

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 5 January 2017

Present:

Councillor Wardle (Chair)

Councillors Foale, Foggin, Hannan, Holland, Newby, Packham, Robson and Vizard

Apologies:

Councillor Branston

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Deputy Chief Executive, Service Lead Housing Customers, Service Lead Performance, Strategy and Resources, Technical Accounting Manager, Principal Accountant Corporate and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

In attendance:-

Councillor Phil Bialyk	-	Portfolio Holder for Sport, Health and Wellbeing
Councillor Paul Bull	-	Portfolio Holder for the Communities and Neighbourhoods
Councillor Emma Morse	-	Portfolio Holder for Customer Access
Councillor Keith Owen	-	Portfolio Holder for the Housing Revenue Account

1

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2016 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

2

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATES

3

REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS - HALF YEARLY UPDATES

Councillors Owen, Morse, Bull and Bialyk presented the following progress reports on priorities within the Housing Revenue Account, Customer Access, Communities and Neighbourhoods and Sport and Health and Wellbeing:-

Housing Revenue Account

The Portfolio Holder provided the following updates:-

- work on the Housing Revenue Management Board was progressing and a report would be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee and Executive when proposed changes to the Constitution had been put forward;
- tenants would be able to report on the quality of contractor services through the City Council website;
- three Older Persons Property Services Officers would be appointed as part of a new model for supporting residents of older persons' accommodation; and

- a contractor had been engaged to undertake a stock survey for report in June.

Responding to Members, he advised that, in respect of the scrutiny of contractors' work, not only the quality but the timing of work completed was being examined, including whether work was completed at the first visit by the contractor.

The Service Lead Performance, Strategy and Resources enlarged on the changes made to support older people following Devon County Council's withdrawal of the warden service. The three service officers, together with the Housing Community Partnership Officer and Community Patrollers would provide an enhanced service, working together on housing related support and, although social care and health did not fall within their remit, they would ensure necessary contact with relevant agencies. Tackling social isolation was a key element and improved use of existing community rooms would be a target.

Customer Access

The Portfolio Holder focussed on homelessness in her report. A tabled update showed that Exeter Safe Sleep operated between 20:30 and 08:00 each night offering safe and secure accommodation for people who would otherwise be sleeping on the streets of Exeter. She praised the work of Julian House staff and City Council housing and planning officers and it was noted that a number of people had expressed an interest in volunteering. Occupancy, excluding the opening night, had varied between a low of 14 on New Year's Eve to a high of 28 on 29th December. A press release had been issued.

Julian House wished to encourage clients to stay consistently and engage to develop support plans and focus on not returning to the street. The focus was on helping people move on into accommodation.

Communities and Neighbourhoods

The Portfolio Holder reported the following:-

- as part of the Grass Roots Grants programme, Executive would shortly consider recommendations from the Exeter Community Forum Panel;
- the introduction across the Council of how Asset Based Community Development can assist key services;
- roll-out of the Community Builder funded social prescribing/community resilience programme involving Exeter Community Forum, ICE and the NHS;
- draft implementation plan for the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy; and
- renewal of Fairtrade City status.

There would be seven Community Builders, previously community organisers, working to improve community connectivity as well as involving GP surgeries to help reduce unnecessary visits to surgeries.

Sport and Physical Activity and Health and Wellbeing

The Portfolio Holder focussed on the St Sidwell's Point and Bus Station development in his update, a contractor for the project to be selected by the end of the month. Work was progressing on contract preparations for the Leisure Complex operator procurement, the City Council having previously agreed that there should be an external provider to run this facility, the first of its kind in the UK. It was essential to ensure that the contract delivered the best conditions for both the public

and employees of the selected operator. December 2018 was the anticipated opening date.

Interim solutions were being worked up with bus service providers for the 18 month period of construction/change over for the new bus station and it was noted that both schemes were ahead of the Crown Estates part of the re-development in terms of implementation and delivery. Members would receive briefings as the schemes progressed, including the state of the current leisure market generally. Details of progress were also available on line through the Leisure Complex and Bus Station Programme Board, which was a public meeting.

Get Active Exeter was working alongside the Greater Exeter Sports Board on activity programmes throughout 2017, beginning with a launch of a 'This Girl Can' project to encourage women and girls into Sport and Physical activity. A particular focus would be given to traditionally hard to engage inactive families, targeting busy adults. This would be achieved via community focus groups, activity in the workplace and collaborative working with delivery partners. He referred to a Change4Life Sugar Smart City Launch at County Hall on 23 January 2017.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the reports of the Portfolio Holders.

ESTIMATES, CAPITAL PRORAMME AND FEES AND CHARGES

4 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - ESTIMATES/NEW CAPITAL BIDS/FEES : 2017/18

The Technical Accounting Manager presented the report on the Housing Revenue Account Estimates and Fees and Charges, which outlined the strategic framework within which the estimates had been prepared, changes in accounting practices which affected all budgets and gave detailed reasons for major changes in the Management Unit estimates. A detailed schedule of the capital programme for Housing was also attached to the report together with details of the Council Own Build programme.

The Service Lead Housing Customers advised that the cyclical repair and improvement works were undertaken following assessment of the age and condition of individual elements of properties and was not simply a rolling process regardless of actual need. The Portfolio Holder stated that the stock survey would be completed by mid-year which would improve knowledge and efficiencies in this area. He also advised that the Council was maintaining its HRA Working Balance at no less than £4 million to help meet any introduction of the higher value asset levy by the Government. Although delayed by a year, this Government initiative meant that further house building by the Council was not possible at present.

People Scrutiny Committee supported the draft Revenue Estimates for 2017/18, the proposed Capital Programme, Fees and Charges and Council Own Build for further consideration by Executive on 14 February 2017 and Council on 21 February 2017.

5 PEOPLE - GENERAL FUND - ESTIMATES/NEW CAPITAL BIDS/FEES AND CHARGES: 2017/18

The Principal Accountant presented the report on the People Revenue Account Estimates and Fees and Charges, which outlined the strategic framework within which the estimates had been prepared; changes in accounting practices which affected all budgets and gave detailed reasons for major changes in the

Management Unit estimates. A detailed schedule of the capital programme for People was also attached to the report.

The Technical Accounting Manager undertook to respond to a Member on licensing charges for houses in multiple occupation.

People Scrutiny Committee supported the draft Revenue Estimates for 2017/18, the proposed Capital Programme and Fees and Charges for further consideration by Executive on 14 February 2017 and Council on 21 February 2017.

6

HOUSING RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES : 2017/18

The Technical Accounting Manager presented the report recommending a 1% rent decrease for council dwellings from 1 April 2017.

Until the Government's Summer Budget announcement, social housing rents had been expected to increase by Consumer Price Index inflation plus 1% annually for the ten years - 2015-16 to 2024-25. This was intended to give landlords certainty in order to help them plan for future investment. The 10 year inflation linked rent settlement had been replaced with a new rent reduction policy announced in July, requiring social landlords to reduce rents by 1% annually for each of the next four years with an anticipated loss of £7.9 million rental income in this period.

The Service Lead Housing Customers explained that there were financial challenges ahead for the Housing Revenue Account and that the strategic decision made to increase the working balance from £3 million to £4 million was to try and mitigate the potential risks this presented going forward.

The Government had extended Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants and Local Authorities would be required to fund this via a higher value assets levy and any payment to be made would be a further pressure on an already tight HRA budget after the 1% reduction for the next four years. The Council had already had to stop its Council Own Build programme apart from already committed schemes in order to address the rent reduction.

No details of this levy had been released yet and it was very much an unknown at this point. This did make planning more problematic and it could be said was counter intuitive given that the Government had introduced self-financing in 2012 to enable Council's to plan over 30 years.

He added that the Government had decided not to proceed with the 'pay to stay' policy on a mandatory basis for Local Authorities and that it was now discretionary. The mandatory scheme was where tenants would be required to pay a tapered higher rent up to market rents if they had earnings over £31,000. Under the discretionary scheme, it would be possible to implement a policy for tenants with incomes over £60,000. At this time, it was understood that it was not the Council's intention to introduce this policy.

People Scrutiny Committee noted and supported the report and recommended Executive to approve:-

- (1) a reduction in rents for Council dwellings of 1% from 1 April 2017;
- (2) garage rents increasing by 2% from 1 April 2017; and

- (3) service charges to remain at their existing levels, with the exception of the charges specified below from 1 April 2017:-
- (a) 3.5% increase in respect of water at Magdalen gardens in line with rises in water and sewerage charges; and
 - (e) 5% reduction in respect of door entry systems in line with system maintenance costs.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

7

TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2016-2020

The Service Lead Performance presented the proposed new Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement and Communication Strategy which replaced the former Housing Resident Involvement Strategy which operated from 2012-2015. The report also sought endorsement for the following Housing Service's 5 Key Pledges (Local Offer) – the HRA's service standard commitments to council tenants and leaseholders.

- Repairs and maintenance - *We pledge to provide safe, well-maintained homes;*
- Neighbourhood and community- *We pledge to work in partnership with other organisations to create neighbourhoods which are safe and well maintained, and where people want to live;*
- Tenancy - *We pledge to work with tenants and leaseholders to ensure all terms and conditions of our tenancies are understood and complied with;*
- Lettings - *We pledge to let our properties promptly, fairly and consistently in order to meet housing need and help create sustainable communities;*
- Equality, diversity and access - *In order to meet all our pledges we will involve our residents, and provide services which are fair, equitable and accessible*

He referred to the following informal proposals for improved communication:-

- creation of an electronic group of 50+ to comment on policy proposals via email rather than formal meetings;
- formation of local residents' groups; and
- establishment of locally based focus groups to address local issues/concerns with incentives for people to participate.

The new revised strategy has been prepared in conjunction with tenants and leaseholder representatives who sit on the Performance Scrutiny Partnership which would remain as a consultative forum.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report and requested Executive to adopt the new Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement and Communication Strategy 2016-2020 together with the above Housing Service's 5 Key Pledges (Local Offers).

8

POLICY FOR TACKLING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN HOUSING

The Service Lead Housing Customers presented the report seeking the adoption of the new Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy for Housing Services.

The ASB Policy had last been reviewed in September 2012. During the interim period, the Government had introduced the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and

Policing Act 2014 and Housing had completed a major re-structure and introduced a new way of working. The new policy and the revised procedures reflected these changes.

Responding to Members, he advised that guidelines on what was and was not acceptable behaviour was set out in the Tenancy Agreement, Tenants Handbook and in leaflets. The causes of, and responses to, Anti-Social Behaviour were often complex and required input from a range of statutory and voluntary agencies to resolve, reduce and prevent incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour. This included working with other local authorities, the Police and other agencies through the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team and Community Tasking Group (ASBAT), taking a multi-agency approach to tackle priority issues.

He emphasised that the Police and Council officers worked effectively in partnership on anti-social behaviour on housing related issues with close liaison with the Police at both a senior level and with officers on the ground who often visited the Civic Centre on a case by case basis.

He affirmed that, in some cases, behaviour related more to disputes between individual residents and that these were dealt with appropriately. Some delays in possession action could be attributed to the court process and their resources for matters such as attending evictions.

People Scrutiny Committee supported the report and requested Executive to adopt the new Anti-Social Behaviour Policy for Housing with immediate effect.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.38 pm)

Chair