

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - RESOURCES

16 September 2015

Present:

Councillor Bull (Chair)

Councillors Baldwin, Bialyk, Brock, George, Harvey, Lyons, Sheldon, Packham and Thompson

Apologies:

Councillors Buswell, Wardle and Edwards

Also present:

Assistant Director Finance, Corporate Energy Manager and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Morris	- Portfolio Holder, Customer Access
Councillor Hannaford	- Portfolio Holder, Housing Revenue Account
Councillor Pearson	- Portfolio Holder Enabling Services

42 Welcome

Councillor Bull welcomed Councillors Packham and Thompson as Members of the Committee.

43 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 1 and 29 July 2015 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Morris being listed as having attended the meeting on 1 July in her capacity as Portfolio Holder, Customer Access.

44 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of discloseable pecuniary interest were made.

45 Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order 20

In accordance with Standing Order No 20, a question was put by Councillor Harvey to the Portfolio Holder for Enabling Services. A copy of the question had previously been circulated to Members. The responses are appended to the minutes.

46 Portfolio Holder Statements 2015/16

Councillors Morris, Hannaford and Pearson presented their respective work programmes within the Customer Access, Housing Revenue Account and Enabling Services portfolios respectively.

Customer Access

Councillor Thompson declared an interest as a landlord.

Councillor Morris, as Portfolio Holder, highlighted the following:-

- it was intended that the Homelessness Strategy would be updated every six months to ensure that it best served the community. The Homelessness Task and Finish Group was also making a positive contribution to the process.
- she wished to pay tribute to the pioneering work of the Move On Officer and his team in developing Integrated Care Exeter (ICE).
- the newly formed Landlord's Forum would contribute towards the effort to drive up standards in the private rented sector and encourage best practice.
- she encouraged Members to attend a forthcoming visit to the Job Centre.
- it was anticipated that an initiative offering money management and debt advice as well as facilitating a Credit Union would be based in the Customer Service Centre by next spring.
- she was confident that they would be able to make real progress to tackle rough sleeping by the end of the year.

Councillor Morris responded to Members' questions and confirmed that a guidance note for landlords was available on the web site and regularly updated to include the latest legislation. The production of a similar publication for tenants was currently being pursued. A Member made a plea to encourage landlords to be empathic with the cultural needs of their tenants and consider the duty of care. The implementation of a Public Spaces Protection Order for the city centre area should be seen as a positive control measure and work was ongoing with a range of partners including the Police.

Housing Revenue Account

Councillor Hannaford, as Portfolio Holder, highlighted the following:-

- the new annual inspection of Council houses was part of a more rigorous approach of housing management and was already reaping many benefits for the tenants, with staff working through any issues in a systematic way.
- the proposed 1% rent cut imposed on the City Council will have an impact on the Housing Revenue Account, in relation to repairs and the new build programme.
- staff were working with Exeter University in relation to housing needs across the city.

He responded to a Member's question on ensuring value for money and the general specification for replacement kitchens and bathrooms which were functional and durable and liaison was undertaken with tenants to ensure their needs were met. Legal advice was being sought to address the impact of the rent cuts and there would be the opportunity to lobby the local MP's.

Enabling Services

Councillor Pearson, as Portfolio Holder, highlighted the following:-

- it was anticipated that the procurement officer, when appointed would possess the risk skills set to manage the process to increase efficiency on the future procurement process.
- the Channel Shift Programme would dovetail with the web site programme update.
- the Corporate Manager Property and the team formed as part of the corporate property initiative would be able to facilitate the vision for the city to

deliver high quality development, as well as manage existing property for the benefit of Exeter people.

- the forthcoming changes in the Feed In Tariff has been a challenge in relation to investment for the future, and the Council will have to look at new and innovative ways for carbon and energy reduction for the city.
- the Equalities agenda should be added as a priority with work planned to produce a coherent policy. He referred to a meeting of the Social Equalities and Diversity Task and Finish Group taking place on 1 October.

He responded to comments in respect of the development of the Bus and Coach Station and leisure complex site, and confirmed that issues such as emergency access would be considered. Any solution over traffic flow was likely to be controversial, but he welcomed the opportunity for a wide reaching consultation process. The aspiration remained to deliver a cohesive development, supporting all businesses, including the independent sector in and around the site, and he would ensure that colleagues were made aware of the comments. He would address the access issue in respect of Oakwood House.

Members congratulated all those involved at the Council on an excellent programme of events as part of the Rugby World Cup 2015.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the reports.

47 **Overview of Revenue Budget 2015/16**

The Assistant Director Finance presented a report which advised Members of the overall projected financial position of the General Fund Revenue Budgets and Housing Revenue Account after three months, for the 2015/16 financial year. The report also sought approval for a number of supplementary budgets totalling £89,000. The report contained details of the three Scrutiny Committees and the Housing Revenue Account, together with details of a budget variance after the first financial quarter of the year. The Service Committee budgets showed a forecast underspend of £588,890 against a revised service net expenditure budget of £13,397,320. It was projected that there would be an overall net contribution to the General Fund balance of £165,955.

The Assistant Director Finance responded to a Member's comment on the opportunity to use the BID to gauge interest for a later or evening trade waste collection from the city centre. He also referred to the positive efforts to actively market South Street with genuine and significant interest in a number of vacant properties. A report exploring the medium to long term view and potential for the development of the Corn Exchange and South Street area would be made to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Economy. He would ensure that other areas of outstanding sundry debt were detailed in the accompanying graph, rather than trade waste, which was now under control.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources noted the report and requested that Council approve the:-

- (1) General Fund forecast financial position for the 2015/16 financial year;
- (2) Housing Revenue Account forecast financial position for 2015/16 financial year;
- (3) additional supplementary budgets listed in Appendix C of the circulated report;
- (4) outstanding Sundry Debt position as at June 2015;
- (5) creditors' payments performance; and
- (6) Council Tax and Business Rates collection performance.

48 **Capital Monitoring Statement**

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report, advising the current position in respect of the Council's revised annual capital programme and of the anticipated level of deferred expenditure into future years. The report also sought approval to amend the annual capital programme in order to reflect the reported variations which were set out in paragraph 8.4. He also outlined the schemes which were completed during the first quarter of 2015/16.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the current position and recommended approval by Council of the revised annual Capital Programme as detailed in paragraph 8.1 and the revision of the annual capital programme to reflect the reported variations detailed in paragraphs 8.4 and 8.5.

49 **Budget Monitoring**

The Assistant Director Finance presented a report which advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the revised budget for the first three months of the financial year up until June 2015. The current forecast suggested that the net expenditure for this Committee would decrease from the revised budget by a total of £612,640 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital as detailed in Appendix 1. This represented a variation of 9.94% from the revised budget and included supplementary budgets of £116,650, already previously agreed.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources noted the report.

50 **Income Generating Measures: An Energy Neutral Council- A Renewables and Energy Efficiency Programme Update**

The Corporate Energy Manager provided an update on the Renewable and Energy Efficiency Programme work that has been undertaken following year one of the programme, and since the previous report to Scrutiny Committee - Resources on 18 March 2015.

A presentation was made on what had been achieved, work in progress and projects planned, demonstrating the successful delivery of the renewable and energy efficiency programme. They are in year two of the programme and, despite the challenges over the last 12 – 18 months; there has been the opportunity to deliver real and lasting results for the Council. She outlined the early projects and more recent ones delivered and the financial benefits of the programme, including the new savings that will be secured at the end of this financial year (March 2016). Work was nearly complete on the pioneering car park Canopy Solar PV Scheme at Mary Arches and John Lewis car parks to provide zero carbon car parks during the summer months as well as delivering an income of £50,000 per annum. Engineering problems had delayed this project, but it was nationally the first of its kind. It is hoped that the covered top decks will create a more attractive parking option. The Corporate Energy Manager was happy to arrange a site visit.

A 3D image of the planned 1.5MW PV array on the Livestock Centre was shared. This had received a lot of interest and was the Council's largest PV scheme to date. After a robust tendering exercise, this was awarded to Sungift Energy. However, the project is time critical, so as to guarantee the current Feed-In Tariff before this is reduced on 1 January 2016. The installation follows the re-roofing project which was brought forward to ensure the Western Power Distribution (WPD) offer of connection was not lost. It was anticipated that, at the end of 2015, the following energy

reduction would result in energy savings of 15% and 37% by 2016/17, with a new programme and robust strategy for the future years.

The projects have resulted in the following:–

- energy and Carbon savings
- reduced energy bills and long term income streams
- renewable energy delivered by Solar PV
- water saving scheme
- energy savings and improved lighting from LED
- the promotion of use of electric vehicles and EV charge points

The solar field proposal cannot be progressed due to the restriction imposed by WPD, and a review of the FIT would significantly impact the viability of large solar projects, but it was hoped that, in time, there may be other incentives. The Energy Manager responded to a Member's enquiry and stated that innovative PV schemes will work by offsetting the electricity generation against use or by developing a private supply arrangement. It was noted the changes were still under consultation and that future lobbying would be appropriate. The Corporate Energy Manager responded to a Member's enquiry stating that Wat Tyler House was unsuitable for PV panels as it was partially shaded by trees.

Members congratulated the Council's Energy Team on the excellent work they had achieved so far.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources noted the progress made to date and delivery of year two of the Renewables and Energy Efficiency Programme and feasibility work planned for year three.

51 **Financial Reporting Review Update**

The Assistant Director Finance updated Members on the success of the trialled changes and improvements to the overall style and presentation of Financial Reports.

The Chair thanked Councillor Baldwin for influencing the Financial Review Task and Finish Group, which had resulted in Members being far more informed. Councillor Baldwin responded and thanked the Assistant Director Finance for his support. She asked if A3 sized reports could be broken down, so that they were more manageable to view on the iPad.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources supported the changes and improvements to the style and presentation of Financial Reports, which had now been adopted on a permanent basis.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.20 pm

Chair

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – RESOURCES
16 SEPTEMBER 2015

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HARVEY UNDER STANDING ORDER 20 to
COUNCILLOR PEARSON - PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENABLING SERVICES

Enabling Services:-

Can the Portfolio Holder please give an update on work being undertaken to update the City Council's website and, specifically, can he provide an update on the following issues:

- (a) Is the key thrust of the review work to deliver a, long-overdue, streamlined website which is easier for those wishing to access Council services and information on Council services?
- (b) Has an exercise been undertaken to review time currently spent on updating/managing Council web pages across Council departments and, in turn, identify efficiencies that could be delivered as a result of a streamlined City Council website?

Councillor Pearson replied in the following terms -

- a) The new web site would be more streamlined. Staff have been working to reduce the number of pages on the site by more than 60%, and the published information and processes would also be streamlined so that they were simpler and quicker for customers to use. The site would be more responsive, and also accessible from other mobile devices such as phones and tablets.

Earlier this year, the responsibility for the content of the web site transferred to the Communications Team, and they have been reviewing the entire content. The team have also been working with Strata to design a new web site, and government advisers on content design and that work is now largely complete. Detailed work was now underway with council services to build the site for release at the end of the year.

- b) The first task of the Communications Team has been to review the entire content of the web site and identify the irreducible core. They have worked with senior managers to identify a restricted number of content owners across the Council. When the streamlined content and format is finalised, and the demands on new content owners are known, all managers will be in a position to review resource requirements and adjust these as appropriate.

They hoped to encourage people to use the Council's web site as a primary means of contact and this work will tie in with the channel shift and procurement work.

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