

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 8 November 2018

Present:

Councillor Sills (Chair)

Councillors Wood, D Henson, Mitchell, Owen, Prowse, Begley, Lyons, Pattison and Robson

Also present:

Director (JY), Director (DB), Chief Finance Officer, Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, Senior Environmental Technical Officer, Economy and Enterprise Manager, Skills Officer and Democratic Services Officer

In Attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk

- Exeter City Council

Councillor David Harvey

- Exeter City Council

Councillor Chris Musgrave

- Exeter City Council

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held on 13 September 2018 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

48

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of discloseable pecuniary interest were made.

49

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 19

In accordance with Standing Order 19, five members of the public submitted questions on the closure of Clifton Hill Sports Centre (attached as an appendix to these minutes).

The questions related to:-

- the closure of Clifton Hill Sports Centre and residents' concern regarding the apparent speed of the decision to close;
- green spaces in the area and Clifton Hill Leisure Centre being separate issues and such be treated as such;
- the need to fully establish costs and confirm that public funds for the building were being used correctly;

In addition to responses to the public questions (as included in the appendix to these minutes), the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Communities and Sport and the Chair responded to Member enquiries, stating:-

- The decision to close was made based on health and safety issues provided to the Director, following professional advice;
- The toolkits were not available and had not been considered for use or how they would fit into making the decision;
- Public questions to the committee were received up until 10am three working days before the meeting. Member questions could be received up until the day

before the meeting. If Members wished to see the questions received from members of the public in advance of the meeting, they should make an appropriate request to the Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support;

- All Members were given the opportunity to attend a briefing about the closure when detailed information surrounding the recommendation was presented.

A copy of the questions had been previously circulated to Members, and these, together with the responses from Councillor Bialyk, Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Communities and Sport is appended to the minutes.

50 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER 20**

In accordance with Standing Order 20, Councillor Mitchell and Councillor Musgrave submitted respective questions on recycling and air quality.

A copy of the questions had been previously circulated to Members, and these, together with the appropriate responses from Councillor Harvey, Portfolio Holder Place & Commercialisation and Councillor Sills responding on behalf of Councillor Sutton, Portfolio Holder Economy, Culture standing in for Councillor Denham as Portfolio Holder City Transformation, are appended to the minutes.

51 **REVISION OF THE AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN**

Councillor Musgrave attended the meeting under Standing Order 44.

The Director (JY) presented the report of the new Air Quality Action Plan following completion of a public consultation. The plan detailed a range of actions for the Council and partners to take to improve air quality in Exeter between 2019 and 2024, in line with the Council's Corporate Strategy 2018 – 2021 and the emerging Exeter Vision. The Action Plan is a statutory requirement under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995. The format of the report and action plan was in a template prescribed by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra).

The draft Action Plan has been subject to a statutory consultation with a great response, with over 3,000 residents completing the online survey, and many others responding in written submission and through participation in targeted focus groups. The appendix in the Final Action Plan sets out how the draft action plan had changed following the feedback from the consultation exercise.

Councillor Musgrave stated that he had no criticism of the officers or their work, however he stated that the report was a year late with no action plan in place since January 2017. He commented that in his opinion, 66% of monitoring stations showed that the air quality was over the legal limit and that Devon County Council and Exeter City Council appeared to be moving in different directions on tackling the issue. He noted a letter he had received from the Director of Public Health, who claimed that all areas of Exeter required improvements to air quality. He further commented that he considered that the figures presented in the report for the workplace parking levy had included the undecided 25% as a part of the 59% figure, which he felt was misleading. The report should read as 39% against the action plan. He hoped that Place Scrutiny Committee would not recommend approval.

The Senior Environmental Technical Officer advised that the introduction of a workplace parking levy was proposed in the draft Air Quality Action Plan. Only 41%

of respondents had agreed with the implementation, with 59% either disagreeing or undecided. The measure had not been taken forward in the Action Plan, but would be kept under review with Devon County Council who were the statutory authority for implementing the scheme. An update would be brought back to Scrutiny Place Committee as part of the annual review of the Air Quality Action Plan.

In response to questions from Members, the Director (JY), the Senior Environmental Technical Officer and the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager responded:-

- The issue of whether the locations of bus stops at road junctions contributed to poor air quality in certain locations was one that could be raised with Exeter City Futures for them to consider including in their action plan.
- The report which came to the previous Place Scrutiny Committee was the Annual Status Report, which is a statutory return to Defra who require data from the previous five years. The Annual Status Report had been considered by both Place Scrutiny Committee and Executive. The reports showed that 11.9% of monitoring locations showed an exceedance of the objective level (40 micrograms per cubic meter) in 2017. There had been a clear reduction in the number of locations which were above this objective in the past 15 years.
- The data tables in Appendix C were very technical and could be difficult for the lay person to interpret. They essentially showed the methodology used for calculating the impacts of actions. They had been included for transparency and for Defra, but were not essential in understanding the overall report.
- Filtered Permeability was the name given to the way access could be restricted to make travel by active and sustainable mode relatively more attractive.
- Bonfires had not been included in the action plan which focussed on the statutory responsibilities. The Secretary of State had confirmed that there was no intention to change the current legislation on bonfires. The Council's approach was to encourage gardeners to use the garden waste service or composting.
- In relation to the taxi fleet: the Council already had one of the highest emission standards in the UK for Hackney Carriages and had introduced a new policy in 2015 for new ultra-low emission vehicles to be introduced by 2020.
- Drivers were encouraged to turn engines off at prolonged stopping sites e.g. level crossings, however new technology in cars includes start/stop systems to help reduce emissions.
- The action plan would be reviewed annually through the Place Scrutiny Committee.
- Members were welcome to speak to the City Solicitor and Head of HR about introducing bylaws on the use of bonfires.

A Member commented that, although transparency was vital for an authority, it was disingenuous to repeat questions, which had been responded to at a previous committee meeting and thanked the officers for their hard work.

Place Scrutiny Committee agreed to the recommendations in the report and requested that the Executive recommend approval by Council of the adoption of the Air Quality Action Plan, and that the feasibility of a work place parking levy be kept under review with an update being brought back to Scrutiny Place Committee as part of the annual review of the Air Quality Action Plan.

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IKEA PRESENTATION - NICK EARLE

Nick Earle, IKEA Exeter Store Manager attended the meeting and provided a PowerPoint presentation about the arrival of IKEA in Exeter.

He explained that the Exeter IKEA store was the most sustainable IKEA store in the UK and that since opening in May 2018, the store had received more than one million visitors and recruited over 75,000 new IKEA family members. It was the intention of IKEA to provide a better everyday life to residents to help have a better home at affordable prices while protecting the environment. He explained why Exeter had been selected as a viable city to open a store.

The store paid all co-workers according to the UK Real Living Wage levels and offered generous benefits to ensure they were an employer of choice. 85% of employees lived locally. The store offered a variety of sustainability options including electric delivery vehicles, rainwater harvesting and would be introducing solar panels soon. Since opening in May 2018, the store had welcomed more than one million customers.

The IKEA Exeter Store Manager responded to Member questions on the following:-

- All feedback was appreciated, and noted the suggestion for adding seating around the store to support elderly customers;
- The Green Travel Plans survey results would be shared when they were available;
- IKEA made every effort to draw people in to the store and encouraged a good guest ethos;
- Averaging four people per car at a million customers, would be around quarter million cars visiting the store since it opened.

A copy of the presentation is appended to these minutes.

Place Scrutiny Committee noted the presentation and thanked Nick Earle for his attendance.

53

EXETER CITY CENTRE

The Economy and Enterprise Manager presented the report to update Members on footfall within the city centre and factors affecting the High Street. The report also determined trends within Exeter, to enable officers to plan and mitigate against any negative impact. She commented on the Grimsey Review 2, which was discussed by officers from City Council officers. There were recommendations in the report which would be suitable for Exeter and would be included in the City Centre Strategy Review. She referred Members to the findings of the CACI Ltd report, which highlighted that Exeter city centre had a very strong national ranking and was ranked 2nd in the South West, just behind Bristol as a dominant retail centre in the South West.

Exeter had a comparison goods market potential of £665.3 million, and had the opportunity to gain market share in surrounding towns in the region. The Economy

and Enterprise Manager stated that any targeted marketing and promotional campaigns should be developed in conjunction within InExeter to promote the city centre to increase market share.

Members were informed that the Growth & Enterprise team had been collating information on the reasoning for shop closures, and could not identify any trends, but confirmed there was still a demand for retail in the city centre. The Economy and Enterprise Manager commented on online shopping, and how this also had an impact on high street stores and referred Members to the footfall information in the report, detailing trends within the city centre and annual comparisons. She also noted that the fire at the Royal Clarence Hotel in 2016 had a significant impact on footfall within Cathedral Green, as did external events to the city such as the World Cup, the Royal Wedding and adverse weather.

The Economy and Enterprise Manager discussed how people travel into Exeter, indicating that 19,000 commuters travelled to the City Centre on a daily basis. Commuters by car had reduced by 18.3%, whereas commuting by alternative means had risen by 21.5% but the number using Park and Ride had declined. She commented on the various commuter options and where improvements had been made. She considered having a 21st century city centre that was fit for purpose and agile enough to cope with change was vital. The report would be used to develop the new City Centre Strategy, and the initial findings would be presented to Place Scrutiny Committee in January 2019.

In response to questions from Members, the Economy and Enterprise Manager and the Director responded that:-

- Devon County Council were involved with City Centre Strategy and were regularly consulted;
- Congestion was an issue and impacted on the experience of visiting Exeter;
- The Car Parking team would be involved with resolving the wider city centre issues and would be meeting with Devon County Council;
- Devon County Council and Stagecoach, had provided information which indicated that the number concession passengers had declined;
- The footfall had increased in Fore Street, which could be explained by the range of shops and premises at the location.

Place Scrutiny Committee noted the report and

- (1) supported the stance for closely monitoring footfall, car park and park & ride data, as well as the closure and opening of shops and restaurants within the city centre; and
- (2) that the Grimsey Review 2 continues to inform the review of the Exeter City Centre Strategy and the work of InExeter.

The Skills Officer presented the report which covered the development of a Skills Strategy for Exeter, including the progress made to date, an overview of required actions and required timescales. The report aimed to ensure Members were kept up to date with progress and future plans, in relation to this area of work, and understood the planned process and initial priorities to develop and deliver a skills strategy for Exeter.

She explained to Members that the city was performing well in relation to key employment and skills indicators, and that the graduate retention levels in Exeter were 7.4% and 50% across the South West region. Exeter University were continuing to engage with local businesses for graduate work placements in Exeter.

Members were referred to the feedback results from a short business survey, with local businesses which highlighted the key areas of concern from employers as; the low unemployment rate causing recruitment challenges, a mixed response to apprenticeships from employers and also that some responders were not offering work experience or engaging with schools. To date, a number of priority areas have been identified, and further robust research was required to confirm these as part of the preparing the strategy. The Skills Officer advised that a Skills Advisory Group for Exeter would be formed to support the delivery of the Skills Strategy and the projects for development.

In response to questions from Members, the Skills Officer responded as follows:-

- Members would receive quarterly update briefings on the progress of the work;
- The requirement for funding priorities was medium risk, due to the uncertainty of future European Funding and what would replace it, this could be re-assessed once more is known;
- The post of the Skills Officer was a permanent full time role;
- Exeter University managed several schemes to retain graduates locally, including internships, but there were not enough businesses engaging with them to utilise these schemes. Raising the profile of these schemes was a priority;
- The budget would be large enough to support the development of the strategy and associated research;
- There were a number of employers in Exeter offering the National Living Wage to employees;
- The report was for the local economy and a part of the remit of the Place Scrutiny Committee;
- The 7.4% retention figure covered graduates who remained in Exeter only. The number of graduates retained across Devon was around 12%, the figures for this year would need to be clarified and reported back at a future meeting.

Place Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made to date in relation to the development of a Skills Strategy for Exeter, and supported approval by the Executive of the following:-

- (1) to plan for the next stages of development, leading to the publication of a strategy and associated action plans,
- (2) the formation of a Skills Advisory Group for Exeter that will support strategy development and provide ongoing support, direction and challenge to the delivery of identified priorities, and
- (3) Members continued support for the priorities identified in Section 10 of the circulated report.

The Chief Finance Officer presented the Budget Monitoring report for Quarter 2 which advised Members of the material differences, by management unit, between the 2018/19 approved budget and the current outturn forecast in respect of Place Scrutiny Committee revenue and capital budgets. At the last Place Scrutiny Committee meeting in September, the Chief Finance Officer had issued a warning about the Councils' reserves dropping below the recommended level. He explained

that following the work by the Strategic Management Board , working with their Service Leads, the reserves were now at £3.015 Million. This amount equated to just over £15,000 above the reserve level, with vigilance on spending to continue.

He referred Members to the report, highlighting that the current forecast had suggested that the net expenditure for the Committee would increase from the revised budget by a total of £246,718, after transfers from reserves, which included supplementary budgets of £755,800 which had already been agreed by Council.

In response to questions from Members, the Chief Finance Officer and Director explained:-

- Reserves were there to manage finance over several years, as a Local Authority, the Council could manage finances over a number of years, with the reserves in place for unforeseen issues and it was usual practice for Councils to use their reserves when needed. The warning issued by the Chief Finance Officer at previous Scrutiny meetings was not an indication of financial trouble for the Council, but to ensure a level of financial discipline and to ensure a sensible financial buffer.
- Business recycling was an expanding market. The City Council took mixed recyclables from neighbouring authorities, however the income generated by the Council varied, but he could provide an exact figure if requested.
- There was an £80,500 underspend for the Public Realm Development team, following the deletion of three posts under one management area with new posts created under another management unit.
- The officer employed for tree preservations was shared with another authority and was for planning purposes only. The general Public and Green Spaces posts were for Exeter City Council use only.
- The Leisure Complex budget was approved by Full Council and would be coming forward into 2019/20. The specific costs for decontamination were not known, but the Chief Finance Officer would report the costs back to Members.

Place Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

The Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support presented the report providing an annual update on the Scrutiny work achieved during the Municipal Year 2017/18. The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to:-

- a) track the progress of the Scrutiny function and process at Exeter City Council,
- b) comment upon the progress and direction of Scrutiny over the past year and into the future,
- c) ensure that the Scrutiny Committees were kept fully up to date in relation to the Task and Finish Groups and what they had achieved, and
- d) illustrate how effective Scrutiny could contribute towards an accountable, transparent and democratic process.

The Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support discussed the various Task and Finish Group Priority topics identified during the Scrutiny Work Programme meetings that were held between November 2017 and July 2018. He expressed his

thanks for the hard work undertaken by the former Scrutiny Programme Officer, who had now taken up another post within the Council.

In response to questions from Members, the Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support stated that the Scrutiny Programme Officer post would be reviewed ahead of the 2019/20 budget process prior to submission to Council. The decision had been taken not to fill the vacant post, although the decision to delete the post had to be decided by Full Council. Future Task and Finish Groups would be led by respective service leads.

The Chair commented on the loss of Task and Finish groups and its impact on the Scrutiny process. He suggested duplicating the recommendation from People Scrutiny Committee, to review the decision to not fill the Scrutiny Programme Officer post, in two years' time. The Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support advised that there was no suggestion to stop using Task and Finish Groups as and when appropriate, but that they would be dealt with differently than they had previously.

Members asked that their appreciation for the comprehensive and hard work undertaken by Anne-Marie Hawley in her role as the Scrutiny Programme Officer be recorded and their thanks passed on.

Place Scrutiny Committee noted and approved the Annual Scrutiny report and recommended that the decision to not fill the Scrutiny Programme Officer post be reviewed in two years.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.25 pm)

Chair