

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 7 March 2019

Present:

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

Apologies:

Councillors

Also present:

Director (BA), Service Lead Housing Needs & Homelessness, Service Lead Housing Assets, Principal Accountant Corporate, Technical Accounting Manager and Democratic Services Officer

In Attendance:

8

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held on 10 January 2019 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

9

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

10

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 19

None

11

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER 20

None.

12

HRA BUDGET MONITORING TO DECEMBER 2018

The Technical Accounting Manager advised Members of any major differences, by management unit between the approved budget and the outturn forecast for the first nine months of the financial year up to 31 December 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.

During this period, the total budget variances indicated that there would be a net deficit of £396,482 in 2018/19. This represented a significant movement of £3.7 million compared to the budgeted deficit of £4.1 million for 2018/19 with, most notably, £3.2 million attributable to a reduction in the revenue contribution required to finance in-year capital expenditure due to the extent of slippage in the programme. Delays with the St Loyes Extra Care scheme and LAINGS refurbishment accounted for a large part of this year's capital slippage. This meant that the HRA was forecast to take out £0.4 million from its working balance, rather than taking £4.1 million out of its working balance at the end of the financial year in order to balance its revenue account.

The current HRA Capital Programme showed a total forecast spend of £7,431,100 compared the £14,871,217 revised programme, a reduction of £7,440,117.

The Service Lead Housing Assets updated Members on progress with the extensive procurement programme and on the Mears contract specifically, the outstanding response repairs in respect of the latter having reduced from 200 in December 2018 to 86 currently. He confirmed that regular meetings were being held at a high level and on site with the Mears Management Team to ensure the continued effective delivery of all contract requirements and that the local Mears team were engaging effectively. He reported a good level of resident satisfaction being reported through the key performance indicators used to help manage the contract. Work was continuing on the procurement process for a new contract and, following a Stakeholder Day held with Members and staff on 28 February 2019, an options appraisal paper was being prepared which would evaluate all potential delivery models and propose the optimum service structure for the Council.

He reported that both the Extra Care Scheme and the Laings refurbishment should be delivered by Autumn 2020 and that it was the intention of continuing with the garden assisted scheme and the procurement of the service for 2019/20 had been completed. He outlined the features of the zero carbon energy project (Zebcat), confirming that EU funding had been secured, since the time of writing the report. Following the Government's decision to remove the HRA debt cap, officers and an advisory group of Members, were developing plans for the HRA's new-build programme including evaluating the potential of all sites with a report back to this Committee in due course.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

The Principal Accountant advised Members of any material differences, by management unit between the approved budget and the outturn forecast for the first nine months of the financial year up to 31 December 2019 in respect of People Services. 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 Services budget.

The current forecast suggested that net expenditure would increase from the approved budget by a total of £94,000 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital. This represented a variation of 2.67% from the revised budget and included a supplementary budget of £580,000.

Members were advised that, with a largely full employment situation in Exeter, it was necessary to utilise temporary and agency staff but that it was important to

balance the cost of this with maintaining services. It was also noted that the Housing Needs team was now at full strength. In response to a Member's question regarding how empty homes were brought back into use, the Director (BA) advised that she understood that a report on the Empty Homes Strategy would be presented by the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager to this Committee.

People Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

14

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE

The Director (BA) introduced the presentation in the context of the Council having received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) funding of £481,600 for 2018/19 and £444,260 for 2019/2020.

The Service Lead, Housing Needs and Homelessness spoke to the presentation advising that the former Exeter and Teignbridge Five Year Joint Homelessness Strategy had been amended to separate action plans as a result of devolved management and independent housing advice structures. The presentation covered the Rough Sleeping Initiative eight work streams of the Night Shelter, Housing First Project, the Tenancy Ready Scheme, shared Housing Projects, resettlement from Hostel, discretionary placements, mental health clinics and a rough Sleeping Co-ordinator. Rough sleeping figures for Exeter and the South West were provided and he referred to additional funding streams for the Rapid Rehousing Pathway Fund including the funding of navigators to support individuals and funding for a Local Lettings Agency scheme with St. Petrocks charity and the Private Rented Access Fund for increasing access to private rented tenancies.

The Complex Lives Co-ordinator detailed the achievements of the Rough Sleepers Initiative referring to case studies. Because of the complexity of needs of many of the individual rough sleepers for whom housing was secured, the success rate was around one or two out of ten who did not revert to rough sleeping. She commended the work of the support workers at the Night Shelter, reporting that it was regrettable that the year two funding did not include funds to continue with an additional hostel resettlement worker at Gabriel House.

The achievements and future plans of the Homelessness Strategy were set out, the revised Strategy to concentrate on delivering a strategy for Exeter and identifying what is needed to reduce homelessness in the city over the next two years, consultation on which would commence in the Spring with statutory partners, providers and Exeter's voluntary sector as well as departments within the Council to ensure that there is support across the city for the future. Members commended the Homelessness Team on the work undertaken and urged officers to look at further ways of publicising this work which would better inform the public.

The Service Lead Housing Needs and Homelessness explained the local connection criteria which were based on MHCLG guidance emphasising that the City Council did not passport homeless people to other areas. Responding to queries, he referred to how the service responded to those presenting themselves as homeless including those from outside the area and it was noted that any potential consultation on the local connection criteria with other partners including the Devon Partnership NHS Trust and Devon County Council was likely to be independent of general consultations regarding the revised Homelessness Strategy.

Details of the Duty to Refer including figures were provided. Briefing of organisations would continue including work with the A&E department to identify ways in which they can make referrals, contacts with Exeter GP's and a roadshow

with Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care. Additional support to manage referrals from the prison was also being planned through dedicated navigator posts.

Members thanked officers for the informative and comprehensive presentation.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.03 pm)

Chair

DRAFT