

EXECUTIVE
(HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING)

Tuesday 12 January 2021

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)
Councillors Sutton, Foale, Ghusain, Harvey, Morse, Pearson, Williams, Wood and Wright

In attendance:

Councillor Leadbetter in his capacity as an Opposition Leader.

Apologies:

Councillor K. Mitchell in his capacity as an Opposition Leader

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management, Director of Culture, Leisure and Tourism, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, Service Manager Parks & Green Space, Policy Officer – Community Safety, Safeguarding and Equality & Diversity, Democratic Services Officer (MD) and Democratic Services Officer (HB)

1

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2020, were taken as read and approved as a correct record for signing by the Chair at the earliest possible convenience.

2

THIRD LOCKDOWN

Following the recent Government announcement of a third National Lockdown and to recent Pandemic statistics, the Leader urged all to continue to follow Government guidance and to be careful and to stay safe. He referred to the continuing practical work of the City Council through Wellbeing Exeter and to its work with partners in helping support the roll out of the vaccine.

3

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

4

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 19

No questions from members of the public were received.

5

GENERAL BULLER STATUE REVIEW

The Executive received the report on the review of the General Buller Statue, which had been brought back to the Executive Committee following a resolution at the July 2020 Executive meeting, that a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group be set up to investigate the continued appropriateness of the statue of General Buller and his

horse Biffen at its current location. The investigation was to further contrast the statue's appropriateness against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement against systemic racism and discrimination.

The Director Leisure Tourism and Culture and the Policy Officer - Community Safety, Safeguarding and Equality & Diversity made particular reference to the following:-

- the wide range of stakeholders who had been consulted including historic and civic societies, community groups and local historians with feedback received from some 20 organisations in total;
- the strong views expressed on the matter by the wider public;
- that no financial provision had been made should a decision be taken to remove the statue other than for the provision of temporary information boards from within existing budgets to contextualise the statue; and
- subject to a decision being made on the application for listed building consent and funds being identified, the matter would be brought back to Members for a final decision to be made.

During the discussion the following points were made:-

- the Task and Finish Working Group were thanked for its time and work in exploring in detail this emotive subject and its recommendations supported, including the proposal for full public consultation before reaching a final decision;
- it would not be an assessment of General Buller himself but the appropriateness of civic statutes and monuments in a modern setting;
- welcome the proposal for an arts based engagement process with residents in order to facilitate a broader examination of the role of public art;
- welcome the support of the University of Exeter and Exeter Culture in working with the Task and Finish Working Group; and
- both the Equality Impact Assessment and Carbon Footprint Statement were procedural tools used to help achieve informed decisions on matters before the Council, reflecting the Council's strong commitment in both areas.

Councillor Leadbetter, as Leader of the main opposition group, expressed his concern that resources were being diverted un-necessarily to this issue given the continuing seriousness of the Covid-19 Pandemic and questioned the need and sensibility in proceeding with the proposals, other than some form of public consultation. He also referred to the general context during the period of the original proposal for a statute commemorating General Buller and to the significant public support at that time.

The Director Leisure, Tourism and Culture advised that the determination of a listed building consent would be a matter for the Planning Committee with the normal planning consultation process carried out. He also stated that the provision of the statute had not been without controversy during that period as evidenced by newspapers of the time.

The Leader concluded by referring to the intention to fully consult the public and that no funds had been identified at present. It was also noted that the continuation of services to residents remained the Council's priority.

The Task and Finish Working Group were thanked for its time and work in exploring in detail this emotive subject and its recommendations supported, including the proposal for full public consultation before reaching a final decision.

The recommendations were moved and seconded and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED that the findings of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group be noted.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve: -

- (1) an application being made for listing building consent for the relocation of the statue to an alternative location, to allow the opportunity to conduct a public consultation on the proposed Task and Finish Group recommendations prior to a final determination of the matter by full Council;
- (2) temporary information boards be erected near to the statue;
- (3) an arts-based engagement project with residents be established, through a public art working group in conjunction with the University of Exeter and Exeter Culture, to consider the role of public art and create a new public art strategy in Exeter;
- (4) a working group be created to establish a Council Anti-Racism Strategy led by the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Communities; and
- (5) the Corporate Equality and Diversity Group develop a training and awareness raising programme for staff and Councillors on equality impact assessments, and their role in the Council's decision-making process.

6

TREE REPLANTING PROGRAMME FOLLOWING ASH DIEBACK DISEASE IN EXETER

The Executive received the report on the Exeter tree replanting programme following Ash Dieback disease, which was a Europe wide issue, requiring the planting of additional trees and associated works to ensure the tree canopy cover was maintained. The works would contribute to the Council's goal for Net Zero carbon and protect people and property from any unacceptable risk.

Particular reference was made to the following:-

- Ward Councillors would be kept fully informed as works progressed;
- mobile platforms would be necessary in some cases to ensure that the tree surgeons could access the trees safely;
- whilst a number of single trees had been mapped, further mapping of groups of trees and small areas of woodland would be undertaken;
- costs were greater than with the management of other trees and funds would be used in the most efficient way as the disease progressed;
- it was vital to ensure public safety whilst maintaining the canopy cover in Exeter; and
- whilst there were areas of private land throughout the city with Ash Trees including Devon County Council land, the City Council was also working with the Saving Devon Treescapes Programme with the Wildlife Trust and hoped to attract funding as part of this work.

During the discussion the following points were made:-

- the Council was committing the necessary funds to ensure the safety of the public;
- the programme would help maintain the tree canopy cover throughout the city and the general green nature of Exeter; and

- there would be a two to one ratio of tree replacement throughout the city, a recent example being the planting of 2,000 trees on the Monkerton Ridge.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the capital budget presented in the report, to allow the Tree Management Team to begin the replanting of new trees in place of diseased Ash trees following the Ash Die Back emergency and for additional Ash tree works in accordance with the recommended actions by the Exeter City Council Service Manager Public and Green Spaces, in order to maintain tree canopy cover.

7

2021/22 BUDGET STRATEGY AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Executive received the report on the strategic overview of the budgetary position for the 2021/22 financial year and beyond, which included an indication of the likely level of available resources, the current demand for resources and the proposals to ensure that a balanced budget is achieved. Members noted that the Council was required to set a balanced budget and Council Tax prior to the start of the financial year.

Particular reference was made to the following:-

- the Government, through its Local Government Finance Settlement, had announced a Lower Tier Services Grant as a one off, one year settlement. This equated nationally to £110 million with Exeter's allocation to be £228,000 which would result in the Council's core spending power remaining the same as the current financial year;
- a higher contribution had been received in respect of the New Homes Bonus compared with the previous Medium Term Financial Plan;
- the Referendum Principles for the Council Tax set by the Government would allow Councils to increase the tax by £5 or 2% whichever was the higher. A £5 increase equated to 10p a week;
- the Medium Term Financial Plan had built in a drop in Business Rates Income as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic; and
- savings would be required to achieve a reduction of £6.1 million up to the period 2024/25.

The Leader thanked the Treasury Team for their work on the budget.

RECOMMENDED that Council: -

- (1) note the contents of the report; and
- (2) approve the proposals to establish a balanced revenue budget and capital programme.

8

COUNCIL TAX BASE AND NNDR 1 2021/22

The Executive received the report which set out the 2021/22 Council Tax base in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012. The report further sought approval to delegate the Council's estimate of Business Rate Income (NNDR1) for the next financial year to the Director Finance.

Members were advised that the amount calculated for the Council as its tax base would be 37,377, which was an increase of 29 over the figure of 37,348 for 2020/21.

Particular reference was made to the following, both being Covid-19 related:-

- a lower than normal number of properties that are eligible for council tax added for 2021/22; and
- an increase in Local Council Tax Support has also impacted on the tax base

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Exeter City Council as its tax base for the year 2021/22 shall be 37,377; and
- (2) the responsibility to approve the Council's NNDR1 return by 31 January 2021 be delegated to the Director Finance (Section 151 Officer).

9

HOUSING RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES 2021-22

The Executive received the report which set out the proposed changes to Council dwelling rents, garage rents and service charges with effect from 1 April 2021.

Particular reference was made to the following:-

- the impact of Covid-19 had resulted in a lower increase in charges in the Medium Term Financial Plan with approximately £2.3 million less of budgeted rental income over the period to 2024/25 mitigated by the re-profiling of planned capital works over a longer period;
- rentals compared favourably with other socially rented properties and the open market; and
- the Council's continued commitment to re-invest in its housing stock, such as retro-fitting of its properties as well as building new homes.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve: -

- (1) the increase of Council dwelling rent by 1.5% from 1 April 2021;
- (2) the increase of garage rent by 1.5% from 1 April 2021; and
- (3) the increase of Service Charges by 1.5% from 1 April 2021, with the exception of charges detailed in paragraph 13.3 of the report.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.22 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.