

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 7 June 2018

Present:

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

Apologies:

Councillors Foggin

Also present:

Director (BA), Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, Service Lead Housing (Assets), Housing Solutions Lead, Principal Accountant Corporate, Technical Accounting Manager and Democratic Services Officer

In Attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk	- Exeter City Council
Councillor Emma Morse	- Portfolio Holder for People
Councillor Hannah Packham	- Portfolio Holder for Housing Revenue Account

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held on 12 March 2018 were approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

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TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

The Chair requested Members to advise the Scrutiny Programme Officer of any potential topics for consideration by a Task and Finish Group.

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DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

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WHAT IS CITIZENSHIP - ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

The Chair welcomed Sally O'Donnell, Sophie Holmes and Robert Hawken to the meeting.

Robert Hawken, Engagement Officer and Co-Chair of the Devon Learning Disability Partnership Board and Sophie Holmes, the Senior Commissioning Officer and Co-Chair of the Devon Learning Disability Partnership Board made a joint presentation on citizenship. They spoke about the work of the Board in partnership with stakeholders and its support of the challenges faced by adults with a learning disability to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives with the same opportunities as everyone else. The presentation included details of the seven key themes around citizenship as well as details of a web site for more general information on welfare reform:-

www.centreforwelfarereform.org a free on-line resource from The Centre of Welfare Reform Limited

Robert Hawken referred to the importance of understanding the challenges that people with learning and other disabilities had. He detailed the numbers of people with a Learning Disability in Devon, which was estimated to be 14,720. Of that number, approximately 3,238 people with a learning disability were known to services, although that did not mean they were all receiving services from Devon County Council. He added that, of the overall number, 11,482 people with a learning disability living in Devon relied on being able to access Universal Services in their communities to live their life, but that being able to access community life was important to their long term independence and wellbeing reducing the need for a call on the statutory services.

Mr Hawken explained that following changes to the Disability Living Allowance he had been offered a position by Devon County Council as an engagement officer, as well as holding a position as a Co-Chair of the Devon Learning Disability Partnership Board. He explained that the job had enabled him to earn his own money, gain new skills, make new friends and have a sense of purpose. He finished the presentation by stating that Citizenship was for everyone, it was about celebrating differences, being a member of the community and enabling all to fulfil their potential in life.

Responding to Members he felt that improvements could be made to improve accessing information for the disabled such as easier to read literature and he undertook to feed back to the City Council any improvements he could identify in its services from the point of view of the disabled.

Sophie Holmes referred to a Ready When You Are Campaign to be shortly launched focussing on employers across Devon as part of a five year Strategy including consideration of apprenticeships for individuals with learning disabilities with ongoing dialogue with other large employers as well as regular engagement with Job Centre Plus, all with a view to assist individuals with disabilities gain experience in the workforce. It was important to encourage as many businesses to get on board.

The Chairman thanked Robert Hawken and Sophie Holmes for their informative presentation and hoped that the City Council would assist with their ongoing work.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

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HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - 2017/18 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - OUTTURN

The Technical Accounting Manager advised Members of any major differences, by management unit, between the approved budget and the outturn for the financial year up to 31 March 2018 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.

The 2017/18 financial year had ended with an overall net surplus of £1,644,790. This represented a movement of 4,132,405 compared to the budgeted deficit of £2,487,615 with, most notably, £2,700,000 attributable to delays with the St Loyes Extra Care Scheme.

A projected under-spend of £3,667,716 had previously been reported to Scrutiny Committee - People as part of the quarterly budget monitoring updates. The

variances in the final quarter of the financial year had therefore resulted in further savings of £464,689, of which Executive approval to carry forward £335,000 into 2018/19 would be sought.

The total amount of HRA capital expenditure for 2017/18 was £6,264,876, which equated to 84.5% of the revised approved capital programme.

In respect of a Committee Member's questions submitted in advance of the meeting, the Planned Repairs Lead reported a total budget variance of over £200,000 in the out-turn compared with the expectation three months earlier and that this reflected a lower than expected number of empty properties such as at Rennes House and Laings properties and delays in the rollout of the Universal Credit Full Service. Rental income from dwellings was monitored by officers on a fortnightly basis, but the total for the year was not fully known until the accounts were closed due to the impact of delays in planned capital works and the fortnight free periods late in the financial year - one at Christmas and one at the end of March. For this reason, the rental income from dwellings was reported to committee as a budgetary risk throughout the year, as a minor percentage budget variance resulted in a significant amount of money against a £19 million budget. Regarding the forecast variance of £20,000 at quarter three, the Technical Accounting Manager advised that this figure related to rent from garages rather than rental income from dwellings, as this could be quantified with reasonable certainty.

The Planned Repairs Lead provided updated statistics on the backlog of repairs. The contract had 18 months to run and he and the Director (BA) confirmed that officers were in regular contact with representatives of Mears in monitoring the work and that a meeting had recently been held with the Regional Director of Mears. There was a shortage of relevant skilled workers in Exeter and Mears had recently sent one of their teams based in Milton Keynes to assist in reducing the backlog.

In respect of the sheltered housing at Nelson Close, Topsham, the Local Member stated that residents had been concerned about maintenance issues and the Planned Repairs Lead undertook to investigate this further as well as assess conditions generally on site. He also confirmed that a focus group meeting had been held at the Nelson Close community room in April when residents had raised a number of issues in relation to repairs and maintenance, an increased presence on site of the Police Community Support Officers etc. As a result, an 18 point action plan had been drawn up and repairs etc. were now being instigated.

The Director (BA) advised Members that savings identified in housing assets and training in respect of the housing management system were due to post vacancies and staff recruited who had yet to start. Responding to a Member, she undertook to ensure that timetable details were provided on the four HRA estates within the estate regeneration programme.

The Technical Accounting Manager advised that the report design was to be revised following on from a recent meeting of the Financial Reporting Task and Finish Working Group.

People - Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

The Principal Accountant advised Members of any major differences, by management unit, between the approved budget and the outturn for the financial year up to 31 March 2018 in respect of People - Scrutiny Committee. 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 - Scrutiny Committee budgets.

It was noted that the final outturn had been calculated and the report highlighted the major differences by management unit from the approved annual budget after adjusting for supplementary budgets. The total variance for the year showed a deficit of £449,548 after transfers from reserves. This represented a variation of 15.36% from the revised budget.

The People Capital Programme showed a total spend of £959,437 in 2017/18 with £408,823 of the programme deferred until 2018/19.

Responding to a Member, the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager stated that the change in the operation of the Disabilities Facilities Grant through the introduction of the Better Care Fund had resulted in funding increasing from £350,000 per annum to £680,000 in 2017/18 and was likely to increase further to some £800,000. This was allowing the Council to be more innovative in its approach to grant spending of the Council's Better Care Fund Allocation.

The People - Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

ITEM FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

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FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY FOR THE BETTER CARE FUND

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager presented the report setting out a revised Financial Assistance Policy under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 to ensure policies were in place to maximise grant spending of the Council's Better Care Fund Allocation. It was noted that the policy had been developed by both the County and District Councils to ensure a consistent approach across Devon.

The report set out the impact of increased Government Funding for Disabled Facilities Grants, administered through the Better Care Fund. The Council was now able to broaden its ability to support those disabled persons who fell out of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant system by providing financial assistance to undertake preventive measures to reduce hospital admissions and reduce delayed hospital discharges and by working in collaboration with health services to provide funding to remove housing related obstacles preventing discharge.

Better Care Fund money could be used to assist disabled residents to remain in their own homes through supporting the provision of adaptations, safeguard the health and well-being of vulnerable residents by removing unnecessary hazards in the home, provide adaptations and assist vulnerable people to afford to heat their homes through appropriate energy efficiency and heating measures.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- the Government had changed the funding mechanisms in an attempt to bring health and social care together in an integrated way with a key aspect being to ensure, as far as possible, that vulnerable individuals could remain safe and healthy in their homes thus reducing the burden on social services and the NHS;
- the funding was primarily for Disabled Facilities Grants but could be used flexibly to meet the Better Care Fund objectives. The 2017/18 allocation for the

City Council was £660,128 with the 2018/19 allocation likely to be around £800,000 which included the underspend money from the previous year;

- the Accessible Homes Grant enabled an enhanced offer in addition to the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant. For example, topping up a mandatory grant where the cost of the work exceeded £30,000 - possibly up to £50,000 and funding works beyond the scope of a Disabled Facilities Grant to make a property safe for the disabled occupant; and
- individuals were largely identified from home visits by adult and children social care staff. The City Council also identified those requiring assistance, for example, many mobile homes were of a poor standard and 25% had received grants for insulation and boiler replacement. Contributions were also being made in respect of properties found to be in a poor/squalid condition.

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

- (1) approve the proposed Financial Assistance Policy in order to ensure increased funding provided via the Better Care Fund would be delivered to those who had not previously been able to obtain financial assistance;
- (2) recommend Council to approve the proposed Financial Assistance Policy in order to ensure increased funding provided via the Better Care Fund would be delivered to those who had not previously been able to obtain financial assistance; and
- (3) request Executive to recommend that Council adopt the Financial Assistance Policy.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

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IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND IMPACT OF THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT

The Interim System Lead - Housing Needs presented the report summarizing the main changes and measures being introduced as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (which had come into effect on 3 April 2018) and updated on the implementation of measures, challenges and impact for the Council in meeting the legal requirements of the Act (HRA 2017) to date.

The Act placed more emphasis on homelessness prevention activities by placing new legal duties on local authorities to provide meaningful support to everyone who was homeless or at risk of homelessness. A more robust approach was required and, once a local authority was satisfied that someone was eligible for assistance and homeless or threatened with homelessness, an assessment would be carried out including the circumstances that had caused homelessness/potential homelessness, the housing and other support needs of the applicant and their household and a personalized plan (PHP) setting out steps for the applicant and the Council to take to ensure accommodation is secured and/or retained.

He responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- the additional staff being recruited to the team comprised of approximately six full time and three part time staff across advice and prevention, temporary accommodation and resettlement;
- direct enquiries regarding homelessness could be made at the Civic Centre with the relevant duty officer and/or an appointment made for an interview and

advice was also available over the phone - 265726 or by email housing.advice@exeter.gov.uk;

- the Government had made £70 million available to help address homelessness nationwide, much being taken up by the London authorities. The City Council had adopted a preventative approach to service delivery over recent years and had provided additional resources to assist with the transition to the new requirements;
- the Act gave applicants the right to request a review of decisions made by the local authority. It was anticipated that the greatest number of requests would be in respect of initial decisions that the applicant was intentionally homeless which would enable housing to be provided during a review and on the content of the Personal Housing Plan. Other reviews could be in respect of the steps set out in assessment plans, giving notice to withdraw prevention or relief duties and the suitability of accommodation offered; and
- in respect of severe weather conditions, additional support was being given to Gabriel House to provide emergency bedding during the winter. A bid had also been submitted to the Government for revenue support towards a Night Shelter for the six month period, October to March, which would have a similar or improved capacity than the Safe Sleep initiative.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the progress and actions undertaken to date and further plans to develop the service in accordance with the Act.

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PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PARTNERSHIP - MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 FEBRUARY AND 12 MARCH 2018

In respect of a Committee Member's questions submitted in advance of the meeting relating to an advertising leaflet to be used in helping recruit new members and in respect of the number of Performance Scrutiny Partnership (PSP) members etc. the Portfolio Holder for the HRA providing the following information:-

- there were currently four members of the PSP with the possibility of one more joining in the near future. The quorum was three;
- the leaflet had been produced with the involvement of the PSP themselves in both the design and content and was handed out to all new tenants when they sign their tenancy agreements with Lettings Officers. Housing Officers also distributed them during their regular tenancy audit visits,
- a recruitment video had been produced that could be accessed via Facebook and Facebook was regularly used to advertise the PSP,
- a recruitment letter was sent to all tenants with annual rent statements;
- regular articles included in issues of Insight, the tenant and leaseholder quarterly newsletter; and
- the first information/training sessions for all new Exeter City Council tenants would be held in September giving officers the opportunity to explain exactly what being a tenant means in terms of the benefits and responsibilities on both sides and to explain services offered. The work of the PSP would also be raised.

Further methods would be looked into on how the Council could become more accessible and relevant. A review was to be undertaken of the approach to resident involvement and community development and the resources needed to deliver a modern approach and this was to be undertaken through the Housing Tenant Involvement Task and Finish Group.

People - Scrutiny Committee noted the minutes of the meetings of the Performance Scrutiny Partnership of 19 February and 12 March 2018.

**EXETER COMMUNITY, HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD - MINUTES OF THE
MEETING HELD ON 26 FEBRUARY 2018**

People - Scrutiny Committee noted the minutes of the meeting of the Exeter Health and Wellbeing Board of 26 February 2018.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.17 pm)

Chair

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