

## **EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

Tuesday 8 August 2023

### **Present:-**

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor Councillor Kevin Mitchell (Chair)  
Councillors Allcock, Asvachin, Begley, Bennett, Bialyk, Branston, Denning, Foale, Fullam, Harvey, Jobson, Knott, Miller, Mitchell, M, Moore, D, Morse, Parkhouse, Patrick, Pearce, Read, Sheridan, Snow, Sparling, Vizard, Wardle, Warwick, Williams, M, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

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### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Atkinson, Ellis-Jones, Hannaford, Holland, Ketchin, Leadbetter, Lights and Rees.

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### **LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND (LAHF) ROUND 2 FUNDING**

The Leader reported that the Extraordinary Meeting of Council had been called to enable a submission to be made to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) by the closing date of 14 August, for an additional £250 million available to Local Authorities for a second round of the Local Authority Housing Fund for the financial year 2023-24. It was intended that the additional funding would be used to purchase housing for those households who have come to the UK from Afghanistan through the Afghan Resettlement Scheme. The additional funding comprised two elements; the Resettlement element and the Temporary Accommodation (TA) element. Exeter City Council had provisionally been identified as eligible for £670,000 capital grant funding to purchase a minimum of five homes, with a minimum of four homes for the resettlement element and a minimum of one home for the TA element.

The homes would be used to relieve some of the pressure in move-on from the bridging hotels (Afghan refugees) and the TA element would be used as temporary accommodation for homeless households in Exeter. Once these resettlement needs had been met, the longer term use of the houses would be for determination by the Council for other housing needs and homelessness relief.

As with other affordable housing provision, there was an expectation that the Council would part fund/finance some of the required capital. In order to secure this capital grant funding, it was estimated that the Council would need to contribute £807,500 which would be available from Section 106 funding. Full details of the purpose of the funding, terms and reporting and monitoring arrangements were set out in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Exeter City Council were attached to the report.

Members supported the proposals and made the following comments:-

- the decision to support the funding application was entirely appropriate and the recommendations should be supported in view of the experiences faced by those who have been displaced, be it by war, persecution, atrocity or invasion, and that in making a reasoned judgement for those residents that the Council represent that the decision to support the funding application was appropriate.

- the city has welcomed and offered support to refugees and those individuals and families under the Afghanistan Resettlement Scheme. The Member acknowledged those people had put their lives at risk in supporting the British Forces in Afghanistan, and it was important to support these families who were now at risk of becoming homeless due to the loss of their temporary hotel accommodation.
- the scheme will provide much needed safe and secure homes for those refugees who have experienced great trauma.

The Portfolio Holder for Council Housing Development and Support Services supported the application and responded to a Member's comment confirming that the accommodation would be offered with a standard tenancy agreement that would ensure equality with other tenants in the area. She agreed with the Member that she hoped that those moving from bridging hotel accommodation would become long term tenants.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homelessness Prevention also welcomed the report and urged Members to vote for the proposals for the Council to make an application for this funding. In boosting the Council's housing stock, it would also have short as well as longer term benefits. It was right to offer such support as was necessary to those families from Afghanistan that had placed themselves at risk.

The Portfolio Holder responded to the following Members' comments:-

- he was confident that the Council was on track to carry out the statutory duty to make sure these families as part of the Afghanistan Resettlement Scheme would not be made homeless. He added that many who have come to the city have also been able to secure their own homes through work or family connections.
- funding achieved for the previous scheme, approved in March, had been put to good use and the Director City Development and his team had worked hard through their negotiations to achieve the best value and maximise the number of properties acquired and would do so again.

The Leader welcomed the informative debate and was proud that such schemes would allow Exeter to continue its proud heritage as a city of sanctuary. He moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a vote, the recommendations were carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (1) acceptance of the full allocation of £670,000 in Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) grant funding;
- (2) the purchase of (five) properties to be held in the Housing Revenue Account;
- (3) the funding of the Council's Capital contribution through £807,500 of available Section 106 funds;
- (4) the identification and purchase of suitable properties to let to eligible households using introductory tenancies for the first year and fixed term tenancies for up to five years;
- (5) the rents being set at affordable rates in accordance with the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding between DLUHC and Exeter City Council and the DLUHC recommended rental funding model Rent Standard - April 2023;
- (6) the MOU (Appendix 1) be signed for return to DLUHC by the 14 August 2023 confirming the Council's participation in the programme; and
- (7) the Director of City Development and Housing and the relevant Portfolio Holder be given delegated authority to proceed with the acquisitions and to

amend the number of properties purchased in line with the agreement above and including where additional Government grant may become available (provided that no further capital contribution is required from Exeter City Council).

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### **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

It was noted that no public questions had been received.

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### **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 8**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 8, the following questions were put by Councillor Moore to the Leader

1. In its draft report to the Devon County Council Cabinet proposing £1,454,478.48 cuts to its Homeless Prevention budget only the following risk is especially highlighted “that the multi-occupancy hostels may close because of insufficient staffing levels.”

If this Devon County cut is implemented as proposed, what assessment of capacity and risk has the City Council made for this financial year and the medium term financial plan?

- a) of potential closure or impact on third sector services serving Exeter?
- b) the City Council’s own ability to deliver services to meet its statutory duties to prevent and relieve homelessness?; and
- c) the financial implications on this City Council service in general, and the budget for temporary accommodation, in particular?

### **Response**

The Leader requested the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homelessness Prevention to respond to the questions.

- a) Negotiations over the future funding with the Council’s partners, including Devon County Council have continued since February and have largely been very positive. The Exeter Homelessness Forum had taken on the mantle of the former Exeter Homelessness Partnership which now brought together statutory partners in the city to tackle the issues of housing need together. It has been suggested that an additional £1.45 million, as direct cost to Exeter City Council would be required for rehousing people in hostels, which mirrored the sum required for the whole of the Devon County Council contract. There would be similar costs associated with such provision by other local District Authorities. He added that, with the increasing dialogue, he was able to report that Devon County Council had just confirmed that an announcement was imminent regarding the continuation of funding until the end of this financial year. The Director City Development and the Service Lead Housing Needs and Homelessness and his team had been working to come up with alternatives before the Autumn and would be relieved that there was some respite in the deadline.

- b) the City Council's ability to deliver under the Homelessness Prevention Act would not change, and if all negotiations should fail and despite the increased cost of delivery to the Council, there was still a duty to deliver.

Councillor Moore thanked the Portfolio Holder for the reply and sought a response for information on the last part of her question and the financial impact on this City Council service.

The Portfolio Holder would provide a written response.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question on future funding and whether support for the agencies who remain as providers of exempt accommodation would be able to bill their housing benefit directly through the Government and not the Council, and also if there was any discussion with other District Councils on this matter.

The Portfolio Holder also responded to the supplementary question on exempt accommodation and advised there was no change in this financial year and that further negotiations would take place, but that the City Council was reliant on information from Devon County Council which was tied to the County's budget setting process. Contact will be maintained with the County Council to obtain as much information as possible on what they would be prepared to fund. Exempt accommodation was linked to support accommodation and, as the detail was very technical, he would provide a written response.

2. With regard to the proposed cut of £270,000 by Devon County Council to the Wellbeing Exeter Partnership Fund, which funds the Community Builders' work in Exeter:-
  - a) what progress has been made to prepare a fundraising plan by the City Council led partnership?;
  - b) how many funding bids have been prepared and submitted to date - and what was the outcome?; and
  - c) how many bids are to be submitted in the next two months?

## **Response**

The Leader requested the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homelessness Prevention to respond to the questions.

It was not anticipated that there would be any impact in this financial year, as funding was in place until the end of March 2024. No future core funder had been identified apart from the commitment of the City Council, Devon County Council, and Sport England in Exeter to take next year's funding forward which would be part of the Council's budget setting process in February.

In terms of specific grant applications, the Council was currently working to secure funding for the future. A Case for Support was enveloped in partner organisations including Sport England, and all opportunities would continue to be explored with a number of public sector bodies, private sector organisations and philanthropic investors to secure more sustainable long term funding. The success of the Sport England project has had a huge impact on the residents of the city.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 6.27 pm)

Chair