

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 5 September 2023

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

Councillors Denning, Foale, Morse, Parkhouse, Pearce, Williams, R and Wood

Also present:

Councillor Jobson (as an opposition group Leader)

Councillor D. Moore (as an opposition group Leader).

Apologies:

Councillors Wright and Councillor M. Mitchell (as an opposition group Leader)

Also present:

Chief Executive, Service Lead Revenues, Benefits & Customer Access and Democratic Services Manager

80

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the typographical amendment relating to the attendance of Councillor M. Mitchell as being in attendance.

81

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

82

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 19

No questions from members of the public were received.

83

REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Executive received the report on the Corporate Risk Register and were advised that as part of the Council's revised approach to risk management, the register was now based on the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2022-26.

Members were advised that the Council's Directors had been working with their relevant Portfolio Holder's to capture the risks and mitigations. The risk register would be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Strategic Management Board (SMB) and would be reported to the Executive for monitoring.

Particular reference was made to the Audit and Governance Committee, who would continue to have a role in ensuring that the Council had a robust process for identifying and mitigating risks. It was also expected that some of the likelihood risk scores on the register should decrease over time as focus is made on specific areas.

The Leader enquired on the matrix table and how risks were scored.

The Chief Executive advised on how risk scoring was achieved. The inherent risks indicated an assessment of the overall risk and the residual risk was the risk that

remained after the controls and mitigations. Where scoring remained red but with a lower risk score meant that the Council had reduced the likelihood of the risk occurring. Directors would work on coming up with additional proposed mitigations for discussion with Portfolio Holders.

Councillor Jobson, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and thanked officers for the hard work involved to date.

Councillor D. Moore, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and expressed concern on there being no mitigations or lead resource allocation for the Net Zero and Climate Crisis. She raised concerns relating to the misalignment of the UK with the Devon Climate Plans, which needed to be considered with greater caution and actioned sooner, with analyses on the impacts of failing to mitigate reducing greenhouse gases or adapt the city to future challenges. The Council needed to take a similar approach to the Government in policy and strategy for addressing Net Zero in the city.

Councillor Moore raised the following three questions:-

- (1) In relation to building greater neighbourhoods and communities, why was the risk of low land/property values and lack of investment appetite, a greater inherent risk than residents not being able to afford to rent or buy the new homes built under this approach?
- (2) Which consultants had been appointed to undertake the full business case for the Exeter Development Fund and what are targets for the delivery of affordable housing and infrastructure under this model and will they be modelling the greenhouse gas emissions for the programme delivery of the fund?
- (3) Would each Portfolio Holder undertake a serious attempt at properly assessing the policies and strategies of the Council and the partnerships they are involved in to reduce inequality and address climate change.

The Leader advised that the risk register report was in relation to the overall risks of the Council and how they were being addressed. Individual risks would be discussed in other forums as required. He requested that the questions be submitted to him. The responses are appended to the minutes.

During the discussion the following points were made:-

- the risk area for delivering housing and building greater neighbourhoods had recently changed responsibility from both the Leader and Portfolio Holder for City Development and there were some mitigations that required moving for specific area;
- the work that had been undertaken on the risk register and the process of being presented to the Executive to advise Portfolio Holders was welcomed; and
- the Corporate Risk Register provided an overall top tier of risks, where other registers reported on specific risks, including progress on Net Zero. The register didn't record all the work of the Portfolio Holders but was designed to outline the risks and mitigations for reducing them.

In response to questions and points raised by Members, the Chief Executive advised:-

- it was the intention to bring the Risk Register to the Executive on a quarterly basis;
- any refinements would be addressed following Members' discussion;
- progress on the Council's work towards achieving carbon reductions for its operations would be reported to the relevant Scrutiny Committee and a future report would also be brought to the Executive on Net Zero in light of the close down of Exeter City Futures; and
- the positive work on delivering strategic objectives would be available in the Annual Review of the Corporate Plan.

RESOLVED that:-

(1) a quarterly report on the Corporate Risk Register be submitted to the Executive as the responsible committee to ensure it takes necessary actions to mitigate any identified risks for which it is responsible; and

(2) the revised Risk Register in Appendix A of the report presented at the meeting, be noted, with Members assured that the proposed mitigations set out are appropriate to address the risks identified.

84

COUNCIL TAX EXEMPTION FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Executive received the report which sought Members agreement for in-principle support for a Council Tax exemption for care leavers up to the age of 25. A subsequent report would be presented to Executive in November 2023 outlining the financial impact of the in-principle support

Work was being undertaken with Devon County Council and other District Councils in Devon, following recent focus on the responsibility of local councils in being a Corporate Parent. Members were referred to the seven corporate parenting principles outlined in the report and advised that district level authorities must have specific regard to Council Tax, Housing and Leisure functions. Although the report was focussed on Council Tax, work with Team Devon was being undertaken in relation to care leaver support for Housing and Leisure functions.

The Service Lead Revenues, Benefits and Customer Access presented the report and made particular reference to:-

- There had been a Devon wide process for supporting care leavers with a Council Tax liability, which had been agreed by Members in 2019. The Council Tax Team Leader had been designated the nominated contact in Exeter for care leavers in relation to Council Tax. For those care leavers entitled to Council Tax support, where there was any shortfall the financial difference could be cleared using the exceptional hardship fund. For those with no entitlement to Council Tax support, a write-off could be considered.
- Section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, provided Councils with discretionary powers to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable to a person, and any write off amounts would be made under these powers.
- The cost of Council Tax support and the exceptional hardship fund was apportioned between Exeter City Council, Devon County Council and the Police and Fire Authorities as per the preceptor percentages for Council Tax. However, Exeter City Council would have to meet the cost of any write offs.

- Although Devon County Council was the corporate parent, there was a county wide ambition to strengthen the local offer to care leavers and following advice from the National Advisor for Care Leavers, an element of the offer was a Council Tax exemption for care leavers up to the age of 25.
- There were 161 care leavers between 18 and 25 in Exeter, of which 50 had a current Council Tax liability and 32 of those were in arrears, highlighting that there was a vulnerability for younger people.
- The annual cost would be dependent on the agreed final policy, however, the discretionary awards for these 50 residents after national discounts, would be a £60,000 cost to the Council. If the discretionary awards were made after the Council Tax support application, the cost would be reduced to £25,000 per year. Anything introduced during this financial year would likely reduce the amount to an estimated £12,000.
- Section 151 Officers were meeting regularly to discuss how exemptions would work to support the final policy for Member approval. It was likely that there would be amendments made to the Council Tax Support Scheme from April 2024 to award 100% Council Tax support to care leavers. Exeter having the highest number of care leavers, had a higher financial risk, and negotiations on funding mechanisms were still on going.

Councillor D. Moore, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and welcomed the report. As part of implementing the policy, she suggested that as single person relief is lost when a person rented a room to a care leaver that retaining the single person relief until the care leaver was 25 years, would encourage additional availability of accommodation to care leavers until they were ready to live on their own.

The Leader advised that the suggestion could be raised with Team Devon as part of the partnership working in developing the final policy.

Councillor Jobson, as an opposition group leader, welcomed and supported the report.

During the discussion the following points were made:-

- the in-principle proposal had brought District Councils together to support care leavers and any final proposal would be made in cooperation with other authorities to agree a best practice solution;
- the Council had a range of support mechanisms for other residents requiring support, and the proposal was seeking to provide support to care leavers who were identified as being vulnerable and would benefit from the policy; and
- the policy would support vulnerable people in the community whilst supporting officer resources.

Members welcomed the report which would provide support to younger residents at financial risk and made their thanks to the Service Lead Revenues, Benefits & Customer Access for the work undertaken.

In response to questions and points from Members, the Service Lead Revenues, Benefits and Customer Access explained:-

- the estimated £12,000 cost would only apply should the policy be introduced during the current financial year;

- Section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, set out the governance legislation, in which Exeter City Council had discretionary powers and would incur the full cost. Where a care leaver was given Council Tax Support, the cost of the scheme would be shared between the preceptor authorities; and
- prior to receipt of the latest carer details, the Council had only been notified of 16 care leavers since 2019. From looking at individual cases due to being unaware that the account belonged to a care leaver, that unfortunately in some instances recovery action had been taken but this has now been withdrawn.

RECOMMENDED that in principle agreement be given for a Council Tax exemption for care leavers up to the age of 25 and looked after by Devon County Council, subject to a further report setting out all the implications including the financial impact on Exeter City Council.

85

MEMBERS TRAINING

The Executive received the report on the progress of work on the Members' training programme and the attendance and feedback for the various training sessions, since May 2023.

Particular reference was made to:-

- there had been 18 training and briefing sessions held since May, which showed an average attendance of 49%;
- there had been an increased number of Councillors who were not in attendance of the live sessions, who had used the recordings to confirm that they had completed the training;
- there had been 41 feedback responses, showing that 50% of Members were very satisfied and 40% satisfied with the training received. All feedback was sent to the training providers for their information;
- the online training platform had been renewed for another year and Members were encouraged to complete the GDPR training and Safeguarding training; and
- an Effective Scrutiny training session had been arranged on 7 September and a further training session for Council Meetings and Procedures had also been arranged for November 2023.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Democratic Services and Environmental Health advised that the Councillor Development Steering Group had recently met and discussed the training programme. They agreed that there was excellent training being provided, particularly for new Councillors. They also suggested that some additional work was required on the training for more experienced Councillors, with more variety and engagement, for Licensing and Planning training sessions.

Councillor D. Moore, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item and advised that Members of her group had been satisfied with training provided to date.

During the discussion the following points were made:-

- thanks and recognition to the Assistant Democratic Services Officer for the hard work undertaken in organising the training programme, particularly for the period following the elections;
- thanks to all the officers who had provided training and shadowing opportunities to date.

- assurance was needed that points raised in Councillor Feedback would be acted on by the providers; and
- the report highlighted the volume of work and training undertaken by Councillors which demonstrated their commitment to their role as elected Members.

The Leader welcomed the report and the first rate training provided to Members.

RESOLVED that the Executive Committee note the Members' Training report.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.20 pm)

Chair

The decisions indicated will normally come into force 5 working days after publication of the Statement of Decisions unless called in by a Scrutiny Committee. Where the matter in question is urgent, the decision will come into force immediately. Decisions regarding the policy framework or corporate objectives or otherwise outside the remit of the Executive will be considered by Council on 17 October 2023.