

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 January 2020

Present:

Councillor Luke Sills (Chair)

Councillors Newby, Atkinson, Buswell, Lamb, Lyons, Moore, D, Owen and Pattison

Apologies:

Councillor Moore, J

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Director (BA), Service Lead Housing Assets, Principal Project Manager (Development) (HS) and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Rachel Sutton - Deputy Leader/Portfolio Holder Climate and Culture

Ian Hutchcroft - Innovation Director Regen

1 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee held on 21 November 2019 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

2 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

3 **2020/21 Budget Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan**

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer referred to the Executive report presented to Members of this Scrutiny Committee for information. The detail included the 2020/21 budgets, with a projection of the financial position over the medium term up to 2023/24, acknowledging that the final settlement was anticipated by the end of January. The key headlines included the impact of the business rate re-set from 2021/22 as well as an expected phased end to New Homes Bonus by 2023/24. She drew attention to a projected £3.7m funding gap in the years from 2021/22 (between resources and expenditure), which would require difficult decisions to be made to identify budget reductions to close the funding gap.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer would seek a response to a Member's enquiry on the new recycling facility's predicted income and whether reductions in the gate fees had been factored into the budget, particularly as waste would be sent to the incinerator. She gave the following additional responses to Members' questions -

- the budget allocation for 2020/21 in respect of climate change was a one off funding line which comprised a number of elements and included specialist research, obtaining baseline CO2 data, and a growth programme focused on females in Devon.

- the budget in respect of the Council's signage was an extension of an ongoing programme of new signage erected around the city. She would need to come back with specific locations for the new signage in 2020/21.
- an acknowledgement of a specific comment on the effect on the Council of the ensuing loss of the Government grant. The Government were in the process of carrying out a fair funding review and an assessment of need, and although the New Homes Bonus would come to an end, the Council would still receive the retention of business rates and council tax but at a much lower level than currently achieved.

The Chief Executive & Growth Director referred to the continuing challenge to deliver statutory services as well as place shaping the city. Exeter's success in maximising its share of the business rates receipts had been a part of a behavioural change to incentivise growth. The changes to the business rates and New Homes Bonus had now resulted in a £3.7 million shortfall for the Authority, against a backdrop of finding ways to continue providing statutory services. A Member commented on the potentially detrimental effect of a loss of car parking income of £8 million in addition to the £3.7 million shortfall. A Member also questioned if in the light of the comments made, that offering free Thursday night parking in three of the city car parks would be reconsidered.

Members noted the report, approved by Executive on the 14 January which would establish a balanced revenue budget and capital programme.

4 **Towards Carbon Neutral Exeter - Update January 2020**

The Programme Director, Exeter City Futures (ECF) provided an update on the progress made on the recommendations and activities that would support Exeter's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030. The 12 goals of Exeter City Futures would provide a blueprint for change, but there were many challenges to overcome, including financial, political and behavioural. It was important that the public embraced and understood the need for and sustaining change, up to and beyond 2030. A further update on the work by the team included the launch of the Exeter Key Facts document, which was circulated to all Members. The document contained publicly available information, which was referenced from validated sources and she hoped that it would increase a culture of data collation and sharing across the city. She was also pleased to report that they had attracted £250,000 of national lottery funding over the next three years to support Exeter City Futures engagement with residents and business for projects to address local need.

Other forthcoming work included:-

- the launch of a dedicated microsite www.netzeroexeter.co.uk, which would include details of a planned Net Zero Summit to be held in the city on 26 March.
- a programme of public engagement with Encounters, an arts based organisation, to be held with community builders across the city
- three targeted workshops, inviting political, business and community leaders to consider the challenge and barriers for delivering the blueprint for change. Their deliberations, as well as the outcomes of the public engagement, would also help to inform the summit taking place on 26 March.
- the learnings from all these activities will be collated into the net-zero Exeter roadmap to be delivered to the Chief Executive & Growth Director at the end of March.

The Chief Executive & Growth Director provided a response to a number of Members' questions and the challenges and commitment of reaching carbon neutrality by 2030 with increasingly limited resources. It was important to work out the costs associated with the Roadmap, and issues associated with the local delivery pilot, understanding behavioural issues and the economic opportunities.

The Portfolio Holder Climate and Culture responded to a Member's comment on the greening of the city and would raise a particular issue of trees planted at the Newcourt development with planning officers. Over 24% of the city had tree cover and opportunities to plant more were always encouraged. She made the following observation and remarked that robust data was needed to be able to plot and track the journey forward. The political commitment was within her portfolio and despite the constraints on the Council, she would make every effort to progress this within Council's available resources. She welcomed the involvement of Encounters. The Programme Director (ECF) would also involve her colleagues to stress the importance of ensuring that a statement of intent or engagement was developed. She also referred to the importance of engagement and acknowledged there was a proportion of people who were very committed and were very active in their efforts. The forthcoming Summit in March would help to ensure that everyone had an understanding of the scale and scope of the challenge.

The Programme Director (ECF) responded to a Member, who sought clarification on Exeter City Futures work in a letter from a member of the public. It was noted there was a formal mechanism to ask questions of their Scrutiny Committee, however, the Programme Director (ECF) clarified the following, that the subheadings in her report were recommendations for the work ahead; the engagement work to date and reports were on the Exeter City Futures web site; the framework duties would be structured under the 12 goals of Exeter City Futures, and the forthcoming Summit would be open to all and every effort would be made to ensure that the information was shared on the web site.

Members commented on financial inequality and ensuring social justice. A Member referred to a request agreed at a previous Council meeting to ensure that recognition of the sustainable climate agenda was included in the Council's governance report structure. The Director (BA) stated that this had been included in the report template and would be rolled out in the next Committee cycle.

Members noted the progress that was being made on bringing forward the Carbon Neutral Exeter 2030 Roadmap, and extended a further invitation to the Exeter City Futures Programme Director to provide regular updates of progress, as appropriate, at the Strategic Scrutiny Committee meeting.

5 Presentation - Energiesprong

The Service Lead Housing Assets provided an update on the Council's Housing stock asset management and development. He introduced Ian Hutchcroft, Innovation Director, Regen and briefed Members on a pioneering retrofit scheme pilot to improve energy and maintenance in three pairs of semi-detached houses in Chestnut Avenue, using modern methods of construction and off site manufacturing in partnership with the Dutch company, Energiesprong. The work was nearing completion and had utilised modern methods of energy efficiency with wrap around wall panels, triple glazing directly installed on the properties, improved insulation, solar panels on the roof to generate electricity to help meet the household needs of plentiful hot water and an ambient temperature. The product was guaranteed for 30 years. The knock on effect of more efficient and warmer houses for less cost, as well

as improving the exterior could also lift aspiration in the local environment and offered an opportunity for the Council to further its social, financial and environmental responsibilities to their tenants. It was intended that this was not just best practice, but also next practice to share with neighbouring authorities.

Ian Hutchcroft advised that Energiespong, had been working with the Dutch Government to deliver net zero energy efficient homes in cooperation with the energy and construction sectors working together. The benefits included savings in maintenance costs and by tenants who paid a reduced energy bill, with a comfort charge in the form of a modest fixed monthly cost to the landlord. It was important to understand the technical changes with the supply chain and companies would need to overcome in their construction methods. The Chief Executive & Growth Director stated that every effort would be made to identify a funding solution to meet the challenges of fuel poverty and the carbon reduction agenda by 2030.

The Service Lead Housing Assets made the following responses to Members:-

- the Housing Revenue Account has a capital programme of up to £12 million a year and work was being done to investigate how this might be re-aligned to look at retrofit of these homes which would address the issues of fuel poverty and future maintenance as well as carbon reduction.
- tenant engagement and the opportunity for individuals to have a control of their heating and household environment was key the fire rating for the pilot homes would be A1, and although the original building would be encapsulated rather than replaced, and issues in relation to the original building may remain, the building would be stabilised. The internal environment would also have an improved heating and ventilation system.
- the necessary safety and structural condition survey checks would still be made, as well as a tenant check every two years.
- the Council's plans for energy management included a review of the Asset Management Plan and environmental use of all building and maintenance materials used as part of the end of life consideration of the building.

The Director (BA) referred to the completion of the pilot, and she would share the outturn report with Members when it was available. The results of the pilot would be considered alongside other options for working towards net Carbon zero for the council's housing stock. Following a request from a Member, the Director confirmed that a site visit of the pilot site would be arranged.

6 **Presentation - Consultation on the Future Building Homes Standard 2025**

The Principal Project Manager (Development) reported that he was coordinating the response from the City Council to the consultation for *The Future Homes Standard: including options to vary Building Regs Parts L and F of the Building Regulations for new dwellings* in 2020 as well as 2025. Members were invited to offer comments towards the coordinated response before the closing deadline date of 7 February 2020. The two stage consultation set out proposed changes to Building Regulations and included proposed options to increase energy efficiency requirements for new homes in 2020. There would also be further opportunities to lobby for the requirement for new build homes to be future proofed with low carbon heating and energy efficiency by 2025. The City Council's response would include offering the minimum standard work, and provide some direction to ensure occupants used energy more efficiently, made good use of renewable resources such as solar photovoltaic panels, solar hot water panels, and ground source heat pumps and purchasing electricity from renewable energy suppliers.

The Chief Executive & Growth Director paid tribute to the hard work and efforts by the Principal Project Manager Development and his response to the consultation which would include encouraging energy efficient house building practices, as well as a level of commitment from volume house builders. The Principal Project Manager (Development) invited Members to continue to contact him and following a request from Members agreed that he would circulate a draft of the consultation response to them.

Members supported a response from the City Council to the Building Regulation Consultation, and that it should include a reference to the consistency with the City Council's stated aim of a Carbon Neutral Exeter by 2030 and of a fabric first approach to the highest standard.

7 **Items for Future Consideration**

The Chair invited Members to suggest items for future consideration by the Scrutiny Committee and which would be put forward to the Scrutiny Programme Board.

Strategic Scrutiny Committee noted the request.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.00 pm

Chair