

CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Thursday 25 June 2020

Time: 5.30 pm

Venue: Legislation has been passed that allows Council's to conduct Committee meetings remotely

Members are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business.

If you have an enquiry regarding any items on this agenda, please contact Howard Bassett, Democratic Services Officer (Committees) on 01392 265107.

During the Corona Virus outbreak, meetings will be held by virtual means. The [live stream can be viewed here](#) at the meeting start time.

Membership -

Vizard (Chair), Mitchell, M (Deputy Chair), Begley, Foggin, Mrs Henson, Mitchell, K, Oliver, Pattison, Martin, A, Quance, I, Sheldon, Sparkes, Wardle and Warwick

Agenda

1 Apologies

2 Minutes

(Pages 3 -
6)

To approve and sign the minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 6 February 2020.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillors are reminded of the need to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests that relate to business on the agenda and which have not already been included in the register of interests, before any discussion takes place on the item. Unless the interest is sensitive, you must also disclose the nature of the interest. In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, you must then leave the room and must not participate in any further discussion of the item. Councillors requiring clarification should seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer prior to the day of the meeting.

4 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public

It is considered that the Committee would be unlikely to exclude the press and public during the consideration of any of the items on this agenda but, if it should wish to do so, then the following resolution should be passed:-

“RESOLVED that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the particular item(s) of business on the grounds that it (they) involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraph(s) of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.”

5 **Questions from the Public Under Standing Order No. 19**

For a period of six months, all questions submitted to Scrutiny must only relate to Covid-19 matters.

For details about how to speak at Committee, please click the following link - <https://exeter.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-meetings/public-speaking-at-meetings/overview/>

Questions must be submitted by 10am three working days before the meeting. For example, if the meeting is being held on a Thursday, questions must be submitted by 10am on the Monday before the meeting, in this case 22 June 2020.

6 **Presentation on Covid-19 by Portfolio Holders and Questions from Members and Answers**

(Pages 7 -
14)

Portfolio Holder briefing note attached.

Portfolio Holder for Supporting People – Councillor Morse
Portfolio Holder for Council Development and Services – Councillor Wright

Details of questions from Members relating to the two Portfolios above on Covid-19 issues only should be notified to the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support by 10.00am the Monday before the meeting – 22 June 2020.

Date of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee will be held on **Thursday** 16 July 2020 at 5.30 pm in the Civic Centre.

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CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 February 2020

Present:

Councillor Matthew Vizard (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Begley, Foggin, Mitchell, K, Oliver, Pattison, Sheldon, Sparkes and Wardle

Apologies:

Councillors Martin, Quance and Warwick

Also present:

Director (DB), Cleansing & Fleet Manager, Deputy Chief Finance Officer and Democratic Services Officer

In attendance:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Councillor Amal Ghusain | - Portfolio Holder for Equalities, Diversity and Communities |
| Councillor David Harvey | - Portfolio Holder for Environment and City Management |

1 **Apologies**

These were received from Councillors Martin, Quance and Warwick.

2 **Minutes**

Subject to the inclusion of Councillor Harvey in the list of Portfolio Holders in attendance, the minutes of the meeting of Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 5 December 2019 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

4 **Questions from the Public Under Standing Order No. 19**

No questions from members of the public were received.

5 **Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order No. 20**

No questions from Members were received.

6 **2019/20 General Fund Capital Monitoring Statement - Quarter 2**

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer presented the report on the 2019/20 General Fund Capital Monitoring Statement setting out the current position in respect of the Council's revised annual capital programme and advised Members of the anticipated

level of deferred expenditure into future years. The report also set out amendments to the annual capital programme in order to reflect the reported variations.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer highlighted the ongoing work on site in respect of both the Leisure Complex and Bus Station and Riverside Leisure Centre sites and the City Council loan to Exeter City Living.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised that the report had been presented to the Executive on 10 December 2019 and which was before Members of this Scrutiny Committee for information.

Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

7 Overview of General Fund Revenue Budget 2019/20 - Quarter 2

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer presented the report which advised Members of the overall projected financial position of the General Fund Revenue Budgets for the 2019/20 financial year after six months.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised that the report had been presented to the Executive on 10 December 2019 and which was before Members of this Scrutiny Committee for information. She highlighted that the projected working balance would stand at £3.75 million, which was above the minimum level of reserves.

Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

8 2019/20 HRA Budget Monitoring Report - Quarter 2

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer presented the report which advised Members of the overall financial position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue and Capital Budgets for the 2019/20 financial year after the first six months. The report also highlighted budgetary areas of risk for factors beyond the Council's control that may result in potential deviations from budget.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer, referring to the detailed schedule of the capital programme for Housing and the Council Own Build programme, highlighted the removal of the HRA debt cap which had enabled the Council to invest, on a site by site basis, to bring forward housing development opportunities. She also referred to the slippage in certain refurbishment programmes.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised that the report had been presented to the Executive on 10 December 2019 and was before Members of this Scrutiny Committee for information.

Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee noted the report

9 Scheduling of Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee Meetings

Referring to the time lag between the Quarter end of the budget monitoring reports, the Chair reported that he would raise the timetabling of the meetings of this Committee at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Programme Board on 19 March 2020.

10 Kerbside Recycling Service - Presentation by the Cleansing and Fleet Manager

The Cleansing and Fleet Manager spoke on the presentation on the kerbside recycling service set to be launched in September 2021. He provided the following details of progress to date:-

- comprehensive research had been undertaken into schemes run by other authorities including Bristol, Bath, Oxford and Cardiff as well as the more rural neighbouring authorities of Teignbridge and East Devon. The latter had provided useful information of operating in the narrow, terraced streets of Exmouth, on its communication programme and health and safety etc. matters;
- evaluation and cost analysis of vehicle options and appropriate material sorting technology as part of the upgrade to the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF);
- the methods of capture and sorting of the recycled waste both at the kerbside and within the MRF where an optical sorting equipment by means of a laser beam would distinguish differing materials. A high quality end use was sought to generate income;
- a conservative analysis by the consultant that each crew would collect from 676 properties per round; and
- staffing matters, including the involvement of the Civic Centre Customer First team, as part of a communication strategy, as the launch was likely to lead to an increase in enquiries.

He responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- the preferred method of roll out was under consideration, options including a city wide roll-out, launching in three or four areas initially or a single area pilot;
- additional staff would be required with many of those currently working at the MRF re-deployed to the vehicles for on-site sorting. In addition, an apprenticeship scheme was intended with training on loading initially and then as drivers;
- routes would be carefully planned to limit traffic congestion around rush-hours and in the city's narrower streets;
- it was anticipated that there would be a short time period when the MRF would not be operational in order for the new equipment to be installed;
- with the current national average re-cycling rate being 45% - often reflective of rural or more stable populations - Exeter's goal, which was a conservative one set by the consultant, was to increase its target from a percentage of mid 30's to 49%-50% and above. It was also noted that Exeter had one of the lowest waste production rates in the country; and
- regular meetings were held with the University where an annual "Student On The Move" scheme had been introduced to reduce associated problems of changing occupancy. The University was keen to develop its commitment to sustainable communities and, one possible student involvement scheme, could be through research into improved communication with the student population.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and City Management commented as follows:-

- a business/project plan was in place;
- with 3 to 9 February 2020 being National Apprenticeship Week, it was appropriate that the City Council was strongly committed to its apprenticeship programme and offering training opportunities to develop the talent of Exeter's young people and help address labour shortages; and

- praised the hard work, enthusiasm and commitment of the Cleansing Team and its willingness to take on additional work such as the University Campus Waste Collection contract.

Members welcomed the update on the implementation of the kerbside re-cycling service, requesting that this become a standing item on this Committee's agenda. The inclusion of the business plan in the report to the next Committee was also requested.

The Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report and agreed that further reports be presented to each meeting to include timelines of the scheme implementation, details of the business/project plan and the communication strategy, these details to be provided in the Committee papers prior to the meeting.

11 **Items for Consideration for Future Meetings**

The Chair advised that there would be a presentation on Community Safety by the Service Lead Environmental Health and Community Safety and Inspector Simon Arliss at the next meeting of this Committee on 2 April 2020. The presentation would focus on anti-social behaviour and drug related issues across the city's Public Realm. He also invited Members to suggest items for future consideration by the Scrutiny Committee and which would be put forward to the Scrutiny Programme Board.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.31 pm

Chair

Customer Access

Housing Needs

- Key dates
 - 23rd March Lockdown commenced
 - 24th March – partner services and district Councils close doors (ECC remains open)
 - 26th March Luke Hall MP instructs Councils “Everyone In”
 - 27th March – ECC procures hotels and begins accommodating rough sleepers
- 75% increase to the temporary accommodation portfolio
- All rough sleepers offered accommodation (97% accepted)
- 91 households accommodated on special emergency grounds
- Demand for housing advice and homelessness applications has stayed the same
- Physical face to face applications shift to phone and on-line applications
- 57% increase in positive move-on compared to previous 3 months

Background

The Covid lockdown was announced by the Prime Minister on the evening of Monday 23rd March and from the morning of Tuesday 24th March, all customer access to the Customer Service Centre was stopped, save for emergency homeless presentations. On Thursday 26th March Housing Minister Luke Hall asked all local authorities to help the crisis response by making safe accommodation available to all rough sleepers. This included finding different accommodation for those already in night shelters, as this form of accommodation was no longer seen as safe during the crisis. Work began to achieve this on Friday 27th March and within a week most rough sleepers had received an offer of accommodation. The work to keep the numbers on the streets has continued throughout the crisis however, as new presentations from those newly homeless or newly moved to the area has been ongoing.

The Housing Needs service has remained very busy during the pandemic. Whilst the number of evictions generally reduced new causes of homelessness arose such as shielding-related loss of home and accelerated discharges from hospitals and prisons. Numbers of out of area homeless applicants applying to Exeter also remained consistent as has the rate of applications for social housing. Added demand on the service from the need to provide extra accommodation for all local rough sleepers from the end of March continues to stress-test the team with accommodation procurement and management, additional caseload assessment work and pressure to create move-on in a semi-paralysed housing market.

Emergency Covid-19 accommodation

Since 15th March the service has provided additional assessments and emergency covid accommodation for 91 households (mainly single homeless) for whom the Council would not ordinarily owe a duty to accommodate. This includes all rough sleepers supported under the government’s “Everyone In” instruction on 26th March.

Pre CV-19 we were using 88 units of contract TA with additional demand being met by the use of spot purchased accommodation.eg Travelodge / Premier Inn. In March it was necessary to dramatically increase the TA portfolio to accommodate those rough sleepers who we would not ordinarily have a duty to accommodate. Numerous options were explored.

The Main Challenges

- Increased daily demand for placements
- Increased financial demand
- Increased demand from clients & providers
- At exactly the same time our partner agencies were making decisions based on managing social distancing which resulted in the closure of our local support provision. In addition, the majority of district council closed their customer service centres.
- Support services across Sanctuary, Social Care, Together, were drastically scaled back to providing some telephone support for clients, face to face meetings with clients stopped abruptly
- In the properties owned by the council and managed by TA staff, the Temporary Accommodation Officers in addition to managing the three properties were ensuring that clients who needed to shield due to symptoms of CV were able to self-isolate. Emergency Food and medicines were provided by as there were simply no other options available to us, none of the clients who self-isolating were hospitalised and none tested positive for CV.
- Managing a CV Risk Assessment across all TA properties including spot purchase so that we could advise and support providers and give advice from PHE which changed daily
- Move on from temporary accommodation during lockdown was significantly restricted due to supporting services e.g. letting agents, removals etc. being out of action.

Rough Sleeping

All 32 local rough sleepers known to services from the start of lockdown (23rd March) were made offers of accommodation, most starting from the 27th March. All but 1 person accepted accommodation. Numbers were added to with people presenting to the Council from who were staying with friends, rough sleeping out of area and leaving local and regional institutions. Members may recall that the Council, within less than 48 hours of the government's announcement had put in place emergency arrangements to offer accommodation to all those sleeping rough. Special thanks must go to Gillian Littley for this.

Numbers of rough sleepers in the city reduced to a low of 5 at one point (3 awaiting a specific offer of accommodation and 2 new arrivals).

Further to the "Everyone In" instruction Government specialist homelessness advisors have subsequently advised local housing authorities to predominantly return to normal assessments of homelessness applicants under existing homelessness legislation. The Council was advised at the end of April that the expectation to accommodate all rough sleepers was no longer required. To date however this position has not been relayed in written guidance and so the service continues to be challenged by some partner agencies expecting accommodation to be provided regardless of legal homelessness status.

Recovery Plans

The service has been working hard to maximise positive move-on from the temporary emergency accommodations. From April to present day, 27 individuals have moved on positively into alternative more settled housing (19 into private rented, 2 into social housing, 6 direct matches). 54 persons remain in emergency covid accommodation and the focus continues on planning for specific move-on options as part of the step-down recovery planning.

The service is working with partner agencies for both accommodation pathways and support services (where needed) for those unlikely to access private rented options. Actions are underway with Bournemouth Churches HA and Westward HA to create voids in Gabriel House and Mortimer House through support from our private rented access service (HAT) and St Petrocks Fairlets service. Finance and support packages are being drawn up in order to optimise move and sustainment potential.

Discussions are also ongoing with other partner accommodation providers in supported housing and social housing; vacancies in ECC stock properties already being prioritised for statutory homeless referrals from Housing Needs. RSLs have also been asked to prioritise additional vacancies to assist with the anticipated increase in homelessness applications from people fleeing domestic violence and abuse as lockdown continues to relax.

The temporary accommodation team is also prioritising voids wherever possible for move-on from covid accommodation. However this is challenging given the continuing numbers of new applicants for emergency housing.

We have been working with central government's task force of HAST advisors under Dame Louise Casey's agenda to minimise the number of people having to return to rough sleeping. The service has been reporting local needs in terms of current numbers in temporary accommodation and what might be needed in order to step down from hotels and provide interim accommodation in preparation for longer term plans.

Thank you to Richard Crompton, Kevin Neil and all of the staff in the Service who have worked tirelessly to support people in crisis to access emergency accommodation.

Customer Access

The Customer Services team's Covid- related activity has focussed around supporting Housing Needs staff by maintaining a skeleton staff in the Customer Service centre and playing an integral role to the development and resourcing of the Exeter Wellbeing Hub. The Hub has now been incorporated into the work of the Customer Services team.

The Payments and Collection team have been responsible, on top of business as usual in developing the framework for the dispersal of Grants from the Government's two grants Schemes to Businesses- the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Scheme where £25m has been given out to support local eligible businesses and the Discretionary/Top Up Scheme where there is £1.5m to be allocated to eligible businesses. The work involved in administering these Scheme cannot be underestimated- staff have often worked over the weekend to put these in place and respond to business enquiries. Also supporting the work has been Victoria Hatfield's team, finance and Strata, working alongside Laura Fricker, Jayne Hanson, Guy Burnley.

Senior staff in the team have also been involved in submitting the required returns to government on the council's spend of Covid 19-related work.

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Housing – Summary

Housing Assets - Asset Management Team	
Stock Condition Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inspections of blocks have continued and have been completed with no interaction with residents• Data cleansing, rationalisation, updating and general housekeeping of the stock condition information has been undertaken• A huge amount of stock condition data and expertise has been fed into the Carbon Reduction project.
Development Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work has continued to identify and bring forward opportunities to meet the 500 home delivery target for the HRA• The Laings development site closed down, but is due to re-mobilise at the beginning of July• The Extra Care scheme / Bovemoors Lane development have continued and good progress has been made• The procurement of an operator and care provider for the Extra Care scheme has slowed due to pressures within Devon County Council teams
Housing Assets - Health, Safety & Compliance	
Gas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The housing regulator did not relax the requirement to undertake annual gas safety inspections despite many tenants objecting at the height of the pandemic and gas engineers themselves having to self-isolate• Initially, contractors also found it hard to source PPE but we were able to develop detailed records of properties where tenants were self-isolating or shielding to be followed up at a later time which is allowable by the Regulator. Compliance dipped from 99.76% in February to 98.68% for May with most of the drop consisting of coronavirus related no-access. We expect the compliance figures to begin improving from July so that by September figures will be normal or near-normal• Our own teams have helped the contractor by providing additional reassurance calls to tenants• Gas boiler installation program continues to be delivered• Gas Repairs – This service was largely unaffected as all breakdowns tend to be urgent, as they leave tenants without hot water or heating.
Electrical	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Domestic 5-yearly inspections – Extensive planning between the contractor and ourselves has meant that the catch-up has already commenced. Compliance has dipped and currently stands at 94.1%.• Electrical Repairs – These were largely unaffected• Communal 5-yearly inspections – Although these did not involve electricians entering tenant properties, the risk from the coronavirus and difficulty obtaining PPE meant that the inspections were suspended. Compliance has reduced from 100% in February to 93.8% in May. We are now on track.• Emergency lighting upgrades – this extensive program was also suspended but in line with the other electrical work has resumed.

Asbestos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communal re-inspections – This service was largely uninterrupted and good compliance has been maintained – 99.29%. Voids and surveys – As voids were suspended, this area of work ceased. This was sector-wide. Work is resuming again and we will continue to work closely together to minimise any disruption.
Legionella	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk assessments – as these are annual we largely maintained compliance Testing and inspections – the work completed in sheltered schemes was suspended. Planning for the backlog has taken place and service is due to resume this month.
Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fire risk assessments (blocks of flats) were suspended, in agreement with the fire service, until September. We have been able to bring the resumption date forward so that surveys will start in July and finish in October Monthly inspections of communal areas in blocks of flats were suspended in agreement with the fire service. With visiting officer risk assessment now agreed and our own guidance we are resuming these inspections.
Lifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communal lifts – 6-monthly inspections and maintenance largely unaffected Domestic stairlifts – emergency repair continues but maintenance and safety inspections were suspended. Resumption of service is starting this month.
Footpaths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-inspections - Outdoor inspections have continued and remain on target.
Housing Assets - Reactive Repairs	
Reactive Repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reactive repairs moved to emergency and essential repairs only, following the introduction of restrictions Non-urgent repairs have been logged and prioritised Specialist contractors (damp proof, roofing) were put on hold and are now resuming We are planning for an anticipated surge in demand on the service
Voids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We reviewed existing void properties to establish whether they should be mothballed or used for temporary accommodation The void process has now commenced Re-let times (therefore rental income) have been temporarily negatively affected, but the service has withstood the challenge of COVID
Assisted Gardening Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Assisted Gardening Scheme was temporarily suspended with the exception of health and safety works. This service has now recommenced.
Housing Assets - Planned Repairs	

Planned Repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All works undertaken by the Planned Works Team have been suspended with the exception of health and safety development and one urgent major disabled adaption job which need to proceed towards the end of the initial lockdown • We have revised our programmes of work to accommodate the delays, including working with our contractors • Our contractors have returned to site
Tenancy Services - Estates	
Housing Officer Team Lettings & Leasehold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carried out desk top tenancy/ property audits and flexible tenancy reviews • Written to all tenants keeping them updated on the Housing services being provided and updated social media • We have launched a lockdown Garden competition • Introduced a new housing management I.T. system • Provided properties to housing options for rough sleepers needing to self-isolate • Continued to deal with complaints, MP enquiries and reports of anti-social behaviour (over doubled the number of reports of ASB) • Started to re-let properties • Continued to accept mutual exchange requests although not able to carry out final property inspections but were processed up to this point • Continued to process Right to Buy applications • Liaised with other Social Landlords operating in the area to share best practice and take a common approach • Arranged for additional cleaning of older persons accommodation • We have worked with Housing Needs to adapt the DHC policy to give a priority to homeless household in order to tackle the anticipated rise in homeless households
Performance, Strategy & Resident Involvement	
Performance, Strategy & Resident Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devised a three stage recovery program, to resume normal services • We have contributed to the corporate Business Continuity Plan from a Housing point of view • We have updated our risk register to help mitigate the negative effects of Covid-19 • We only furloughed four staff as the vast majority were performing essential functions • We provided information and answered customer queries through our social media accounts • We have helped produce a clear three stage recovery plan • Our performance has held up despite all the current difficulties (e.g. no staff off sick; rent arrears at the median level according to Housemark; reports of ASB have increased but are in line with other social landlords) • Provided performance and operational delivery data to a number of agencies (NROSH, Housing Ombudsman and Housemark) in addition to normal requirements

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided a link between housing and the Exeter Wellbeing Hub for tenants and leaseholders of the council
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No. of complaints / enquiries received	MP enquiries	Cllr enquiries	Service Level Complaints	Corporate Complaints	TOTAL
March	8	10	10	4	32
April	1	2	3	0	6
May	4	2	3	2	11
					49