

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 JULY 2020

ITEM 6 : QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS ON COVID-19

Questions to the Portfolio Holder for –Leisure & Physical Activity - Councillor Pearson

Questions from Committee Members

1. **Councillor J Moore** - Will the pools and leisure centres at St Sidwell's Point and Riverside be included in the future in-sourcing of ECC leisure services?

Yes and they are crucial to that in-sourcing and part of the landmarks of the city and of the fantastic Leisure Services that we provide.

2. **Councillor J Moore** - Alongside the 2018 Draft Playing Pitch Strategy review, will there also be a review of other outdoor sports facilities?

There are no plans to review at a strategic level the Move Physical Activity and the Move More Built Leisure Facilities Strategies published in 2019 which guide the work of officers. The Parks, Play areas and Green Spaces strategy work will be led by the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Harvey and that is still under development and obviously there have been some delays due to the CV-19 pandemic. We are aware that outdoor spaces can be valuable and their value has been seen in a new light, and we have not seen anything in that strategy that did not value those outdoor spaces, and think that we need more in some cases as well as how we deliver.

3. **Councillor D Moore** - Please can the Portfolio holder expand on the second bullet point of the update of the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot and explain the new system and approach, and key outcomes from the evaluation?

A diagram (shown at the meeting and included below) illustrates the whole system approach in terms of the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot and that means bringing together aspects you may not always think of as relating to health and wellbeing. Such as transport and connectivity, our community and culture, housing, leadership and governance which all make our society work and how can they be used to improve the health outcomes of all those in our community, and particularly where health outcomes are not as good in parts of the city. The whole system approach therefore tries to effect all of those areas whether it is the work place, schools, and what we do as a Council, and not take a narrow view of health outcomes just being about sport and fitness. It was talking to the right people in schools and workplaces and making sure that we have the right relationships and trying things or taking a different approach. He would ensure that two documents referred to namely a report to the Sport England Exeter and Cranbrook Local Delivery Pilot Programme Board 15 January 2020, and Sport England Local Delivery Pilot Exeter and Cranbrook Interim Plan April – September 2020 would be circulated independently as they outline the details of the plan, the delivery and the challenges that we face and how they can be overcome. The whole system approach was about winning hearts and minds but they needed to make sure that they engaged with the right people in organisations in a positive way to bring it altogether to make it work. Coronavirus has had an impact on us doing that over the last couple of months and things have not progressed as you might have expected with resources going into making Exeter Community Wellbeing work.

Exeter & Cranbrook theory of change



Long term Impacts:

- Narrowing health inequality
- Improving inclusivity & sense of community
- Reducing congestion & improving air quality
- Embedded analytical approach

4. **Councillor D Moore** - For some people the experience of shielding or self-isolation has led to or increased anxiety and frailty. How will this change the Local Delivery Pilot priorities and /or approach to delivery?

There had been a great deal of learning and putting resources towards support for people with coronavirus. It was important to recognise about the delivery pilot that even before the coronavirus pandemic, the aim was to target groups in that category who have those issues and difficulty getting into that first step of physical exercise. Those things are the focus of the delivery pilot and he did not think that the approach would change drastically, but there was a lot of learning having said that, from what they have been doing over the last couple of months.

Questions from Non-Committee Members

1. **Councillor K Mitchell** - Social distancing measures are likely to be in place in the medium to long term as part of the new norm. Has this been factored into the revised likely income from the new St Sidwell's Point Leisure Centre (SSP) and our other leisure facilities?

No revisions have yet been made on the business case for SSP. The key issues in relation to this are set out in the Leisure Services Recovery Plan committee paper due to be considered by the Executive and Council in July. It was early days with regard to the Council's response to the challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic and the implications of living with this for a while but the realisation that the implications are still just starting, and we need to evaluate.

2. **Councillor K Mitchell** - Are there any plans to use our parks and open spaces over the summer months to provide exercise classes which would normally be offered within our leisure centres?

No there no plans although it has been gratifying to see people during the CV-19 pandemic finding really innovative ways to keep on with their activities on various platforms, but currently it is outside of the Government guidance to bring people together and important to note that and although we are coming out of it, but we still need to make people safe. We are working with people offering great things such as free movement in parks, but we are not making plans to offer traditional classes back in our leisure centres as we need to make sure that people are safe and can use our parks safely.

Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Support Services & Procurement – Councillor Wood

Questions from Committee Members

1. **Councillor K Owen** - An important piece of work carried out by the Council is ensuring that the maximum number of people are on the electoral register every year. The postponement of the May 2020 elections means that we will have city council, county council and police and crime commissioner elections next year. Can you please tell us what work on this (if any) has had to be postponed due to the pandemic and what plans are being made for the months ahead to maximise the numbers on the electoral roll.

To uphold the political neutrality of the Members in this matter the Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support responded –

Although the elections due in May 2020 were postponed, electoral registration work has continued. Those members of the public who wished to register to vote have continued

to be able to do so, and the ability for new applicants to register on line has continued unhindered. Only those new applicants who wish to register by way of paper application have had a slower response time since some members of the election team have been furloughed. Full staffing will resume from week commencing 6 July.

The annual canvass will be carried out from the end of July and during the autumn, with the intention of publishing a revised register on 1 December. The Cabinet Office have indicated that there may be legislation which allows a delay to publication of the electoral register until 1 February 2021. Plans for the canvass are in hand and on time and it is ultimately for the Electoral Registration Officer to decide when the Electoral Register will be published.

2. **Councillor D Moore** - What consultation with the Union has been held to enable their input to the redesign of safe working practices?

The decision was made some time ago to have a full time UNISON Secretary which has meant that we have daily contact with UNISON who help both staff and management teams in the redesign of the safe working practice across the organisation. Unison's involvement has been both invaluable and very welcome.

Indeed Stuart Ward, the UNISON Secretary actually walked the floors of the Civic Centre with Officers to ensure we have as safe a working environment as we can in line with the current Government Guidelines.

3. **Councillor D Moore** - Before Operation Shield ends, vulnerable people may need some support to make alternative arrangements for safe and timely access to food supplies. What Council notification and liaison will there be with charities, registered social landlords and other organisations to help people make these alternative arrangements?

Legal Services have worked extremely quickly and effectively analysing a huge range of regulations and legislation and providing advice and support on the interpretation as they apply to the full range of Council Services. This included the regulations and responsibilities involved in Operation Shield.

However, the operational implementation and service implications fall outside of my Portfolio and under the Equalities, Diversity and Communities Portfolio under Cllr Amal Ghusain. On enquiring I have been ensured that the Exeter Community Wellbeing network will remain in operation to provide support and lines of information and guidance being developed that will go on our web site and social media to provide information and support. If more information is required it would be better to approach the appropriate Portfolio Holder.

4. **Councillor D Moore** –What identification has been made of businesses that have fallen through the gaps of the various government financial schemes?

There have been a range of different grants coming through and there have been weekly meetings with Exeter Chamber, Exeter Federation of Small Businesses and InExeter; in which discussion takes place on the types of businesses that have fallen through the gaps from the financial support that has been available from central government. We also receive communications direct from businesses that feel they have not received financial support.

In developing the Exeter Discretionary Business grant, Exeter City Council followed national guidelines in developing this grant, which supports four types of businesses

listed within national guidelines, which fell through the gaps from the original business grants. As some funds remain, a second round of funding will be open to any business within Exeter, as long as they meet the mandatory eligibility criteria:

- Were trading on 11 March 2020 and will continue to trade*
- Need to be classified as a small to medium business*
- Are not eligible for cash grants from any central government Covid-related scheme (apart from Self Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS) or Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS))*
- Are not in administration, insolvent or a striking-off notice hasn't been made*

This second round of funding of the Exeter Discretionary Business Grant will support the remaining businesses that have not received any financial support to date.

5. **Councillor D Moore** - Will the emerging Exeter procurement policy set out measures to prioritise local employment by supporting local businesses and social enterprises, and contribute to Exeter's 2030 net zero carbon target as part of the city's recovery plan?

Exeter City Council has approved Devon District Councils Procurement Strategy and procures all contracts and work in line with this strategy.

The current Procurement Strategy has four key themes:

- Contract Management*
- Social Values*
- Engagement with SMEs and Local Businesses*
- Behaving Commercially*

The two elements which relate to this question are Social Value and Engagement with Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs) and Voluntary and Community Social Enterprise (VCSE).

The relevant actions set out in the strategy are to include social value and sustainability in all tenders both with a minimum weighting of 5%. Which means that an advantage is given to those suppliers who can demonstrate that they contribute to these twin aims.

In advance of developing our own additional elements to the Procurement strategy our Contract procedure rules require that the Real Living Wage is paid by all contractors.

We are committed to work with our Public Sector partners through the Devon and Cornwall procurement partnership. Exeter University has been successful in securing funding under the heading of Partnership and Collaboration. Part of which, is to work with partners such as the RD&E, DCC and ECC to work together to improve investment in the local economy through targeting our individual and collective procurement, and where activity and collaboration occur due to similar requirements in the contracts that we seek.

Questions from Non-Committee Members

- 1 **Councillor M Mitchell** - Arising from the likely continuation of restrictions related to the current pandemic does the council have the resources to support either 100 percent postal vote elections or a massive increase in voters requesting postal votes for the three elections being held on the same day in May 2021.

To uphold the political neutrality of the Members in this matter the Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support responded –

AS you would expect all aspects of next year's Elections are currently being looked at by the Cabinet Office and all in the Electoral profession, and the possibility of an all postal vote elections in 2021 is currently being explored. However, legislation would be required to enable this to happen. He wished to set a bit of context on the level of postal votes and what that would mean at the moment.

- At last year's City elections, ECC issued 13,806 postal votes
- At the European election 13,996 postal votes were issued

The number of electors in the city already requiring a postal vote was 14.5% of the electorate. If demand increased a 10% would add an additional 1400 to the postal vote numbers and as in the graph, a 200% increase would mean a 42,000 postal vote figure or 44% of the total electorate.

We are about to start on the annual canvass and the number of postal numbers may increase and also likely the number of postal votes required increases when any Election is called

| <i>% increase</i> | <i>Additional Amount</i> | <i>New Total</i> | <i>% of electorate</i> |
|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 10 | 1400 | 15400 | 16% |
| 20 | 2800 | 16800 | 17.5% |
| 30 | 4200 | 18200 | 19% |
| 40 | 5600 | 19600 | 20.5% |
| 50 | 7000 | 21000 | 22% |
| 100 | 14000 | 28000 | 29% |
| 200 | 28000 | 42000 | 44% |

We are about to start on the annual canvass and the number of postal votes required may increase, as it does when any Election is called. It is likely that any increase in demand will be sudden, and will be triggered by the issue of poll cards about 5-6 weeks prior to polling day and probably peaking at about 2-3 weeks prior to polling day. A 10% increase would be manageable but a 50% per cent increase would have significant impact. Much will depend on how the CV-19 situation develops over the next few months. An assessment of the prevailing circumstances will need to be made at a national level, in sufficient time as to ensure the smooth conduct of the relevant elections.

It may also be worth mentioning that as the questioner has also said that we are due to have three elections on the same day on the first Thursday in May 2021, the City Council, the scheduled Devon County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioners Election.

There is also a strong possibility that, due to the combination of elections next year, we may need to issue two sets of postal votes. One for the City and County and one for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections. This will be due to the physical problem of fitting them all into one envelope and the different voting systems which will be in place.

If all postal elections were mandated, we need to issue 96,000 postal votes.