary HRA Procurement Manager in post for over a year, with the costs re-charged to the HRA. The Manager would be leaving the Council and the work would be incorporated into the internal Procurement Team.
- There was an error with the debt write off figures in the report, which would be corrected and re-issued to Members.

Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee noted the report and requested Executive and Council to note and approve:

- (1) The General Fund forecast financial position for the 2018/19 financial year;
- (2) The HRA forecast financial position for 2018/19 financial year;
- (3) The outstanding Sundry Debt position as at March 2019; and
- (4) The creditors' payments performance.

The Chief Finance Officer presented the Capital Monitoring Statement, which reported the current position of the Council's revised annual capital programme and advised Members of the anticipated level of deferred expenditure into future years. Capital expenditure was a significant source of risk and uncertainty and the Capital Programme was updated every three months to reflect the latest costs and manage the risks.

He explained that that £10.7million had now been deferred to future years and that £1.074 million had been brought forward into 2018/19. There were a few significant projects in place at Exeter City Council, which would see substantially higher expenditure by the end of the next financial year. Members noted that they could enquire with project managers for explanations on why a scheme had been deferred.

The Chief Finance Officer referred to the completed schemes during the third quarter, stating that it was being recommended to Council, to add £74,900 to the Capital Programme for the Mobile and Agile Working for Environmental Health, which was a part of the Council's Transformational Change Programme.

Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee supported the report and requested Executive to recommend to Council to approve:

- (1) The revision of the annual Capital Programme to reflect the reported variations detailed in 8.1, 8.4 and 8.5 of the report; and
- (2) The additions to the Capital Programme detailed in 8.7 of the report.

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### **BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 3**

The Chief Finance Officer presented the quarterly report which advised Members of material differences, by management unit, between the 2018/19 approved budget and the current outturn forecast in respect of Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee. He advised that local authorities had a statutory duty to set and monitor budgets during the year and to action potential overspends or income losses.

The Chief Finance Officer highlighted that following the formation of the Procurement team, the significant variances were now stable and would be reflected accordingly in next year's report.

The Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report and were satisfied that actions were being taken to address the key areas of budgetary pressure highlighted in this report.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 5.52 pm)

Chair

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**PUBLIC QUESTION RECEIVED for Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee – 28 March 2019, from Mr Peter Cleasby**

Response to be made by the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development

**Question 1**

Will the Council please explain the practical impacts on its own staff of the various savings measures relating to apprentice opportunities identified in Appendix 5 of the 2019/20 Budget Book?

**Response 1**

Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development responded to the question and stated that there was no longer a corporate salary budget for apprentices. The Council Training Levy was ring-fenced for apprenticeship training costs, which was beginning to be use apprenticeship funds to upskill existing employees.

He explained that it was still possible to recruit new apprentices externally, however departments would have to fund the salaries for these posts, as they would for any other position. Managers had responded well to the changes, and the Human Resources team were receiving substantial amount of queries, requesting apprenticeship training. The Parks and Green Spaces Team were currently gauging interest in Horticultural Apprenticeships.

**Supplementary Response from Mr Cleasby**

Mr Cleasby was permitted a response which he stated that it was not always easy to see the budget changes and that he was grateful to the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development for his explanation. He was satisfied that apprenticeship schemes were still available and that there were still opportunities in place at Exeter City Council.

(It was noted that the question and response would be attached to the minutes).

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## **MEMBER QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER at Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee, Under Standing Order 20 – 28 March 2019**

### **From Councillor Musgrave**

Response to be made by the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development

#### **Question 1**

**Can the Chair please explain to the committee why he has refused to accept a question from a member of the public regarding Councillors who fail to comply with the Council's constitution?**

#### **Response 1**

Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development explained that the question from the member of the public had been refused following discussion with the Chair of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee, and following guidance with Standing Order 19(1). It was considered that the question presented did not fall under the scope of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee terms of reference, and was not relevant to the business of the meeting.

#### **Supplementary Question**

Councillor Musgrave asked a supplementary question about whether refusal of the question was consistent with the Council's commitment to openness and transparency.

#### **Supplementary Response**

Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development stated that the Council must ensure good governance and obey its own rules as set out in the Constitution.

#### **Question 2**

**What is the procedure for members of the public to complain about sitting councillors failing, in their view, to comply with the council's constitution?**

#### **Response 2**

Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development explained that members of the public who wished to raise a complaint against a City Councillor, could find information on how to do this on the City Council's website. The website included the appropriate complaint form and guidance for dealing with a complaint.

Upon receipt, all complaints were forwarded to the Council's Monitoring Officer, who would seek the views of an Independent Person and take them into account before a decision was made on the complaint. Under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, the Council was required to appoint an Independent Person to assist the Council in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct amongst its elected Members.

### **Supplementary Question**

Councillor Musgrave asked a supplementary question about what sanctions were available against Councillors who had not followed the rules as set out in the Constitution.

### **Supplementary Response**

Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development confirmed that, following legislation changes from Central Government, there were no set sanctions in place.

### **Question 3**

**Reference the Monitoring Officers response to Mr Cleasby' s question at the last committee; can the Monitoring Officer reassure me that the proposed amendment to the council's redaction policy will enable the public release of the information specifically requested by Mr Cleasby in his original question?**

### **Response 3**

Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development explained that unfortunately, the Officers involved in this matter were currently on leave, and unavailable to provide him with an update. He stated that in accordance with Standing Order 20 (1) (b), a written response would be provided as soon as practicable after the Scrutiny Committee meeting, and a copy of the response would be circulated to all Members electronically.

**MEMBER QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER at Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee, Under Standing Order 20 – 28 March 2019**

**From Councillor Thompson**

Response to be made by the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development

**Question 1**

**Re the Agenda and in advance of Corporate Services Committee, are you able to advise how the £10,000 for Pinhoe Hub has been spent and also how the £90,000 set aside for the future is allocated to be spent please?**

**Response 1**

Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development explained that the initial £10,000 had been provided to commence the project and to pay the architect fees and support throughout the planning process. A further payment of £13,680 had also been made this week, for further invoices, which was again for architect fees and financial support.

Councillor Edwards stated that the balance of the funds was awarded as and when and that when further expenditure was incurred, it would be paid only on receipt of the invoices, ensuring that the funds were spent in line with the Council resolution.

**Supplementary Question**

Councillor Thompson asked a supplementary question regarding the £10,000 spent from City Council for funding the Pinhoe Community Hub and access to view the accounts and meeting information.

**Supplementary Response**

Councillor Edwards, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development explained that the £10,000 spent, was to 'kick start' the project. The set of accounts could be made available to Councillor Thompson and he recommended Councillor Thompson liaise with Councillor Wood regarding attending the meetings.

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