

Questions and Responses Raised at the Executive Committee - Tuesday 4 April 2023

Item: Overview of General Fund Revenue Budget 2022/23 - Quarter 3

From: Councillor D. Moore

- 1) Was there detail on the business case for the Affordable Housing Development budget, which could be provided, explaining why it had been given up as a saving?

Response: The original approved budget was intended to deliver three outline Business Cases in respect of a residential property company, a consultancy company and a retrofit company. The work has been completed on the first, but the second and third have been paused. The budget therefore is no longer required and will return to Council for a decision if required in the future.

- 2) Was there detail on why the Exeter Community Grants Programme had been paused and deferred?

Response: As Members are aware there is a shortfall in Neighbourhood CIL funding. As a result, Grants approvals were paused to ensure the Council's obligations in 2023-24 could be met. Ward Grants programme will commence in the municipal year.

Item: 2022/23 General Fund Capital Monitoring Statement - Quarter 3

From: Councillor D. Moore

- 1) In relation to the budget line carried forward for the Exeter Quay Cellars cliff face, would money be made available for the re-opening of the Quay toilets?

Response: The quay toilets were out of action due to water ingress and damage to the roof following falling debris from the wall above. Repair work would commence once the wall above has been stabilised and was safe to do so.

Item: 2022/23 HRA Budget Monitoring Report - Quarter 3

From: Councillor D. Moore

- 1) In relation to the replanting of trees as a result of ash die back and having been informed that expenditure would be provided, it had been rolled forward. Could detail on re-planting be provided?

Response: Ash Die Back (ADB) continues to progress across Exeter Ash population. The progress of the disease has been slower than originally anticipated and initially budgeted for and has required less ADB removals and remedial works as a result. The industry guidance available at the time the budget was set (circa 2020) suggested that 90% of ash trees would be killed by the disease. The current guidance makes a more conservative estimate of 80% expected mortality. However, the service anticipates that as ADB reaches more isolated woodland, and as the disease in currently low risk trees advances, we will see an increase in ADB levels city wide, and an acceleration in the disease across ECC tree stocks. Budget has been carried over in anticipation of this acceleration. At this stage 88% of ECC Ash trees are showing low levels of the disease, with 722 trees individually plotted to date, though this number is expected to rise as new trees are recorded during the ongoing tree surveys.

This year's ADB inspections are due to be carried out between June and August, following which, we will have a better understanding of how the disease has progressed, and what the impacts will be on the overall tree stock.

It is anticipated the 83% of the low risk stock will require removal as the disease progresses, and a minimum of 14% of the medium to high risk specimens will need removing this calendar year.

2022 saw the planting of 64 standards, and 600 Whips as mitigation planting to counteract the removal of 339 specimens city wide. In addition to tree planting efforts, many trees will be replaced by naturally regenerated saplings, particularly where trees have been removed (thinned) in a woodland setting. The advantage of this combined approach, is that we will have a more resilient and genetically diverse tree stock that is better adapted to local conditions. ECC Ash Die Back Action Plan indicates that replanting will be carried out on a 2:1 ratio where it practicable to do so. Currently combined standard and whip planting has achieved an approximate 2:1 ratio. Both HRA and City wide ADB management is managed by the Public and Green Spaces Arboriculture team and accounted for within the ADB data provided.

Table 1. Current infection levels.

ADB Priority	Total number of trees within the ADB tree stock
Green (low) 100% to 76% canopy remaining	633

Amber (medium) 75% to 51% canopy remaining	72
Red (high) 50% to 26% canopy remaining	17
Total	722

Item: 2022/23 HRA Budget Monitoring Report - Quarter 3

From: Councillor D. Moore

- 1) In relation to the consultancy fees spent on the review of the responsive repairs contract and the consultancy work as cost saving for service improvements for Housing Assets, could more detail be provided?

Response: This consultancy expenditure related to a review of the responsive repairs contract and, in particular, the various cost codes that works are booked to. The review has identified some efficiencies that can be implemented between the Council and our main contractor which will result in some areas of savings and reinvestment in responsive repairs and void property repairs.

Item: Council Tax Support Fund 2023-24

From: Councillor D. Moore

- 1) Are there any performance indicators in relation to the length of time for processing requests for support and monitoring potential risk to overpayments available?

Response: The Council Tax Support Fund is not an application based scheme. The additional discount is credited automatically to the Council Tax bill for anyone entitled. For eligible customers with an award of Council Tax Support from 1st April these credits were mostly applied during the annual uprating process in February prior to annual bills being sent. Newly entitled customers will have the credit applied during the process of awarding their Council Tax Support. Overpayments of the CTSF can only occur in limited circumstances, for example where a customer's entitlement to Council Tax Support is ended retrospectively from a date earlier than 1st April 2023. The overpaid CTSF is credited back to our available fund and can be reused for a further award to newly entitled customers. The budget is being monitored throughout the year to minimise any risk to Council finances of paying out more CTSF than our allocation.

Item: General Grants Policy

From: Councillor D. Moore

- 1) Are there details available applying for a grant under the Community Grants Programme.

Response: This will be different depending on the funding available under any proposed scheme. As a result, this will be set out in any report seeking approval for a particular scheme

Item: Amendment to the Financial Regulations and Procurement Contract Procedure Rules

From: Councillor D. Moore

- 1) What was the process for analysing tenders and quotes?

Response: There is a full transparent process for evaluation of tenders and quotes which is quote involved. Officers would be happy to provide a briefing session on the subject should members be interested.

Exeter Plan: Outline Draft Consultation: Consultation Report

From: The Council Leader

- 1) Could clarification and detail be provided on what a 15 minute community was?

Response: 15 minute cities and 20 minute neighbourhoods are recent planning terms which are often used interchangeably. These terms refer to the benefits of providing essential services such as schools, healthcare, shops and jobs within a short walk or cycle ride from where people live. This concept aims to build communities, improve wellbeing, support active lifestyles, enhance access to jobs and opportunities, improve the quality of places and support net zero ambitions. These fundamental principles have traditionally been a key component of town planning principles for many years and will feed into the Exeter Plan. This terminology should not be confused with highway policies elsewhere looking to restrict the routing of vehicle journeys in some cities

Item: Report of the Plant Based Food Task and Finish Group

From: The Council Leader

- 1) Request for an information table to be provided to address dietary options available to provide further clarity on the policy.

Response:

Standards required		Applicable to			
		Dietary Requirements	Council Meetings	Council Events	Council run sites
Availability of plant-based food options	Plant-based food options only	✓	✓		
	Plant-based alternatives to milk	✓		✓	✓
	Plant-based food placed at top of menu (showcased)	✓		✓	✓
	Plant-based food placed first in food counters (showcased)	✓		✓	✓

	Food labelling consistency for vegan and vegetarian options	✓		✓	✓
	Menus should aim for a split of 50% plant-based, 50% dairy, fish and meat options	✓		✓	✓
	Where possible, avoid ultra-processed plant-based meat alternatives and ultra-processed meat based products	✓	✓	✓	✓
Locality and seasonality	Food provision must aim to prioritise local suppliers.	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Work towards the HOSW declaration of at least 50% of all food spend to be procured from growers/ producers/ manufacturers within the South West local region by 2028	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Evidence of use of in-season UK produce	✓		✓	
	Where local suppliers are used, information should be on display to promote local suppliers (showcased)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meat, dairy products, eggs and fish	Ensure meat, dairy products and eggs are purchased from sources with good animal husbandry	✓		✓	✓
	Where possible, do not buy fish species identified as most 'at risk' by the Marine Conservation Society or and only buy fish from sustainable sources such as those registered with the Marine Stewardship Council	✓		✓	✓
Water	Free drinking water is prominently available. Catering outlets should sign up to Refill where possible	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dietary requirements	Where possible, menus should aim to cater for all dietary and cultural requirements	✓		✓	✓
	Food labelling consistency for allergies and intolerances	✓	✓	✓	✓
Accreditation	All suppliers and contractors will be expected to hold an environmental accreditation (EMS) such as Green Accord or other equivalent and approved accreditation	N/A	✓	✓	✓
Organic	Where practical and cost-effective, select certified organic foods	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Where certified organic food is used, ensure this is labelled and showcased	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fairtrade	Where food cannot be sourced locally, certified Fairtrade products should be sourced	✓	✓	✓	✓
Waste	Portion sizes are monitored to avoid food waste	N/A	✓	✓	✓

	Food waste is segregated and diverted from landfill, following a hierarchy of waste: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring we don't over cater in the first instance 2. St Petrocks / Julian House / Community Fridge at Exeter Library 3. Redistribute food where appropriate 4. Anaerobic digestion (review process to achieve) 	N/A	✓	✓	✓
	Adhering to Exeter City Council's Single Use Plastic Policy	N/A	✓	✓	✓
	Minimising use of food packaging	N/A		✓	✓

Item: Financial Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund

From: The Council Leader and Councillor D. Moore

- 1) In regards to the money being passed to 'Lendology', and why there was a large underspend, could a breakdown on the number of residents who had applied for Financial Assistance be provided.

Response: The £300,000 to create the BCF Loan fund with Lendology is available this year, as our BCF allocation is underspent. We are not able to carry underspend over into the next financial year and any underspend is taken into account when determining future allocations. Future allocations are based on an average spend/commitment over the previous three years.

The under spend has arisen because we have had less draw on discretionary funding, particularly Warm Up grants. This is because the government delayed the launch of ECO4 (Energy Company Obligation), meaning that for most of 22-23 we were not drawing on Warm Up funding. Warm Up expenditure for the previous four financial years is as follows:

Year	Spend
2019-20	£506,041.39
2020-21	£129,839.85
2021-22	£71,996.95
2022-23	£22,196.00

(19-20 was a high spend year, as ECO3 had just been launched, this reduced during Covid restrictions, as works could not be undertaken for much of the time). In addition to this, in December 2022, the government allocated ECC a further £293,391.00 in BCF funding. This money had not been accounted for in planning.

This underspend presents a good opportunity for us to follow other Lendology partners, including Bristol City Council, Mid Devon and Torridge, in placing further funding in the Lendology loan fund, ring-fenced for BCF purposes.

With regard to the grant v loan funding question: All mandatory grant funding starts with a referral from an Occupational Therapist. Without an OT referral there cannot be a 'valid application'. This is stipulated in legislation. For the last three financial years the number of referrals received and total adaptation grant expenditure and commitment has been as follows:

Year	Number of referrals	Spend	Commitment
2020-21	135	£514,611.51	£258,330.00
2021-22	126	£426,846.04	£317,752.22
2022-23	172	£541,578.53	~£400,000.00

During 2021, 22 and 23 we have been undertaking marketing activities to try and increase the number of referrals made to Care Direct (Devon County Council). The recent jump in referrals could be because of this, or could be due to a backlog formed during Covid restrictions (cases that are still working through the system).

Exeter City Council's BCF funding allocation was £1,282,515 in 2022-23. With the BCF loan fund, actual spend and other committed resources, we are projecting a final spend/commitment of £1,263,774.00.