

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

1 March 2016

Present:

Councillor Tony Wardle (Chair)

Councillors Brimble, Bull, Buswell, George, Hannan, Holland, Newby, Packham, Raybould and Vizard

Apologies:

Councillors Morris and Shiel

Also present:

Deputy Chief Executive, Assistant Director Environment, Assistant Director Housing, Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer, Cleansing & Fleet Manager, Service Lead Performance, Strategy and Resources, Principal Accountant Corporate, Technical Accounting Manager, Principal Project Manager Strategic Infrastructure and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

In attendance:

Councillor Rob Hannaford	- Portfolio Holder Housing Revenue Account
Councillor Keith Owen	- Portfolio Holder Health and Place
Councillor Emma Morse	- Portfolio Holder Customer Access

In attendance on behalf of the Exeter Community Forum

Christine Fraser and Diana Moor	Joint Chairs
Gerald Couper	CAG Consultants

10 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2016 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

11 **Declaration of Interests**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

12 **Exeter Community Strategy - Neighbourhood Portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy**

The Chair welcomed Christine Fraser and Diana Moore of the Exeter Community Forum who spoke about the work that had taken place involving residents and community groups from across the City in developing the Community Strategy and

Action Plan for the next three years. It was a long term process and would help to inform the work of the Council in a wider context. They set out the background, process, vision and delivery for the Strategy, including the identification of three programme areas of:-

- Community Planning – broader brief than Neighbourhood Plans;
- Support Community Organiser roles and community actions/initiatives; and
- Collaborative work with public sector agencies and community organisations

The Strategy would help inform the release of the neighbourhood portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy fund which, it was estimated, equated to approximately £3.75 million over 10 years. Part of the challenge would be to maximise these funds through investment, match funding and development including “Crowd Funding” and “Love Local Funding”. In addition, £150,000 of New Homes Bonus Community Infra-structure funding was to be reallocated to these funds in order to complement the neighbourhood portion of CIL. It was the intention to use this funding in the next couple of years to support capacity building work with community groups across the city that require investment to enable them to access the CIL neighbourhood funding in future years.

A wide-scale community consultation had taken place involving a number of communities of place and a number of city-wide interest groups which had helped to identify:-

- help for areas of unmet need;
- areas affected by new developments;
- improvement to the environment/green scheme; and
- help for particular groups such as the elderly and young people.

As well as consulting agencies and local groups, the Forum would also consult the ICE project and Exeter City Futures both of which would help lift the aspirations of communities (including young people). A joint promotional event was planned for June.

Responding to Members queries, Christine Fraser and Diana Moore confirmed that some areas have active and well established community groups whilst others need a lot of support, including those areas with greatest needs and areas of new housing developments. Reference was made to the valuable contribution of the Community Organiser (Sue Bullied) working in Wonford and Exwick in helping build a stronger community and develop community initiatives (funded by the City Council).

The Action Plan covered the initial three year period (2016-2019) where the focus was on working to capacity build communities to enable them to take opportunities that are presented by the community strategy – develop community plans and community led initiatives and ultimately be able to apply for much needed community infrastructure through the neighbourhood CIL, and other match funding.

The intention was to review the progress and to continue to develop a further plan for 2019 to 2022. By that time, it was hoped that more high cost innovative projects including capital build would have been identified as well as the possibility of community led service delivery. In this context, the Forum representatives welcomed the suggestion that milestones be identified for the first three years for report back and monitoring by Scrutiny.

The Chair thanked Christine Fraser and Diana Moore for the update as well as the consultants Gerard Couper and Andrew Shadrake of CAG Consultants and Dawn Rivers, the City Council's Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer, for their work.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report and recommended Executive and Council to:-

- (1) welcome and approve in principle the Exeter Community Strategy as a living document that will inform the allocation of the neighbourhood portion of the Community Infrastructure Plan Levy;
- (2) welcome recommendations from the Exeter Community Forum as to how to spend the neighbourhood portion of the CIL and the new Homes Bonus allocation;
- (3) invites the Exeter Community Forum to put forward a process by which recommendations for spending the neighbourhood portion of the CIL are put to the Council for approval on a periodic basis, taking account of the availability of funds secured in the neighbourhood portion of the CIL and of the Council's inability to borrow against future CIL receipts;
- (4) consult Council officers as appropriate on the future review of the purpose, function and future of the Exeter Community Forum to ensure that it continues to perform the representative role it has developed to date; and
- (5) retain, through its Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer, accounting responsibilities in relation to the neighbourhood portion of the April 2015 CIL.

13 **Housing Strategy - 2016-2020**

The Assistant Director Housing presented the proposed Housing Strategy 2016-2020 explaining the context in which it had been developed. A copy of the full strategy was appended to the report. The three main elements were:-

- address housing need by providing housing advice and support to all residents;
- explore ways of delivering new affordable housing across all tenures; and
- be a good landlord – as the largest landlord in Exeter an important role to play both in being a good landlord to our tenants and in being an example to other landlords in the city.

The ambitions of providing affordable housing and other housing services as well as capital investment had been significantly affected by the Government's announcement in the Summer Budget that social rents would be cut by 1% each year over the next 4 financial years; 2016/17 to 2019/20. In addition to the rent cut, a key financial risk related to the High Value Assets Levy, which is likely to require the Council to make a payment to the Government in respect of its 'high value' housing. Due to the uncertainty regarding the definition of 'high value' and calculation of the levy payable, it had been considered prudent to increase the HRA contingency from £3 to £4 million over the medium term.

As the ability to build additional homes had been severely restricted there would now be a focus on maintaining and improving the housing stock, which was a significant asset, and this would impact on the capital programme from 2017/18 onwards. A further consequence of Government changes would be examination of alternative

models of delivery such as exploring the viability of setting up a Council-owned Housing Company which would aim to develop and finance a house building programme outside the Housing Revenue Account. It was noted that the potential of a Co-operative Housing had also been examined.

As the largest landlord in Exeter, the Council had an important role to play both in being a good landlord to tenants and in being an example to other landlords in the City. The Council would continue to work in partnership with other agencies, primarily through the Private Rented Forum, to improve standards in the private rented sector and would also use its regulatory and enforcement powers where necessary. A Landlords' Guide had been produced which was being promoted nationally and a Tenants' Guide would also be produced.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to note and Council to approve the new Housing Strategy 2016-2020.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

14 Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring to December 2015

The Technical Accounting Manager advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the revised budget. The total budget variances indicated that there would be a net deficit of £1,281,066 in 2015-16, representing an decrease of £1,678,116 compared to the revised budgeted deficit of £2,959,182 for 2015-16; the main deviations from budget being set in the report.

The forecast HRA Working Balance as at 31 March 2016 was £2,455,466 and the current HRA Capital Programme showed a total forecast spend of £8,480,533 compared to the £9,331,961 approved programme, a decrease of £851,428.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

15 Community Budget Monitoring to December 2015

The Principal Accountant advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first nine months of the financial year up to 31 December 2015. The current forecast suggested that net expenditure would decrease from the approved budget by a total of £43,090 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital. This represented a variation of 0.47% from the approved budget and included a supplementary budgets of £116,500.

The current Community Capital Programme showed a total forecast spend of £1,589,642 in 2015/16.

On the issue of staff sickness in respect of the Domestic Refuse Collection service during 2014/15, the Cleansing and Fleet Manager advised that the high figure (25 days per person per year) in 2014/15 was a result of a number of long term absences but that this had now reduced to 16 days in the current year to date and, it was anticipated, would reduce further to the national average of 15.5 days by the year end. A number of measures had been introduced to reduce these figures including absence management and training. Staff development was also encouraged.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

ITEM FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

16 **Recycling Action Plan 2016/17**

Councillor Owen spoke on this item having given notice under Standing Order No. 44.

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report setting out the 2016/17 Recycling Plan for support and approval.

Members noted that, although the re-cycling rates could be improved, actual landfill rates were low and that the City Council was within the 20 lowest of 200 authorities in total waste production.

Both the Portfolio Holder for Health and Place and the Assistant Director Environment confirmed that the Citizen was a valuable tool in educating and informing the public in waste reduction techniques and that continued community engagement was vital to encourage further re-cycling. It was noted that an A5 pamphlet had recently been distributed to community outlets such as doctor's surgeries.

A report on the feasibility of kerb side collections of glass had previously been reported to this Committee. As the fraction of glass remaining in black bags was only 4%, this indicated that the network of bottle banks in the City were well used, achieving similar rates of glass recycling to those districts with a kerb-side glass collection. Therefore the cost and benefit of introducing a kerb-side glass collection service was unlikely to be favourable.

In answer to a question about food waste, the Assistant Director Environment explained that food waste was a large fraction of the residual (black bin) waste stream in Exeter, at around 35% of the total content. This was the main reason why Exeter's recycling rate appeared much lower than other local authorities with a food waste collection. However, the cost of providing a food waste collection service from every household would be significant, but it would make substantial savings in the disposal cost of that food waste, as it would be processed more cheaply through anaerobic digesters rather than burnt at the Energy from Waste Plant. Officers would continue to explore the feasibility of introducing such a collection service in association with the Disposal Authority (Devon County Council), and in particular examine how the potential savings in disposal costs could be used to help fund such a service.

In the absence of a food waste collection service the Council would need to rely on changing householders' behaviour through education and a community engagement programmes, in order to encourage people to buy perishable foods more carefully, to store them appropriately, and re-use leftovers for another meal etc. People could also be encouraged to compost more food waste, either individually or as part of a community project.

Scrutiny Committee Community supported the Recycling Plan for 2016 and requested its approval by Executive and Council.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.00 pm

Chair