

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 6 June 2019

Present:

Councillor Vizard (Chair)
Councillors Wardle, Begley, Foggin, Moore, J, Oliver, Pattison and Pierce

Apologies:

Councillors Newby and Quance, I

Also present:

Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, Service Lead Housing Tenancy Services,
Technical Accounting Manager and Democratic Services Officer

In Attendance:

Councillor Emma Morse - Portfolio Holder for Supporting People
Councillor Laura Wright - Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development
and Services

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of People Scrutiny Committee of 7 March 2019 were approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

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DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

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QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 19

None

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QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER

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None

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HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - 2018/19 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - OUTTURN

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised Members of any major differences, by management unit, between the approved budget and the outturn for the financial year up to 31 March 2019 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 2018/19 financial year had ended with an overall net deficit of £186,889. This represented a movement of £3.9 million compared to the budgeted deficit of £4.1 million with, most notably, £3.2 million relating 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 Extra Care scheme and LAINGS refurbishment account for a large part of this year's capital slippage.

It was reported that there was a requirement for supplementary budgets in 2019/20 as the HRA had identified at the end of the year a number of revenue budgets that had not been spent but where a commitment was required in the following financial year. It was therefore proposed that supplementary budgets totalling £973,400 as set out in the report be submitted to Executive for approval and added to the 2019/20 budget.

The total amount of HRA capital expenditure for 2018/19 was £6,197,257, which equated to 83.4% of the revised approved capital programme.

People - Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

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PEOPLE - 2018/19 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - OUTTURN

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer advised Members of any major differences, by management unit, between the approved budget and the outturn for the financial year up to 31 March 2019 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 £52,858 after transfers from reserves. This represented a variation of 1.5% from the revised budget.

The People Capital Programme showed a total spend of £470,294 in 2018/19 with £120,454 of the programme deferred until 2019/20.

The People - Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

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EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY - 2019-2022

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager presented the report setting out the new 2019-2022 Empty Homes Strategy including key objectives, actions and methodology of achieving them.

At the end of 2018, Exeter City Council had 403 long term empty homes and approximately 1,000 households registered on Devon Home Choice looking for accommodation in Exeter, representing 0.76% homes in Exeter being classed as long term empty, below the England average of 0.82%. The overarching aim was "To bring Exeter's empty homes back into use as lived in homes".

The strategy set out an increasing annual target of bringing empty homes back into use with the action plan setting out objectives of increasing the supply of quality, affordable housing in the city and continuing to raise awareness and address issues relating to empty homes. It would have a positive impact on neighbourhoods by returning empty homes to occupation, thus reducing homelessness and the incidence of anti-social behaviour. There were positive financial implications for the Council through New Homes Bonus paid for newly created or returned to use units of housing and through Council Tax by correctly registering properties and therefore paying the right level of council tax

People - Scrutiny Committee noted and supported the report and recommended Executive and Council adopt the 2019-2022 Empty Homes Strategy.

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ADOPTION OF HOARDING POLICY IN COUNCIL PROPERTIES POLICY

The Service Lead Housing Tenancy Services presented the report setting out the draft policy in relation to hoarding in Council properties and spoke to a presentation highlighting the issues, including case studies.

Hoarding presented fire risks in property as the materials hoarded were often highly flammable as well as risks of accident and harm to the tenant and any other household members and compromising the health and safety of neighbours and the wider community. Hoarding could also lead to structural damage and clearance/repair costs to the property once vacated.

With some 48 properties identified with this problem, the Service Lead explained the role of and training for Housing and Environmental Health Officers, the latter involved more with private properties. He commended the work of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and the Principal Environmental Health Officer in this area.

Members discussed issues around mental health where hoarding occurred with particular views expressed where it might prove necessary to evict an individual, potentially making them homeless and incurring further cost to the public sector in support and seeking to re-house. One Member stated that, with particular reference to those with mental health issues, it was important to ensure that eviction should not occur without a guarantee of re-housing and that the policy should reflect this. Other Members felt that regard should also be had to where hoarding occurred in blocks of flats and how this behaviour could impact adversely on neighbours. Action was sometimes needed to also ensure the safety and wellbeing of the tenant and secure the long term condition of the home.

In the last eight years there had been just one case of eviction, the individual concerned being ultimately re-housed by the Council.

A Member moved that the policy be amended to ensure that where eviction is deemed necessary, the Council undertakes to ensure that a hoarder is not made homeless but found other, more suitable housing options. The motion was seconded put to the vote and lost.

Members asked that the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee to the Principal Environmental Health Officer and the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service be recorded.

People - Scrutiny Committee noted and supported the report and recommended Executive and Council adopt the Hoarding in Council Properties Policy.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.34 pm)

Chair

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