

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 3 September 2024

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

Councillors Wright, Allcock, Asvachin, Vizard, Williams, R and Wood

Also present:

Councillor Jobson (as an opposition group Leader);

Councillor Moore (as an opposition group Leader); and

Councillor M. Mitchell (as an opposition group Leader).

Apologies:

Councillor Foale

Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Place, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director for People, Interim Director Community Services (SL), Head of Service - Legal and Democratic Services & Acting Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Manager

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 9 July 2024 and 13 August 2024, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

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QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 19

A member of the public, Mr Cleasby submitted the following question, related to Minute No. 92:-

- In commissioning the study for options for relocating services from the Civic Centre will the Council rule out the use of the historic Guildhall for committee meetings?

The Council Leader in responding, advised that the use of the historic Guildhall for committee meetings would not be ruled out at the current time.

Mr Cleasby on putting a supplementary question, enquired whether the Council would take account of the issues of the building and address the downside of the use of the Guildhall, including acoustics and layout?

The Council Leader advised that only full Council meetings were held in the Guildhall. All issues would be addressed and all options and suggestions would be considered, but nothing was being ruled out or in at the current stage.

92

RELOCATION OF COUNCIL SERVICES BASED IN THE CIVIC CENTRE

The Executive received the report which sought approval to enable officers to proceed to the next stage of planning for a potential move of the Council services

currently based at the Civic Centre to a number of Council owned sites. The potential move would relocate all three phase buildings at the Civic Centre site.

The current layout of the Civic Centre did not promote modern workplace practices for hybrid meetings, had surplus capacity and due to the Council's current financial resources, it was not possible to spend significantly on a new building. Making better use of existing assets would be more cost-effective in improving working conditions and enable the Council to fully embrace collaborative working across teams and services.

Particular reference was made to the freeing up a site for regeneration, which would enable surplus funds from the Guildhall Shopping Centre being used to fund the work without impacting on the taxpayer.

Councillor's Mitchell and Moore as opposition group leaders spoke on the item and raised points and questions, which were responded to by Senior Officers, as detailed further in this minute.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- how would the Council avoid silo working, with a number of different physical locations being considered?
- would the potential move align with the One Exeter work programme?
- would there be problematic for staff working in different physical locations?
- clarity was sought on the ring-fenced Guildhall surplus funds and why it was not usable for other services?
- It was clarified that 8.6 of the report regarding the floor of the Bradninch Place, referred to the second floor of the Bradninch Place;
- the report was welcomed, notably the carbon footprint and environmental information; and
- having a representative from the Net Zero team being invited to the project was welcomed and assurance was sought that projected carbon impact information would be provided as the project moved forward.

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

- carbon impact projections would be addressed in the next stage of work;
- it was confirmed that the report was referring to the second floor of the Bradninch Place;
- silo working was a cultural issue and work had commenced to address the issue. Regular meetings were also held to enable the senior leadership team and heads of service to work together for the benefit of the whole Council;
- the Council was looking to create more modern workspaces for improved and collaborative environments;
- there had been work undertaken for the current layout of the civic centre, to provide agile and flexible working and open plan spaces. This work also supported the Council during the Covid lockdown, allowing staff to continue working from home;
- all partners with a signed Council lease were aware of the intention to move premises;
- work was being undertaken to explore co-location options, but the primary focus was ensuring there was suitable accommodation for Council staff, with a focus on vacant units for office space at the Guildhall Shopping Centre;

- the requested funding in the recommendations, would provide the opportunity to do undertake work on various issues and costings to form an evidence base for moving forward; and
- the Council worked with trade unions through the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee (JCNC). The trade union also sat on the Council staff sounding board, working with staff on the existing Civic Centre arrangements. The sounding board and Union would also be involved with the Guildhall plans.

In response to questions and points raised by Members and opposition group leaders, the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources advised that:-

- any surplus made from the Guildhall could only be used either to enhance the centre or for housing regeneration projects, and therefore could only be used for specific purposes as agreed with the Government as part of the purchase for the Guildhall shopping centre;
- there was an internal resource to manage disposal plans and the £100,000 budget would be used to provide additional support for developing the proposals; and
- the first recommendation was asking the Executive to agree for officers to proceed with plans and costings to move the project forward. Council were being asked to approve the second recommendation, and should they reject that, then work for the full costing would not proceed, but internal work would continue.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RESOLVED that the Executive agree for officers to proceed with detailed plans and costings for the enhancement of a number of Council-owned sites in order to relocate staff currently based at the Civic Centre.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve a budget of up to £100,000 to develop full designs and costings for the project, funded from ringfenced surplus funds from the Guildhall Shopping Centre.

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REVISED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME 2024

The Executive received the report on the revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) which provided a scope and timetable for preparing Council planning policy documents, including the Exeter Plan, and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). Although the existing Local Development Scheme was approved in July 2023, work on the Exeter Plan and other planning policy documents had progressed and it was a statutory requirement to ensure the Local Development Scheme was up to date.

Particular reference was made to:-

- the latest update included a slightly amended timetable for the Exeter Plan and new work on an SPD for a new state-of-the-art health campus at the University of St Luke's site;
- significant progress had been made on bringing forward the Exeter Plan including the full draft that was subject to public consultation, earlier this year;
- several significant projects had been completed since the last LDS, which included a new SPD for Water Lane, a new CIL charging scheme, and a revised Householder Extensions and Alterations SPD;

- an extension of the area of the city centre covered by the Article 4 Direction, relating to Houses in Multiple occupation (HMOs);
- the current published Exeter Plan timetable included the publication of a draft version (Regulation 19) for consultation, in October 2024;
- it was now proposed to publish the draft Publication version for consultation in December 2024 - January 2025, with a final submission to the Planning Inspectorate scheduled for June 2025, with an anticipated adoption date for November 2026; and
- a delay was required to prepare further evidence in response to an earlier consultation at the beginning of the year. The Council remained committed to bringing forward a new local plan quickly and providing sufficient quality and quantity of homes including affordable homes.

Councillor's Mitchell and Moore as opposition group leaders spoke on the item and raised points and questions, which were responded to by the Strategic Director for Place, as detailed further in this minute.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- the report and significant work and achievements of the team was commended;
- clarification was sought that Exeter currently could demonstrate a 5-year land supply ;
- clarification that the impact of the increased housing targets would not take effect until after the Exeter Plan was adopted;
- although there were other supplementary planning policies, it was important for the team to focus on the new timeline to prevent starting the process over;
- the housing reforms were welcomed and the Council wanted to deliver the right number and quality of homes in the right places to meet resident's needs;
- the Council would be responding to the consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), but there would be a considerable uplift in the realistic delivery of housing;
- it was important that the Exeter Plan was robust to ensure it passed examination, and required strong evidence to support it; and
- reassurance was sought that the current Local Plan still carried weight for planning decisions and despite a delay, emerging policies in the Exeter Plan also carried weight.

The Leader highlighted Exeter's ambitions for delivering homes and commended the work and engagement undertaken.

In response to questions and points raised by Members and opposition group leaders, the Strategic Director for Place advised that:-

- the four-year land supply had been clarified by Government guidance, in which the Council was now working to a five-year land supply;
- the Council had previously adopted a local plan which carried full weight but required updating;
- completing the Local Plan quickly was important and once adopted, planning for the uplift in housing numbers could commence;
- the current draft consultation had minimal weight, but the publication version, once submitted, would carry greater weight;
- the Local Development Scheme (LDS) was a high-level programme and there would have different stages for Member and public involvement in plan making.

Exeter maintained an excellent consultation and engagement record in its planning process;

- all the issues being addressed were evidence focussed, which created extra work in addressing all the sustainability issues;
- the Council was obtaining social, environmental, climate and economic sustainability evidence as part of the legal requirements of the plan;
- the Council understood where co-living developments were coming forward and had been taken into account through the Exeter Plan;
- waste and minerals were outlined in the strategic assessment and the Council's response also strengthened the legality of the plan when it goes to examination;
- the Exeter University Master plan had been adopted and but did not have SPD status. Elements of it were included in the core strategy, but it required an update by the University; and
- a master plan for St. Luke's Campus would be different to the main campus documents and therefore would be considered differently.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RESOLVED that the revised Local Development Scheme (Appendix A of the report) be approved as the basis for preparing local planning policy.

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RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Executive received the report which sought approval of the updated Risk Management Policy which reflected the new Strategic Leadership structure and reporting arrangements. It was important that the Council had a robust policy and approach for identifying, managing, and monitoring corporate risks which could impact on delivering the Council's strategic priorities and the policy would be reviewed every two years.

Councillor's Mitchell and Moore as opposition group leaders spoke on the item and raised points and questions, which were responded to by the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, as detailed further in this minute.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- the policy referenced the responsibilities of the Executive and Strategic Management Board (SMB) and highlighted that the Executive was responsible for approving the policy;
- Portfolio Holders as the elected Executive Members, regularly reviewed their areas of responsibility, working with their relevant Strategic Director, which were then presented with the Council Leader, who had overall responsibility for accepting and managing risks; and
- the register was a living document, in which Portfolio Holders monitored and updated their risks and mitigations accordingly.

In response to questions and points raised by Members and opposition group leaders, the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources advised that:-

- the Executive consisted of the responsible Portfolio Holders, and had been grouped as such in the policy accordingly;

- Portfolio Holders were responsible for working alongside the Strategic Management Board (SMB) in monitoring risks, and had the opportunity to propose for risks to be removed at the Executive meeting;
- in the event a risk was considered to be in an unacceptable position, SMB would bring the matter to full Council to address; and
- the policy reflected the Financial Regulations set out in the Council's Constitution, which required that the risk register be presented to the Audit and Governance for consideration ahead of the Executive for approval.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

RESOLVED that the dated Risk Management Policy be approved in accordance with paragraph 5 of the Council's Financial Regulations.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.39 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 15 October 2024.