

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE

Statement of Decisions

Tuesday 24 March 2009

Present:-

Councillor Adrian Fullam (Chair)
Councillors S Brock, Cole, R M Hannaford, Mitchell, Mrs J Morrish and Wadham

Also Present

Chief Executive, Director Community and Environment, Director Economy and Development, Director Corporate Services, Assistant Chief Executive and Member Services Manager

Minutes (Minute 30)

The minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 27 January and 10 February 2009 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (Minute 31)

No declarations of interest were made.

Grants Committee (Minute 32)

The minutes of the meeting of the Grants Committee held on 26 February 2009 were received and, where appropriate, adopted.

Science Park Update (Minute 33)

The report of the Director Economy and Development was submitted, updating Members on progress with the development of Exeter Science Park.

Executive noted the report and welcomed progress on the Science Park, particularly the potential for the creation of higher quality employment opportunities.

Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2009 - 2039 (Minute 34)

The report of the Head of Housing Services was submitted, informing Members of the outcome of the annual review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. The Director Community and Environment reported on the adverse impact of the increase in the Council's subsidy payment to central Government in the next and forthcoming years. She also reported that the Government had recently announced that the guideline rent for 2009/10 would be reduced from 6.2% to 3.1% although confirmation in writing was still awaited. Tenants had already been advised of the previously agreed rent increase in order to give the required notice period.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at their meeting on 10 March 2009 and the support and comments of Members were noted. Executive members noted that the Government had undertaken to compensate local authorities for the loss of rental income but

shared the caution of Scrutiny Committee that if the rent level was to be reduced it was important that there should be no loss of income to the Housing Revenue Account.

Executive recommended that:-

- (1) the conclusions of the report are noted;
- (2) that if necessary the Council borrows against the HRA in 2010/11 to maintain the capital programme pending the outcome of the national HRA subsidy review;
- (3) authority be delegated to the Head of Housing Services to reduce the rent increase to housing tenants subject to formal confirmation being received that the government will fully recompense the Housing Revenue Account for the resultant loss of income; and
- (4) a further review is undertaken of the HRA Business Plan in 2010 and the findings reported to Members.

Housing Asset Management Strategy 2009 - 2015 (Minute 35)

The report of the Head of Housing Services was submitted, informing Members of the new Housing Asset Management Strategy and the recommendations contained within it.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at their meeting on 10 March 2009 and the support and comments of Members were noted.

Executive recommended that:-

- (1) the Housing Asset Management Strategy for 2009-2015 be approved; and
- (2) a further review of the strategy is undertaken in parallel with the HRA Business Plan in 2010 and the findings reported to Members.

Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2009 - 2014 (Minute 36)

The report of the Head of Housing Services was submitted, informing Members of progress in the preparation of the Exeter Empty Homes Strategy 2009-2014 and advising them of proposals for consultation.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at their meeting on 10 March 2009 and the support and comments of Members were noted.

Executive welcomed the Strategy and congratulated the Empty Homes Partnership on the achievements of the scheme over the past 13 years. Members were pleased to note that the Partnership was close to bringing its 1000th dwelling back into use. The Chair re-stated the commitment of the Administration to fully utilise all housing stock in the city and minimise the number of empty homes.

Executive approved the draft Empty Homes Strategy and that the draft strategy goes out for public consultation, the results and amended strategy to be reported to Executive in June 2009.

Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy - Annual Review (Minute 37)

The report of the Head of Environmental Health Services was submitted. The report proposed specific changes to the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy in order to address local needs, as identified in the on-going private sector house condition survey.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at their meeting on 10 March 2009 and the support and comments of Members were noted. Members were pleased to note the financial assistance which had been provided to home-owners through the policy and welcomed the proposed changes. The Chair endorsed the policy as an effective and sustainable way of improving the private sector housing stock in the city.

In response to a query regarding the maximum level of loan of £3500 in respect of mobile homes, the Director Community and Environment stated that this was considered to be sufficient but there was scope to consider individual cases on their merits and review and, if necessary, amend the policy in due course. The Portfolio Holder Housing and Social Inclusion, seconded by Councillor Mrs Morrish, proposed that requests for loans above the £3500 limit for mobile homes should be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Head of Environmental Health Services and this amendment was agreed.

Executive recommended that:-

- (1) the changes to the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy outlined in this report be adopted, subject to requests for loans in excess of £3500 in respect of mobile homes, being determined on a case-by-case basis by the Head of Environmental Health Services;
- (2) the expenditure of the single pot allocation be monitored and the proposed financial allocation to each of the schemes amended or further schemes approved by the Head of Environmental Health Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Social Inclusion; and
- (3) the Policy be reviewed annually, or sooner if needs be, in order to ensure that it addresses local needs and/or government policy.

Exeter Air Quality Strategy 2009 - 2014 (Minute 38)

The report of the Head of Environmental Health Services was submitted, seeking approval of the Exeter Air Quality Strategy 2009-2014, and informing Members of the air quality monitoring and management undertaken by the Council.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at their meeting on 10 March 2009 and the support and comments of Members were noted. Executive noted concerns expressed in relation to air quality in the Sidwell Street area and the reference to the report to the Highways and Traffic Orders Committee on 29 January 2009 on the issue.

Executive resolved to adopt the Exeter Air Quality Strategy 2009-14.

Review of the NJC Job Evaluation Scheme (Minute 39)

The report of the Head of Human Resources was submitted, updating the Executive on the progress of an independent review of the NJC Job Evaluation Scheme, as adopted in 2000. The Director Corporate Services identified the specific measures proposed in response to the review. He advised members of the conclusion of the Local Government Employers that the scheme continued to be applied consistently, followed good practice and remained sufficiently robust to meet the Council's requirements.

Executive resolved that:-

- (1) job evaluation panels be established to evaluate new posts and post changes by including more representation from managers and union representatives; this will require further training and the need to monitor consistency in decision making;

- (2) an appeals procedure be established to ensure natural justice is applied and that all decisions are agreed jointly; and
- (3) ongoing monitoring and regular quality assurance checks of the scheme and its future application be introduced.

Ombudsman report (Minute 40)

The report of the Local Government Ombudsman concerning a finding of maladministration in the way the Council pursued a Council Tax debt was submitted. The Director Corporate Services outlined the main findings and conclusions of the Ombudsman. He commented that the Council did have in place procedures for referring vulnerable clients to advice agencies but in this instance the Council had experienced difficulty in engaging with the individual.

Executive sought assurances that the Council had sufficient procedures in place to deal with people with mental health issues in order to prevent cases of this nature recurring. They also requested that the Portfolio Holder Business Transformation and Human Resources should be consulted in future prior to the Council commencing bankruptcy proceedings.

Executive noted the report of the Local Government Ombudsman and resolved that the Head of Treasury Services consult with the Portfolio Holder Business Transformation and Human Resources, prior to commencing bankruptcy proceedings in respect of clients in future cases.

Lord Mayoralty (Minute 41)

Executive recommended that Councillor John Winterbottom be nominated as Lord Mayor Elect and Councillor Ruth Smith be nominated as Deputy Lord Mayor Elect for the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public (Minute 42)

Executive resolved that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part I, Schedule 12A of the Act.

Extralet Scheme Programme Report and Restructure (Minute 43)

The report of the Head of Housing Services was submitted, updating Members on the progress of the Extralet scheme and proposing a re-structure of the service to integrate staffing within the existing temporary accommodation team to improve the overall management service to tenants and landlords.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at their meeting on 10 March 2009 and the support and comments of Members were noted. Executive members welcomed the continuing success of the scheme.

Executive resolved that:-

- (1) the proposals for the restructure of the Extralet team be approved with effect from 1 April 2009;

- (2) further work be undertaken to look at the options for the future of the team within an expanded county-wide scheme; and
- (3) a further report be submitted to Members once an outcome of the process has been reached.

RAMM and the Renaissance Programme (Minute 44)

The report of the Head of Leisure and Museums was submitted, seeking approval for the steps necessary to align the RAMM operation with changes in Renaissance funding.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at their meeting on 10 March 2009 and the support and comments of Members were noted.

Executive resolved that, subject to the agreement of the Museums Galleries and Archives Council (MLA) to the Joint Renaissance Business Plan submitted by the five South West Hub partners:-

- (1) the employment of the holders of those Renaissance posts no longer required to deliver the agreed Business Plan be extended from the 1st April 2009 for the period of their entitlement to notice, as provided for in their contract of employment, their contracts then be terminated on the grounds of redundancy and their posts be deleted;
- (2) authority be granted to the Director Community and Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Leisure and Business Transformation and Human Resources and the Head of Human Resources, to make payments, where appropriate, to those employees whose contracts are to be terminated in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 19 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Benefits, Membership and Contributions) Regulations 2007 and the discretion exercised by the Council under the provisions of the Local Government (Early Termination) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006;
- (3) the contracts of the holders of all other temporary Renaissance posts be further extended to 31 March 2010; and
- (4) such new temporary posts as may be funded under the next Renaissance agreement be established until 31 March 2010, subject to the creation of job descriptions, person specifications and job evaluations in accordance with corporate policy.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.30 pm)

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 28 April 2009.