

EXETER BOARD

Thursday 19 November 2015

Present:-

Exeter City Council
Councillors Sutton (Chair), Denham, Edwards and Owen

Devon County Council
Councillors Hannaford, Hannan, Owen, Prowse and Westlake

Associate Members
Superintendent Sam De Reya (Devon and Cornwall Police), Jude Taylorson (Faith Groups)
and Christine Fraser

Also Present

Councillor John Hart : Leader Devon County Council
Superintendent Perkin : Devon and Cornwall Constabulary
Head of Policy, Strategy and Organisational Change, Head of Youth Services, Head of
Capital Development and Waste Management, Community Involvement and Inclusion
Officer and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

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APOLOGIES

These were received from Councillors Foggin, Hill, Leadbetter and Morse, Phil Atwell and Simon Bowkett.

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2015 be taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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OPEN FORUM

Questions on the following topics were put to the Board under the Open Forum arrangements.

Broadband Speed - David Russell

Mr Russell explained that, having recently moved from West Hill into the area, he had been surprised to find that the broad band coverage was very poor. A satellite alternative would be too expensive.

Councillor Hart, the Leader of Devon County Council, stated that, although a successful bid for funding had been made for Devon, this had predominantly covered the rural areas and BT was not obliged to cover Exeter and, as a commercial company, it looked to the urban areas to maximise profits. He suggested pressurising BT on this issue as well as emphasising to housing developers the value of future proofing homes with broad band provision.

Both the Chair and the City Council's Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture agreed that broadband coverage was now a fundamental element of infrastructure provision and, as well as inviting BT to attend a Board meeting, suggested the City Council examine its planning procedures with view to influencing housing developers through planning conditions backed by agreed planning policies.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) a representative of BT be invited to a future Board meeting to discuss Broad band provision in the City; and
- (2) the Portfolio Holder for City Development and the Assistant Director City Development examine whether changes in planning policy and processes can influence housing developers in their commitment to broad band provision.

Refugees – Anthony Appleby

Responding to Mr Appleby, the City Council Leader advised that the City Council had agreed to the Home Office request to help support refugees and people seeking asylum, subject to the involvement of other Devon Authorities, but was awaiting further information.

The County Council's Head of Strategy, Policy and Organisational Change advised that the crisis comprised different elements, including the Prime Minister's pledge for the UK to take 20,000 Syrian refugees, the migrant situation at Dover and asylum seekers who were not refugees and for whom the Government was starting to home through dispersal sites. The Government was looking for assistance from Devon, given that Plymouth, Bristol and Gloucester were at capacity.

Councillor Hart stated that the Government had engaged a private sector company to organise the accommodation and deliver private sector housing and that it would be for local authorities to support thereafter as part of their service delivery responsibilities. Funding through the International Development Fund would be available for Year 1, with the LGA in discussions with the Government to identify funding for Years 2-5. Councillor Hart emphasised the complexity of the problem and added that it was likely that support beyond Year 5 was likely to be necessary.

Board Members acknowledged the traumatic and complex nature of the issues but felt that Exeter and its citizens had shown a genuine commitment to assist wherever possible.

The questions and the tabled replies (in italics) are appended to the minutes.

COUNCILLOR JOHN HART, LEADER OF DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL

The Chair welcomed Councillor John Hart, Leader of Devon County Council. As part of the 'Tough Choices' theme he was meeting with District/Town/Parish Councils to explain the kind of future the County Council faced.

The current year, 2015/16, had seen cuts to the County Council's funding for the fifth year in succession. Since the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review in 2010, the County Council's core funding had reduced by £109 million. With inflation, demographic and demand pressures this translated into savings in Council services of £175 million with another £40 million likely to be sought for 2016/17 and £34/35 million for 2017/18. Cuts to Local Government funding would continue

throughout this period and the Government had indicated that the Revenue Support Grant would reduce to £nil by 2019/20. The County Council's Revenue Support Grant in the current year was just under £87 million.

Demand for services and cost pressures were increasing. The County's response had been to reshape its services including youth, libraries, day care, closure of residential homes, the removal of £1.7 million from rural transport and the sale of over a 100 properties. The introduction of a National Living Wage would lead to additional costs of £7.2 million.

The Government intended to move to a 100% Business Rates Retention although there was currently no detail and valuation figures would impact. The County Council currently received 9%, just under £22 million, of the Devon Business Rates with a top-up from Central Government of £72 million. The potential risks and rewards of this policy change were significant.

On 25th November, the Chancellor would announce the Government's Autumn Statement and the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2015. The content was unknown but was expected to include the changes to Revenue Support Grant and Business Rates. As the County Council would not know its level of Government funding until the middle of December the way forward was uncertain but it was clear that the ongoing challenges were being intensified. Specific to Devon were a growing population, increase in over 65's and over 80's, 17% increase in childbirths and challenges of providing broadband provision in a largely rural area. The situation relating to weed clearance beyond three years was also uncertain.

Responding to Members' issues, Councillor Hart made the following comments:-

- Living Wage costs of £7.2 million translated into a direct cost on the County Council of between £200,000 to £250,000 with a further cost of £800,000 falling on schools/education;
- evidence of greater resilience in face of cuts with increasing self help evident;
- greater public support for Local Government than for the Government;
- Pay and Display parking proposals for seaside and market towns had not been implemented due to significant (4,000) opposition and some machines had been made available to Devon authorities. Although Pay and Display generated £3million income per year its use was governed by legislation;
- opposed to a referendum on whether to increase the Council Tax above the 2% cap as the public were likely to resist. The County had been forced to back down when this had been attempted in the past. Furthermore, the cost of re-billing was likely to be in the region of £2million;
- plans were being developed for upgrading the North Devon Link Road subject to funding, and improvements to the A30/A303 was a further aspiration; and
- with regard to meeting aspirations through reducing the defence budget, the Defence of the Realm was a major focus/problem for all Governments.

Councillor Hart was asked to ensure that, in future, the County Council would engage at an earlier stage when policy decisions were likely to impact significantly on services in the City. It was accepted that severe challenges faced both authorities, but advance consultation, as well as helping to secure savings, could offer greater likelihood of achieving quicker and more acceptable outcomes for the community. Unfortunately, youth provision was an example where the future remained unclear and other areas, such as highways, could also benefit from this approach.

Councillor Hart advised that the County Council remained keen to work in partnership with all Devon Districts and that both this Board and Exeter HATOC provided opportunities for collaborative working.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hart for attending.

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CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Superintendent Perkin, as Force Head of the Public Protection Unit and Chair of the Devon Child Safeguarding Board, updated the Board on Child Protection and Child Sexual Exploitation issues. The Unit was responding positively to a recent Ofsted/Inspector of Constabulary's Inspection report and to its 28 recommendations. Some of the 43 Forces assessed had challenged the content of their reports but Devon and Cornwall was seeking to move forward with addressing issues raised, some, such as a new IT system, improved information sharing and attendance at inter agency client meetings having been identified prior to the inspection. The Force had been ranked 7th nationally for its expertise regarding on line exploitation and would receive a National Police College fact finding mission on its systems in early December.

As well as seeking to ensure justice was done, focus was also on safeguarding and early identification of potential exploitation and a pilot scheme in Torbay would be rolled out across Devon with this key change playing a central part and all 1,800 Devon and Cornwall staff were to be trained in child protection issues.

The importance of extending training and awareness to others in the public sector was recognised, The Head of Youth Service referring to the role of youth service in this respect and Councillor Owen adding that the City Council's Taxi Forum met regularly with representatives of the trade and that this issue was covered in the training all taxi drivers were required to undertake. All District Councils had been surveyed on measures undertaken to ensure all front line staff were familiar with this complex matter.

Councillors Edwards and Denham referred to the street homeless, a small cohort of whom may have fallen within this area of work but would, nevertheless, have missed the safeguarding nets. It was suggested therefore, that a gap in core/statutory mechanisms could exist and Superintendent Perkin agreed to look further into this.

The Chair thanked Superintendent Perkin for his presentation and requested that further updates be provided. It was noted that he would speak further at the next Board meeting on 14 January on Modern Day Slavery in Devon.

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FUNDING SUB GROUP UPDATE - MINUTES OF MEETING OF 29 OCTOBER 2015

The minutes of the Funding Sub Group of 29 October 2015 were noted.

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FEEDBACK FROM MEMBER REPRESENTATION ON MULTI AGENCY GROUPS

The Chair welcomed Christine Fraser who, as Joint Chair of the Exeter Community Forum, reported on progress made by the Forum and on its work in bringing forward the Community Strategy for the City in relation to CIL. Professional consultants had been engaged to assist and the goal was to produce a draft by May 2016. A series

of meetings had been held, beginning in Local Democracy Week with a Our City, Our Future event, with the following six communities of place identified for community consultation meetings - Alphington, Countess Wear, St James, Pinhoe, Exwick and Beacon Heath.

The Forum was working closely with local communities and with the University Guild of Students through both its Community Volunteer programme and the engagement of a student graduate to help with communication/social media. Plans were in place for engagement with young people as part of the consultation process with the support of the Devon Youth Service.

The Chair thanked Christine Fraser for the update.

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DATES OF MEETINGS AND FUTURE BUSINESS

RESOLVED that the following dates for meetings of the Board be noted:-

Thursday 14 January 2016
Thursday 28 April 2016
Thursday 14 July 2016
Thursday 22 September 2016
Thursday 17 November 2016
Thursday 2 February 2017
Thursday 20 April 2017
Thursday 27 July 2017
Thursday 21 September 2017

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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 3 of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Act.

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YOUTH SERVICE UPDATE

The Head of Youth Services Devon County Council explained the background to the re-organisation of the County Council's youth service made in response to budget cuts and to the establishment of eight youth centres across Devon including one for Exeter at the 100 Club Countess Wear. The re-organisation would see the creation of a separate staff mutual operating out of the 100 Club with 1 October 2016 identified as the date for a full transfer. He explained the role of remaining staff, the 100 Club now providing five youth sessions a week, three open access, one for LGBT and one for those in care/adoption. It was also integrating young people from other centres.

The following updates were provided:-

Beacon - Knight Club

The transfer had been very successful with additional activities launched even though a number of youngsters were challenging. The youth workers worked closely with the 100 Club in sharing policies, training and advice.

Phoenix Club

Councillor Hannan reported on progress with the Youth Centre which required the agreement of the Wonford Community and Learning Centre who were keen to extend the existing community centre as part of the agreement to provide youth services and also welcomed opportunities to generate income through increased activity. The draft agreement was not dissimilar to that considered by the YMCA who had also expressed an interest in operating the centre initially, but fine tuning in respect of the lease arrangements had been delayed.

Discussions between the County Solicitor and the Wonford Community and Learning Centre Solicitor were on-going to clarify terms and conditions of the lease and Councillor Hart confirmed that he had asked for an early resolution of the legal issues. It was noted that one of the youth workers made redundant had offered to assist at the Phoenix.

West Side

There had been lengthy discussions with Exeter YMCA about the future of the former Devon Youth Services facility at Buddle Lane (Westside) but the position of the YMCA remained unclear regarding their commitment to providing youth provision at the centre. An allocation of £57,000 had been reserved from the Invest in Devon Funds for capital works, the main element being the replacement of the roof of this large building. NPS had undertaken minor repairs, the contractor utilised having estimated the cost of roof replacement to be in the region of £45,000. The YMCA had received a quote of £99,000.

The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer explained that the Board monies earmarked for Westside were yet to be released.

The Board asked for clarification on the YMCA's position. An urgent meeting was required to confirm their commitment to assuming responsibility for the building, associated repairs and refurbishment as well as youth provision in the area.

Possible alternative uses of the site were briefly discussed.

General

With regard to the overall delivery of youth services, the Board had previously called for the development of a youth strategy for Exeter in order to ensure as strong a youth service as possible for the City, but this had not been progressed. The Head of Youth Service advised that a previous move to develop a comprehensive approach to youth issues had stalled due to the lack of engagement of other agencies. He believed that such a strategy should embrace a number of issues – housing, health, education, leisure activities - and that, as such, the full involvement of a number of parties was essential. He was prepared to commit youth service resources to this initiative and hoped that others would also contribute. He was clear that the County Council shouldn't necessarily be the lead agency and that any such strategy may be more objective if it were not one of the key statutory interested parties. He suggested that the Exeter Community Forum or another independent group could play a leading and facilitation role.

RESOLVED that the City Council Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer and the County Council Partnership and Policy Development Officer meet as soon as possible with Peter Stephenson, the Chief Executive of the YMCA, and with local Members as appropriate, to seek clear confirmation from the YMCA of its continued commitment to both the occupation of the building and the delivery of youth work in the area, the YMCA to be set a deadline for their response. Failing any such commitment, consideration would need to be given to an alternative solution for the facility.

(The meeting commenced at 5.50 pm and closed at 7.56 pm)

Chair