

## **PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Thursday 1 November 2018

### **Present:**

Councillor Wardle (Chair)  
Councillors Foale, Holland, Owen, Pattison, Pierce, Robson and Vizard N

### **Apologies:**

Councillor Foggin

### **Also present:**

Director (BA), Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support, Housing Solutions Lead, Principal Accountant Corporate, Technical Accounting Manager and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

### **In attendance**

Councillor Wright                      Portfolio Holder for Housing Revenue Account

39

### **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held on 6 September 2018 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

40

### **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

41

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

None.

42

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

None.

43

### **ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT : 2017/18**

The Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support presented the report providing an annual update on the Scrutiny work achieved during the Municipal Year 2017/18.

Following the resignation of the Scrutiny Programme Officer to take up another post within the Council the decision had been taken not to fill the vacant post. Members expressed their concern at the loss of this valuable service as they believed that it would compromise their ability to carry out the Council's scrutiny function effectively. Noting that future Task and Finish Groups would be led by respective service leads they sought further information on the future operation of scrutiny.

Responding to Members, the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support advised that the decision not to fill the post had been taken because of ever increasing budget pressures on the Council. He however highlighted that all three Scrutiny Committees would have the opportunity to input into the 2019/20 budget process prior to submission to Council. He confirmed that there would continue to be annual scrutiny reports and, in response to a suggestion from a Member, acknowledged that this would be an appropriate time for the Committee to further assess the implications of the decision.

Members asked that their appreciation for the comprehensive and hard work undertaken by Anne Marie Hawley in her role as the Scrutiny Programme Officer be recorded and their thanks passed on.

Members indicated that they would like to review the decision not to fill the Scrutiny Programme Officer post in two years' time.

People Scrutiny Committee noted and approved the Annual Scrutiny report.

44

#### **ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION TASK AND FINISH WORKING GROUP**

Councillor Lyons presented the report on the findings and recommendations of the Accessibility and Inclusion Task and Finish Group.

People Scrutiny Committee supported further investigations as to whether:-

- (1) to incorporate an "Access to Support" page into a prominent place on the Council's website;
- (2) to advertise Council Services and accessibility support on the internal screens in the Customer Service Centre;
- (3) to advertise Council Services and accessibility support on screens at local doctors' surgeries and whether there is an associated cost;
- (4) provide an A-Z page of Council services with general departmental contact details on the website and in paper form in various formats;
- (5) icons should be added to menu options on the website to provide better prompts and signposting to Council services;
- (6) direct links for key services should be introduced under the area headings which appear on the initial front page of the website;
- (7) to adapt the website to provide options to change the magnification, background colour and font size and colour; and
- (9) to ensure the website in general is compatible with the screen reading software often used by partially sighted customers.

45

#### **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - BUDGET MONITORING TO SEPTEMBER 2018**

The Technical Accounting Manager advised Members of any major differences by management unit between the approved budget and the outturn forecast for the second quarter 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 £3,868,032 in 2018/19. This represented a movement of £229,113 compared to the revised budgeted deficit of £4,097,145 for 2018/19.

The total amount of HRA capital expenditure for 2018/19 showed a total forecast deficit of £3,868,032.

The Technical Accounting Manager reported that the Government, as part of the recent budget announcement, had removed the borrowing cap so that local authorities were now able to borrow for new housebuilding in accordance with the Prudential Code.

The following responses were given to Members' queries:-

- 11 sites had been identified for potential new Council house build, subject to further financial viability work. Sites referred to areas not individual units;
- the Zebcat project was a zero carbon energy improvement pilot in conjunction with partners to improve energy efficiency. It included the installation of wall panels which include windows and doors and solar panel on roofs and would involve minimal disruption to tenants due to the pre fabrication of the panels off-site and the reduced installation timescales;
- the kitchen and bathroom replacement programmes were factored over 20 and 30 year periods respectively. Works undertaken separately outside these timetables were always assessed and could result in a recharge to the tenant for the early component renewal costs;
- to address the backlog of repairs in a contract with just under 24 months to run, regular meetings were being held at a high level and on site with the Mears Management Team to ensure the continued effective delivery of all contract requirements. Members were informed that the outstanding response repairs had reduced from 420 jobs at the end of August 2018 to 337 jobs at the end of October 2018 and that further assurance was being sought from the contractor to ensure that all backlog repairs were addressed as soon as possible.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

46

#### **PEOPLE - BUDGET MONITORING TO SEPTEMBER 2018**

The Principal Accountant advised Members of any material differences, by management unit between the approved budget and the outturn forecast for the second quarter 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 decrease from the approved budget by a total of £92,740 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital. This represented a variation of 2.64% from the revised budget and included a supplementary budget of £580,300.

The 2018/19 Capital Programme showed a total spend of £174,646.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## **ROUGH SLEEPING INITIATIVE 2018-2020**

The Interim System Lead, Housing Needs presented the report updating Members on progress with the Exeter City Council Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) including the bidding process, income received and project work streams and timescales.

The Government had announced a £30 million fund for 2018 to 2019 with further funding provisionally agreed for 2019 to 2020 targeted at local authorities with high numbers of people sleeping rough was also released. Exeter, with 35 Rough Sleepers the previous autumn, had been one of the 83 Local Authorities in England who had been able to bid for funds through Round 1 of RSI funding and its eight work stream bid had succeeded with an award of £481,600. Exeter had also been awarded a provisional allocation of £444,260 for the 2019/20 period subject to meeting certain criteria which it was believed could be achieved, one benchmark being a reduction in the homeless figures to be obtained through the official count figure to be determined in November 2018 with a further figure to follow in January.

The Interim System Lead, Housing Needs reported that the most recent count had returned a figure of 27 rough sleepers however an unverified estimate from Outreach and St Petrocks reported a figure closer to 40. Whilst a sudden increase of rough sleepers had recently occurred in London and, nationwide a 16% increase reported in the last 12 months, figures for Exeter showed a small reduction but had generally remained stable over recent years. He confirmed that priority for services was given to those with an Exeter background and the numbers incoming from other Devon origins was small.

Members welcomed the report, praising the new homeless shelter at the former restaurant on Magdalen Street many having attended the opening on 31 October 2018. The facility included CCTV coverage including the exterior and because of the location near busy roads it was the intention to provide suitable advice to users of the service. The shelter had four separate bedrooms plus ground floor areas to meet different needs and the service was mindful of clients who wished to be segregated for various reasons including drink and drug issues.

The Housing Solutions Needs lead advised that it was the intention to create Homelessness Mental Health Champions across the main Homelessness Services including Assertive Homelessness Outreach Service; Gabriel House; St Petrocks; Housing Options Service; ICE team and their partners. Ongoing training would be provided for the Champions, training them in brief interventions and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and this could be rolled out to other parties including Members and officers, as appropriate.

Support for ex-offenders was a further strand and the prison service now had a duty to refer released prisoners to local authorities. A meeting had been held with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government lead Prison and Probation Advisor. There were regular cases of ex-offenders leaving prison without accommodation with a small number turning to rough sleeping on the streets of Exeter as well as other cities. One of the most significant challenges was assessing housing need and accessing accommodation for those who were in and out of prison on short term sentences and did not meet the threshold for accommodating by local authorities as they were often deemed as "non-priority". Because of this a Prison Release Property had been included as one of the projects in the bid.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the Rough Sleeping Initiative report and the actions that would be used to inform future service delivery. They also thanked those staff involved in securing the award and their on-going hard work in this area.

48

**PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PARTNERSHIP - MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS  
HELD ON 13 AUGUST 2018**

The Director (BA) reported that, following the resignation of one of the tenant representatives, the Partnership was no longer quorate and therefore the meetings had been suspended. In any event, a review was being undertaken of the department's approach to resident involvement and community development and the resources needed to deliver a revised approach. As part of the Survey of Residents and Tenants (STAR), tenants' views would be sought as to how they would like to work with the Council and the community connectors would also provide valuable insight. In due course, the agreed task and finish group would be convened to present initial findings to Members to gauge their views.

People - Scrutiny Committee noted the minutes of the meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Partnership of 13 August 2018.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.37 pm)

Chair