

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - RESOURCES**

22 January 2014

### **Present:**

Councillor Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Ruffle, Bowkett, Brock, Bull, Crew, Donovan, Morris and Sheldon

### **Apologies:**

Councillors Dawson, Macdonald, Newby and Robson

### **Also present:**

Deputy Chief Executive, Assistant Director Customer Access, Assistant Director Finance, Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support, HR Business Manager, Principal Accountant Service (SH), Benefits Training and Support Team Manager and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (SLS)

### **In attendance:**

Councillor Sutton - Deputy Leader

Councillor Pearson - Portfolio Holder Enabling Services

Councillor Hannaford - Portfolio Holder for Housing and Customer Access

## **1 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2013 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

## **2 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of discloseable pecuniary interests were made.

## **3 Future Workings of Scrutiny**

The Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support presented the report informing Members of some proposed changes to the future working of the three Scrutiny Committees in order to make the process more efficient and effective.

Some of the proposed changes that had emerged following a series of meetings between the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the three Committees were:-

- a new style of agenda format;
- unless requested, officers would not present reports at committee;
- Members to provide officers with advance notification of questions to be asked at the meeting;
- Scrutiny Chairs to take a more active role in the Committee meeting 'pre-meet' to decided agenda content; and
- Portfolio Holders reports to be considered prior to Council meetings rather than at Scrutiny Committees.

The Chair wished to support the proposals, but had noted the concern raised at the two other Scrutiny Committees particularly regarding the presentation of the Portfolio

Holders reports prior to meetings of Full Council. This could be an opportunity for all Members to listen to the Portfolio Holders reports and offer a broader cross spectrum rather than fall under particular scrutiny areas. She hoped that if the proposal in relation to the Portfolio Holders reports was removed for now, that all other proposals could be supported. A Member said that he understood the concern raised in respect of Members' varying commitments, but would also be disappointed if Members and officers had to revisit the work of the task and finish group.

Members also discussed the setting of the Scrutiny agenda and commented on the proposal to put any questions in advance of the meeting, which could inhibit any spontaneous line of questioning or debate.

Councillor Baldwin moved and Councillor Donovan seconded the following motion:-

“That the proposed changes in the report be agreed, with the exception of the presentation of the Portfolio Holder's reports at Full Council, which should be considered at a later date.”

The motion was put to the vote and lost.

Councillor Bull moved and Councillor Bowkett seconded the following motion:-

“Scrutiny Committee - Resources welcomes looking at further ways to develop the scrutiny process. However, the proposals in front of us come from the Chairs of scrutiny and has, until now, not been through a cross party process. At this stage the report may be subjected to numerous and conflicting amendments at the three individual scrutiny committees. Previous proposed changes to scrutiny were done through a cross party working group and, therefore, a precedent for an appropriate process has been established.

We therefore recommend that Executive re-establish a cross party working group to look into this report and to bring back proposals to Executive and then, subject to approval, they be put before Full Council.”

The motion was put to the vote and carried.

#### **4 Reports of Portfolio Holders**

Prior to the consideration of this item. Members wished to pass on their very best wishes for a speedy recovery to Councillor Edwards.

Councillors Sutton, Pearson and Hannaford presented progress reports on priorities covering the Leader, Enabling Services and the Customer Access area of responsibility which falls alongside the Housing and Customer Access Portfolio.

Responses to Members' queries are set out below:

##### Leader's Statement

- Planning approval for IKEA was given after the 1 December, and so this development will attract a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contribution (CIL) and the new housing associated will attract New Homes Bonus funding (NHB). A further sum relating to business rates should be in the region of £500,000, as well as the benefit of 300 new jobs and the opportunity for employment for local crafts people.
- VPBS panels had been installed on a number of council buildings and as well as the environmental benefits, it had reduced energy consumption and given

a good rate of return through the feed tariff. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that £3 million had been included in the capital programme to progress the City Council's energy neutral aspirations.

- the Deputy Chief Executive referred to discussions relating to the Council's procurement system and some scoping work to consider simplifying the number of suppliers to achieve a greater financial benefit.
- the Council continued to engage with the local community sector to work together and ensure that there was no vacuum as the Council considered a significant change in the delivery of its services. The voluntary and community sector had useful local knowledge which could be shared.

#### Enabling Services

- staff now had access to social media, as the Council used this tool for greater communication and had signed up to a social media policy including training and support which staff should adhere to.
- facility management of smaller buildings and sites had not been seen as a priority. An Asset Management Group had been formed to build a framework to manage the Council's and the community's expectation. A Member offered his expertise should a task and finish group or working party be proposed.
- the Living Wage Forum involved local businesses and voluntary groups. The Forum had also started to look at the concerns raised by smaller businesses over ensuring a sustainable approach to employment.
- a change to the provision of ICT Services would be going forward over the next few months and the process will be as transparent as possible. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the final delivery and implementation plan would come to this Scrutiny Committee.
- a review of the City Council's web site would require a large commitment from staff to update the information, but the importance of ensuring that the web site was accessible and easy to use was recognised as a means of delivering a better service.
- concern over the rise in begging and associated antisocial behaviour in the city was acknowledged, but there was no intention to pursue those facing rough sleeping or homelessness within the same legal framework.

#### Customer Access

- the Assistant Director Customer Access referred to One View of Debt and confirmed that this was part of the Help Me System, looking at assisting customers owing the Council Rents, Council Tax and Housing Benefits Overpayments. Members welcomed this approach. The Assistant Director Finance was looking at whether this approach could be replicated for Sundry debt across the Council.
- individuals affected by the launch of the Household Benefit Cap had been contacted and every effort would be made to support the most vulnerable individuals
- the Benefits Training and Support Team Manager, responded to a Member's comment and the closing of a legal loophole in respect of social sector size restriction will take effect from 3 March 2014. He also confirmed that £1.5 million funding given to Devon County Council by the DWP, with £250,000 for the City Council would be used for the Local Welfare Support scheme this year. It was important to lobby at a central level for funding beyond 2014/15.

Councillor Hannaford urged Members to thank the Housing Benefits team for their sterling work.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources noted the achievements and priorities presented.

## **5 Resources - Estimates/New Capital Bids/Fees and Charges 2014/15**

The Principal Accountant outlined the strategic framework within which the 2014/15 estimates had been prepared, changes in accounting practices which affected all budgets and any significant changes in the Management Unit estimates, which were discussed at an informal briefing of Scrutiny Committee – Resources on 9 December 2013. The budget framework, Capital Programme and proposed new schemes for the areas covered by Scrutiny Committee – Resources and proposed 2014/15 Fees and Charges were included as an appendix.

Since the reporting of estimates to the December meeting of this Committee, the employer superannuation rates for 2014/15 had been announced and had changed from 21% to 22.9% and resulted in an increased cost of £99,500 being reflected in the revised draft revenue estimates. A small amount of the target savings that had been identified have been moved in to 2015 – 2016 plus an approved increase in the budget for clerical support for individual electoral registration.

The Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the draft Revenue Estimates, Capital Programme and proposed Fees and Charges for 2014/15.

### **MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE**

## **6 Annual Pay Policy Statement**

The Human Resources Business Manager presented the report, which set out the City Council's annual Pay Policy Statement 2014/15, and the legal requirement for approval by Full Council each financial year. The changes to the revised policy were set out in section 2.3 of the report.

A Member welcomed the implementation of the living wage, and asked how this related to the apprentices employed at the City Council and if the City Council had considered offering an 'apprentice' living wage. The Human Resources Business Manager stated that eight apprentices were currently part of a continuous rolling training programme at the City Council. It was acknowledged that such training was considered as part of an overall package of benefits. The age profile of the apprentices had been expected to be predominantly made up of school leavers, but appointments to the programme tended to be more in the age range of 17 to 19 years. Apprentice pay rates at the Council were already in excess of the National rates for apprentices with the adult minimum wage being applied as required in line with legislation. The Member hoped that the national low pay unit might review the pay offered to apprentices, but he welcomed the City Council's stance in relation to the minimum wage.

A Member referred to the pay multiple between the Chief Executive & Growth Director and the lowest paid employee and whether a comparison had been made with other local authorities in Devon and Cornwall. In response, the Human Resources Business Manager advised that given that all local authorities were currently in the process of approving their pay policy for 2014/15, a comparison had not been undertaken. She provided further information on the apprenticeship scheme, advising that regrettably, because of the current financial situation, onward employment could not be guaranteed after the apprenticeship period had ended. She also clarified that the Pay Policy Statement would be effective from 1 April 2014 for decisions taken on or after that date.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources recommended that the Council’s annual Pay Policy Statement for 2014/15 be adopted and published following approval by Full Council in accordance with the legislation.

## **7 Capital Programme 2014/15 - 2016/17**

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report and requested Members’ approval of the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes for 2014/15, along with a number of schemes identified for the following two years. Members were advised that a borrowing requirement of £16.505 million had been identified over the next four financial years, which would have an ongoing impact on the council tax. He provided an update on Business Rates (NNDR), but was not yet in a position to report fully on the impact for 2014/15.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources supported the following for approval by Executive:-

- (1) the General Fund capital programme for 2014/15 as set out in Appendix 3 of the report; and
- (2) the HRA Capital Programme for 2014/15 as set out in Appendix 4 of the report.

## **8 Revenue Budget Proposals 2014/15**

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report outlining the strategic framework within which the estimates had been prepared and highlighted the issues that would affect the actual setting of the overall level of council tax. The Government had announced the provisional Local Government Settlement on 18 December 2013, confirming that the Council would receive £7.832 million in 2014/15 (£40,000 lower than predicted as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan). A revised Medium Term Financial Plan was included as an appendix to the report and also set out the additional savings of £4 million that will be required over the next five years.

Responding to a Member, he explained that the loophole which gave a council tax capping advantage to parish and town councils was likely to change in the near future. He also confirmed that if the Government allowed the lowest 25% of Councils to increase their council tax by more than others, then Exeter would be able to take advantage as it remained in the lowest 25%. The Chair congratulated the Assistant Director Finance and his team on the work achieved to present the Council’s financial position.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the report and recommended that Executive approve the Draft Revenue budget proposals for 2013/14, and recommended also that the minimum level for the General Fund Working Balance should remain at £2 million.

## **9 Treasury Management Strategy Report 2014/15**

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report which sought Members’ approval for the adoption of the Treasury Management Strategy Report, which also incorporated the Annual Investment Strategy 2014/15, as required under Section 15(1) (a) of the Local Government Act 2003. The Strategy set out some changes in financial practice including an increase in the level of investment allowed in respect of a money market fund or loaned to an Upper Tier Local Authority. He also confirmed that Lloyds Bank had been awarded the contract to service the Council’s financial affairs, which was due to commence on 1 April 2014. The services of the

Co-operative Bank would be retained for a short period to facilitate a smooth transition.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources noted the report, requesting that Executive recommend the adoption by Full Council of the new Treasury Management Strategy and delegations contained therein.

10 **The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (Incorporating the Annual Statement of Minimum Revenue Provision)**

The Assistant Director Finance presented a report, which set out the proposed 2014/15 prudential indicators for capital finance for adoption by the Council, and to set the annual statement of Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). The prudential indicators covering a period of the next three years was set out in Appendices A to C. The report also confirmed that the requirement to produce an annual strategy of minimum revenue provision for repayment of debt, had been met.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources noted the report and recommended that Executive approve the adoption by Full Council, of the following:-

- (1) Prudential Indicators set out in Appendices A – C of the report; and
- (2) Annual Statement of Minimum Revenue Provision for the City Council.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.30 pm

Chair

## Leader's Update to Resources Scrutiny

22 January 2014

As members are aware the current financial situation facing local authorities is more challenging than it has ever been. The Council is facing a reduction of 44% in Government Grant over the next four years and will have to completely reshape itself in order to achieve this.

In spite of this, we are still an ambitious Council and are determined to ensure that the City achieves its potential and our residents receive quality services. We are facing the challenge head on and this year, we have delivered on our pledge to implement the living wage for all employees at Exeter City Council.

We are also presenting a balanced budget this year, having identified close to £1.5 million worth of savings whilst in the Medium Term we have identified another £900,000 of savings that can be delivered.

This still leaves the Council with a tremendous challenge. As you will have seen from the budget papers on tonight's agenda, in order to balance the budget over the medium term, close to £4 million worth of additional expenditure needs to be removed from the budget.

In terms of the three priorities I have given to the Senior Management Team – I believe that focusing on these areas will put us in the right place to achieve the balanced budget. The priorities are:

- To deliver growth in the City – IKEA locating in the City alone will bring 300 more jobs and 200 new homes to the City. It will also provide growth in our Business Rate, which the Council will be able to keep and invest. Alongside that we now have a viable bus & coach station proposal being developed. Again as well as jobs, this will provide much needed additional business rates income for the Council.
- To ensure that financial discipline continues to be at the heart of service delivery – the management team are monitoring income and expenditure on a monthly basis and are required to address any potential problems. As a Council, work is also ongoing to review the current grant allocation system across the council. The aim is to have a new system in operation for the 2015/16 financial year. This work is now being progressed by myself after changes to portfolio responsibilities.
- To ensure that business transformation becomes the everyday role of managers – this will ensure that our residents receive the services they want, when they want them to a high standard.

In respect of Business Rates, the Council is on track to achieve growth in its Business Rates base during the first year of operation of the new system. This means additional funding for the Council, with an element of the funds also retained and shared within the wider Devon area.

In terms of the New Homes Bonus, we are supporting projects in the wider community. In this financial year, all City Grants have now been fully allocated. Some wards have also fully committed their funds but significant sums remain in the Ward Grant pot (over £16,000).

As I have said there are tremendous challenges ahead of us, but as you can see, not only are we facing up to these challenges but we are still delivering real improvements to the City of Exeter and our residents.



**Portfolio Holder Priorities 2013/14**  
**Cllr Ollie Pearson**  
**Enabling Services**

**Purposes**  
**“A well run Council”**  
**“Maintain our property assets”**

**Update**

<b>1</b>	<p><b>Human Resources</b></p> <p><b>A.</b> The introduction of a negotiating framework to enable the council to introduce greater flexibility into employment contracts and to deal with other emerging priorities such as Exeter’s low wage economy.</p> <p>Job roles at the council are being reviewed in light of the development of new systems, with a view to ensuring the effective management of equal pay, the identification of core skills to support the transformation programme and maintain the new ways of working.</p> <p><b>Update</b></p> <p><b>Having implemented the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee in place of the Employee Liaison Forum, the Council has now implemented the Living Wage in respect of Council employees as from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014. This will have a positive impact on the Councils lowest paid staff and will remove them from the poverty trap.</b></p> <p><b>In addition a new Low Wage Economy Group has been set up under Cllr Denham to consider how we can collectively positively impact on wage levels across the district.</b></p> <p><b>The implementation of systems thinking across the Council is having an impact on the current salary scales. This in effect means that we will need to review our pay structure to better meet the current and future needs of the organisation.</b></p> <p><b>Discussions have now commenced in respect of revisiting the Council’s Single Status Agreement with a view to refining it and building in greater flexibility.</b></p> <p><b>B.</b> Improve monitoring and analysis of the impact of employment policies on our staff.</p> <p><b>Update</b></p> <p><b>Workforce profile reported at Executive in July 2013. Workforce data presented monthly to SMT Performance. New workforce profile data will be developed in the New Year for reporting our annual workforce profile in July 2014, this will include equalities data for publishing annually.</b></p> <p><b>In order to support this all employees are being contacted in the New Year to advise them of the personal data currently held in payroll records with a view to data cleansing and collection of missing equalities information. We have also improved collection of this data during the recruitment process with the</b></p>

	<p><b>development and implementation of our new Recruitment pages including on-line application form. Having more complete data about our employees will enable better analysis of our employment records with regard to the potential impact or benefit of employment policy.</b></p> <p><b>C. Develop appropriate training programmes to encourage a supply of potential future female senior managers and investigate ways of targeting and encouraging more women to apply for management posts.</b></p> <p><b>Update</b>  <b>In July 2013 Members expressed an interest in expanding the scope of our consideration of under represented groups in our workforce profile. We are currently developing our L&amp;D provisions and approach which will include a management development programme. A paper is due to be put to the SMT in the New Year. Until the Council's approach has been decided no specific targeting of under-represented groups in management can be undertaken.</b></p>
2	<p><b>IT</b></p> <p><b>A. DELT is a proposal to deliver IT related services to Exeter City Council, Plymouth City Council, East Devon District Council, Teignbridge District Council and the Plymouth Clinical Commissioning Group. A business case is being prepared for Executive. It must also be compliant with the transformation strategy.</b></p> <p><b>Update</b>  <b>Council in its December meeting agreed in principle to progress with an alternative strategy to potentially create a shared service facility based on the 3 district councils; East Devon, Teignbridge and Exeter. Work is now progressing to complete the detailed implementation plan with a final recommendation hopefully being submitted to Council in the spring.</b></p> <p><b>B. Enhance and promote the use of the Council's website for accessing information and services online.</b></p> <p><b>Update</b>  <b>Levels of demand for different elements of the web site have been analysed and consideration is being given to the most effective way of organising and maintaining the content. A meeting has been arranged with the portfolio holder and Deputy Chief Executive to explore options for optimising the council's use of its web site, including through mobile channels.</b></p> <p><b>This work links directly with the wider consideration of how we use the various e-enabled services to both deliver services and communicate with citizens. The various building blocks, web, social media, proactive messaging, link into a seamless service provision, are presently being considered.</b></p>

3	<p><b>Legal</b></p> <p>A. The Inspector's report rejected the application to register Eastern Fields as a "Village Green".</p> <p><b>Update</b></p> <p>The Inspector's decision rejecting the application to register Eastern Fields as a village green has been appealed by way of Judicial Review. However these proceedings are held in abeyance pending the Supreme's Courts consideration of the Barkas case which is listed for hearing in the first week in April 2014. In practice this means if we are lucky JR may just be listed for hearing before summer recess. Otherwise the matter won't be finally determined till sometime in 2015!</p> <p>B. The team is assisting with formulating the council's street enforcement policy which sets out how to deal with rough sleepers and beggars and associated anti-social behaviour.</p> <p><b>Update</b></p> <p>Several legal remedies are available for use by the Council including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The introduction of a Byelaw prohibiting rough sleeping.</li> <li>2. Use of injunctions to remove the rough sleepers.</li> <li>3. Use of Possession Orders</li> </ol> <p>Once completed the way forward will be reported to Members.</p>
4	<p><b>Policy and Communications</b></p> <p><u>External Communications</u></p> <p>A. We are ensuring that relevant audiences recognise the council's achievements, policies, activities and events by publishing timely information through appropriate channels, including the Exeter Citizen and increasingly through social media channels (Twitter and Facebook).</p> <p><b>Update</b></p> <p>We will be working with services to generate more content for media channels, promoting the council's day to day work. Procedures are in place to provide the public with up to date information in the event of snow causing disruption to refuse services. Events, campaigns, consultations and initiatives are promoted through social media. Work continues to support services in their take –up and effective use of social media.</p> <p>B. Publish the Exeter Citizen four times a year, ensuring all residents are informed of the Council's policies, activities and events.</p> <p><b>Update</b></p> <p>Due to low demand, the Citizen is no longer available in mp3 format or CD. It is however available in large print for the visually impaired.</p> <p>We will be considering alternative ways of providing and enhancing the citizen over the coming months. This links with the wider social media agenda.</p>

## Internal Communications

A. We are working with staff to ensure that they are aware of initiatives and change across the council and can readily submit opinions, attitudes and feedback.

### **Update**

The staff Exchange Briefings have continued to run throughout the year, and have provided staff with updates on the key issues affecting the Council. This is supplemented by the monthly City News staff e-newsletter. Urgent messages are currently distributed via email. Staff are encouraged to submit questions and ideas (anonymously if necessary) through Exchange and City News.

Further work will continue to improve internal communications across the Council. This will include developing City News and looking into the possibility of using message boards to communicate key messages. All staff now have access to social media via the City council's ICT infrastructure.

B. We continue to enhance and promote the council's corporate identity and house style.

### **Update**

The Council's logo has been enhanced to give it a cleaner, more prominent look. Guidance has been produced on how and when to use the new logo. All staff have been advised of these changes and further information is available on the intranet.

C. A briefing session for members on the Public Sector Equality Duty has been timetabled. There are plans to follow this up with more detailed training on equality and diversity in 2014.

### **Update**

The briefing session took place on 9 October and a further event has been scheduled for October 2014.

## Other

A. We are a Fairtrade City. We are an international city supporting communities around the world by encouraging our residents and visitors to buy Fairtrade products.

### **Update**

Plans are underway for Fairtrade Fortnight 2014 including an awareness raising event in Bedford Square and coffee morning in St Stephens church on 1 March.

B. Work in partnership with other agencies to ensure we are developing the best services for communities in the City.

### **Update**

Newcourt Community Association in conjunction with city council resolved long standing issue with developer to enable monies to be released and for new play park to be developed. Currently waiting for handover of new community centre to ECC, community association preparing to do recruitment for centre manager. Priory Community First have produced a Community Plan for the area after

	<p>consultation with residents. They are currently advertising funding available for this year to support community activities. Work to start on recruitment for three community organisers for Wonford to be hosted by Wonford Community Centre, employed through Locality. First meeting of Exeter Health &amp; Well Being Board to address Health &amp; Wellbeing issues for residents of the city. Proposal for physical activity to be the main health &amp; wellbeing priority for development.</p>
6	<p><b>Corporate Property</b></p> <p>A. Creation of new corporate property function and unit.</p> <p><b>Update</b> The Estates and Contract Development teams have been merged with a view to forming the basis for a new corporate property unit which will take the lead in developing asset management across non-housing property and implement a new approach to property investment and maintenance spend.</p> <p>B. Roll out of renewables initiatives.</p> <p><b>Update</b> An initial phase of investment in renewables and other energy efficient technologies has been prepared and will be rolled out in the coming months.</p> <p>C. Creation of a Council wide Asset Management Plan.</p> <p><b>Update</b> Once the new corporate property unit has been formally established a new Asset Management Plan will be developed. In the meantime, however, early work will be undertaken on the Council's repairs and maintenance strategy and on the management of community assets.</p>

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**Portfolio Holder Priorities 2013/14**  
**Cllr Robert Hannaford**  
**Customer Access**

<b>Help Me With My Financial and Housing Problem</b>		<b>UPDATE</b>
1	<p><b>One View of Debt</b></p> <p>Work has started to bring together the services that touch our residents in multiple debt to us; i.e. housing benefit overpayments, council tax arrears and rent arrears.</p>	<p>Council Tax Recovery staff, Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery staff and Housing Rent's Income Management Officers were finally able to physically come together to form the One View of Debt team in October. With a mission statement of 'maximum contact results in minimum debt' and a purpose 'to deal with a customer's total debt as one, and to help customers to get fixed and stay fixed', staff have been busy learning each other's systems, processes and procedures. Priority for the team is to increase the number of automated payment lines, so that more customers, who are just paying and don't need other help, can self serve by phone or online. This frees up staff resources to spend with those customers who are struggling to pay. The team have drawn up an action plan of improvements for the new year including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overhauling correspondence to make it more user friendly</li> <li>• A new OVOD web page to inform on what help is available</li> <li>• Making more payment dates and frequencies available, in line with when and how often people get paid</li> <li>• Reducing the use of enforcement agents so as to keep costs down.</li> </ul> <p>The team work closely with CAB and Homemaker through our Exeter Money Advice Project (EMAP) to help those customers struggling with debts, and EMAP are delighted to be involved as their location in the CSC pod means they can get problems with benefits, rents or council tax sorted out straight away.</p> <p>The team have come up with the following operating principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put the customer, not their debt, at the centre of your decision making.</li> <li>• Look for ways to help, not for ways not to help</li> <li>• Don't punish customers for past behaviour</li> </ul>

- Make every contact count
- Gather information from all systems before making a decision
- Don't take unnecessary recovery action
- Increase collection within the realistic capabilities of our customers
- Increase ways to pay and make it easier to pay
- Help customers to help themselves
- Prioritise new debt, and ring fence old debt
- Reduce manual intervention
- Reduce use of enforcement agents
- Don't add unnecessary costs for customers
- Decrease costs for the Council
- Promote sensible borrowing and seek out alternatives to pay day loans
- Prepare our customers for what's coming
- Always tell customers how we can help
- Work to keep people in their homes
- Make good use of profile information
- Don't take recovery action in April, use that month to work with customers with debts for previous year(s)
- Always collect full contact details (landline/mobile/email), and check info we hold is up to date
- Don't take recovery action within the month instalment is due

It's still early days, but the team have been thinking about how they can measure success, with possible measures being:

- Increased amount collected
- Reduced amount of recovery action taken
- Reduced costs to customers
- Reduction in use of bailiffs

Unfortunately staff have to look at several different systems when dealing with customers, as there is currently no overall picture on one system, and this is hindering progress, but IT are working with the team to see if a solution can be found using the Blackpool model.



2	<p><b>Local Council Tax Support Scheme</b></p> <p>As the Scheme has only been in place since April, there is little evidence to allow us to determine the impact. Initial data suggests that our recovery rates are positive.</p>	<p>ECC's Council Tax recovery rate to the end of September 2013 (quarter 2) was 56.09%, compared to 56.54% at the same time last year. There has been a drop in November, however this may be due to the fact that minimal recovery action has been taken to enable the new OVOD team to establish new ways of working, or it may be the affects of welfare reform being felt, or both. It is still too early to tell and a full year's worth of data is needed in order to gauge the true impact of the scheme.</p> <p>Pro-active work with customers (financially supported by Devon &amp; Cornwall Police and Devon &amp; Somerset Fire Authorities, and Devon County Council) has kept the collection rate high, and a business case has been submitted to our preceptors to continue this pro-active approach into the next financial year.</p> <p>The current scheme includes the provision of an Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF), and 11 awards of EHF had been made by the end of quarter 2 to customers with extreme financial hardship. Again, pro-active work with customers has kept the need for awards low.</p> <p>The scheme will remain the same for the 2014/15 financial year, but officers have begun modelling the scheme for 2015-16 for consideration by Council in case there is a need to reduce funding.</p>
3	<p><b>Local Welfare Support</b></p> <p>Two elements of the national social fund (community care grants and crisis loans for living expenses) were abolished. A reduced amount of funding was passed to upper tier and unitary authorities to devise local schemes to provide welfare support. This is a two year interim arrangement. Longer term funding is uncertain.</p>	<p>At the end of Q2, there had been just under 1,000 applications for assistance through Local Welfare Support. Of the awards made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>71% supported a short term priority need (i.e. food bank referrals, food vouchers, utility top ups, travel warrants, clothes)</li> <li>23% supported establishing into the community (i.e. furniture, white goods, help with moving costs)</li> <li>6% supported self-reliance and resilience (i.e. help with training costs, debt relief order costs, getting back into work)</li> </ul> <p>The concern is that as the funding is limited to 2 years, with longer term funding uncertain, too much is being spent in response to a crisis as opposed to supporting self-reliance and resilience (i.e. getting and staying fixed).</p> <p>On 13 December a local Housing Association forwarded information about a small group of tenants who should not have been affected by the social sector size restriction. Housing</p>

		Benefits reviewed the law highlighted and confirmed the information was correct. By 18 December, 31 ECC claimants (4.5% of those subject to a restriction) had been identified and had their awards corrected with arrears of Housing Benefit paid before Christmas totalling nearly £16,000. On 8 January DWP published an Urgent Bulletin confirming the action taken by ECC was correct. They also advised their intention to amend legislation so that this group would become subject to the size restriction.																																																
4	<p><b>Preparing for the Household Benefit Cap</b></p> <p>The household benefit cap will introduce a total maximum amount that can be claimed in all benefits for non-working families. The threshold has been set at £500 per week for couple and lone parent households and the lower rate of £350 per week for single adult households.</p>	<p>All cases affected by the household benefit cap had been contacted with details of their reduced award by the end of August. In the event there were far fewer cases than had been suggested by DWP scans in the run up to the launch of the cap. All 16 affected households have been contacted and offered tailored assistance to help them either adjust to the reduction or take steps to change their situation so that the cap no longer applies. To date 13 awards of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) have been made to households affected by the cap, at a total cost of £19364.72.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="824 767 1935 1198"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="6">September 2013</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Tenure</th> <th>Cases affected</th> <th>Weekly loss (adjusted) £</th> <th>Average weekly loss £</th> <th>Maximum weekly loss</th> <th>Minimum weekly loss</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Council secure tenant</td> <td>2</td> <td>£107.94</td> <td>£53.97</td> <td>£82.94</td> <td>£25.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Council temporary</td> <td>3</td> <td>£430.31</td> <td>£143.44</td> <td>£198.53</td> <td>£62.61</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Housing Association</td> <td>6</td> <td>£493.86</td> <td>£82.31</td> <td>£110.59</td> <td>£19.86</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Private - Rent Officer</td> <td>1</td> <td>£48.39</td> <td>£48.39</td> <td>£48.39</td> <td>£48.39</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Private - LHA</td> <td>4</td> <td>£540.87</td> <td>£135.22</td> <td>£203.20</td> <td>£76.33</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Grand Total</b></td> <td><b>16</b></td> <td><b>£1,621.37</b></td> <td><b>£92.67</b></td> <td><b>£203.20</b></td> <td><b>£19.86</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	September 2013						Tenure	Cases affected	Weekly loss (adjusted) £	Average weekly loss £	Maximum weekly loss	Minimum weekly loss	Council secure tenant	2	£107.94	£53.97	£82.94	£25.00	Council temporary	3	£430.31	£143.44	£198.53	£62.61	Housing Association	6	£493.86	£82.31	£110.59	£19.86	Private - Rent Officer	1	£48.39	£48.39	£48.39	£48.39	Private - LHA	4	£540.87	£135.22	£203.20	£76.33	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>£1,621.37</b>	<b>£92.67</b>	<b>£203.20</b>	<b>£19.86</b>
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5	<p><b>Late Night Opening</b></p> <p>The late Thursday opening until 7pm will be formally reviewed after 6 months of promotion.</p>	<p>As Members will be aware, the Council since April 2013 has been trialling late night opening on Thursday for the Civic Centre- based services that residents access the most. This has meant that the Civic Centre has stayed open until 7pm. This is part of our commitment to ensuring that we are working to find the most convenient and accessible ways of meeting the needs of residents who need to access our services and in particular, those who are in the most need- one of our reasons for opening later into the evening was in the wake of the introduction of Welfare Reform changes, providing support for working residents who may have been affected by local Council Tax Support and other changes which would find it difficult to access the Council during working hours. We are committed to continuing this approach to our opening hour although looking to ensure that we are targeting this effectively.</p> <p>A report will be going to Executive on 21 January to present what has been learned from the Pilot.</p>
6	<p><b>Business Rates</b></p>	<p>Collection Rate:</p> <p>As at the 31 Dec 2013 the Collection Rate for Business Rates had reached 87.8%- the target is 88% - so only slightly down on where we needed to be. The overall Collection Rate target for the year is 98.5%, which is challenging given the current economic climate but we are reasonably confident that it is still achievable.</p> <p>Current priorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifying new properties more quickly</li> <li>2. Forging better working relationships with other Sections within the Council</li> </ol> <p>These two items will assist in maximising the Council's portion of the Business Rates Retention Scheme as it is based on the Rateable Value that exists on the Rating List</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Introducing e-billing for Ratepayers. This will reduce the amount of bills being</li> </ol>

		<p>issued in the post so this will assist in reducing costs</p> <p>4. Introducing Paperless Direct Debit for Ratepayers which will allow new Direct Debit applications being taken over the telephone and via the Web. This should aid the collection of the Business Rates.</p>
<b>Run the Council Well</b>		
1	<p><b>Customer Access</b></p> <p>We will support our existing systems reviews by working across the council to develop a robust understanding of how our residents are contacting us in person, by telephone, or electronically (email/web/Twitter/Facebook).</p>	<p>The issue of how we make our services more accessible to the public and their changing expectations is at the heart of our work to redefine our interaction with the public. From January 2014, we are beginning work to look at how we deliver services through the various channels of Face To Face, Telephone and On line. While we will maintain Face to Face service for those residents that need it, it is a fact that this is the most expensive method of contact and with the financial challenges facing the Council, we need to ensure that where services can be accessed in other ways, we are identifying those. Residents themselves increasingly expect to access some services from the Council with the convenience and ease that they receive from other public and private sector agencies and therefore we need to respond to this. Part of this work includes looking at how we use our Website. I look forward to updating Members on progress in this area in due course.</p>

**Cllr Robert Hannaford**  
**Jan 2014**