

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

11 November 2014

Present:

Councillor Norman Shiel (Chair)

Councillors Newby, Branston, Brimble, Bull, Clark, Foggin, George, Holland, Mitchell, Morris, Raybould and Robson

Also present:

Deputy Chief Executive, Assistant Director Housing, Assistant Director Public Realm, Technical Accounting Manager, Environmental Health Manager and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

In attendance:

Janice Kay	-	Provost, University of Exeter
Geoff Pringle	-	Chief Operating Officer, University of Exeter

45 **Minutes**

Subject to the inclusion of an expression of interest from Councillor Raybould in respect of Min. No. 36, the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2014 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

46 **Declaration of Interests**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

47 **To Welcome Janice Kay, Provost and Geoff Pringle, Chief Operating Officer of the University of Exeter**

The Chair welcomed Janice Kay, Provost of the University of Exeter and Geoff Pringle, Chief Operating Officer of the University. The presentation covered the following areas:-

- growth and development of the campus;
- the University of Exeter's ranking and reputation;
- economic contribution;
- students in the City including residences;
- students as residents in the City, their impact and involvement in the community;
- the University in the City including sport and art and culture;
- involvement of the University with Exeter College and local schools;
- capital projects;
- impact on the environment; and
- partnerships.

They responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- anti social behaviour by students was taken very seriously by the University and, although preparations had been made for the recent freshers week and influx of new students at the beginning of term, there had been surprise at the level of

problems experienced this October. Michele Shoebridge, deputy to Geoff Pringle, was leading a working group to look into this year's difficulties and to prepare better for 2016. Phil Atwell, the new Director of Campus Services, had been tasked with improving liaison with the Police and Licensed Premises to identify solutions. The University could also resort to severe disciplinary measures if necessary;

- the University was very keen to keep students in the South West following graduation, with two thirds of medical students remaining in the region. It was grateful for the City Council's contribution in pump priming internships for students with City employers - students made a positive contribution, particularly in IT and organisational development;
- the University was ranked 7th in the Russell Group for research and second in the South West for the training of medical students. The Peninsula Medical School was relatively small and there was a commitment to significant future investment on the St Lukes Campus;
- Phil Atwell was setting up a Community Forum for third party providers of student accommodation to address problems of anti social behaviour at some of these premises. They had a responsibility to the City and traded on the back of the University and were required to operate to codes of conduct. In general, they had responded positively when reminded of their responsibilities;
- the new ResLife team comprising University staff and students worked in conjunction with the estate patrollers, whose time was freed up through the teams handling of minor issues such as false fire alarms, minor disputes etc. Their ratio would increase in line with increased student numbers;
- recognising the Council's preferred accommodation solution of on campus provision, Phil Atwell was to report to the University's Executive on the latest development plan; and
- with a reduction in funding per student head, the University had an obligation to reveal any additional course charges.

The Chair thanked Ms Kay and Mr Pringle for the presentation.

Members thanked the University for their presentation and praised the work and contribution made by the University to the life of the City, recognising that its enhanced prestige reflected well on Exeter, as well as its ongoing work to address certain issues of concern to Members and residents.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

48 Housing Revenue Account - Budget Monitoring to September 2014

The report of the Assistant Director Finance was submitted on major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first six months of the financial year up to 30 September 2014. During this period, the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net deficit of £292,096. This represented a decrease of £1,082,454 compared to the revised budgeted deficit of £1,374,550 for 2014/15. It was estimated that the working balance would stand at £5,671,123 at 31 March 2015.

The Technical Accounting Manager responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- work on the competing options for garage sites had stalled due to the landlord services restructure. However, there had been some further consultation with Ward Members to ensure that the issues concerning them are fully picked up and would be progressed in the New Year;

- the need to move telecoms equipment at Rennes House had resulted in a six month delay in major works starting on site, as it has been necessary to give six months notice to O2 to move their equipment from the car park development site. As a result, £400,000 of the development budget would slip into 2015/16;
- the main contractor had returned to Knights Place to resolve outstanding issues and was bearing the costs directly. Any additional costs that the Council incurred would be charged to the retention sum still held by the Council and any excess over this would be claimed back from the contractor;
- the forecast drop in the working balance predominately related to three large schemes – Extra Care, COB Wave II and £2.7 million required to resolve damp ingress. Extra Care had also secured funding of £1.4 million from the Department of Health;
- the small % of budget spend to date on the HRA was because the revenue contribution to capital works would not be added until the end of the financial year as part of closing the accounts and when the extent of capital expenditure is known. Capital charges of £2.4 million were still to be processed;
- the on-going pressure on the HRA balance reflected a commitment to continuous investment in the stock to maintain quality which limited the amount available for any new housing options; and
- the three LAINGS properties that were currently vacant and pending a full options appraisal of the extent of works to be undertaken were each located in the Cowick Ward.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

49 **Community - Budget Monitoring to September 2014**

The report of the Assistant Director Finance was submitted advising Members of any major differences by management unit to the revised budget. The current forecast suggested that net expenditure for this Committee will increase from the approved budget by a total of £238,930 which represents a variation of 2.44% from the approved budget. This included supplementary budgets of £10,130.

The current capital programme showed a forecast spend of £2,058,710 in 2014/15.

The Technical Accounting Manager responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- the University contract loss of income related to the agreement the Council had with the University to carry out enforcement patrols on the campus to deter dog fouling. The University had ended the arrangement from October 2014;
- housing benefit receivable in respect of bed and breakfast and serviced temporary accommodation had reduced. Budgeted income was based on expected occupancy levels and different types of accommodation used attracted a different level of Local Housing Allowance. If the actual accommodation used attracted a lower level of housing benefits, then this management unit would see a reduced level of income;
- if leasehold landlords did not carry out repairs and these were considered to be an emergency, then the lease made provision for the Council to carry out the repairs and recharge the landlord;
- to relieve pressure on the general fund as part of savings efficiencies necessary to help address severe future budget reductions, both street

cleansing and public convenience provision were under review. For the latter, only necessary health and safety works would be undertaken; and

- vacancy pay savings in respect of Advisory Services was due to vacant posts pending the restructure of Housing Services.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

ITEM FOR EXECUTIVE

50 Additional Licensing for Certain Types of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOS) throughout Exeter

The Assistant Director Housing presented the report providing feedback on the outcome of the 10 week consultation exercise undertaken on the proposal to extend the principles of Mandatory HMO Licensing through the introduction of an Additional Licensing Scheme covering specific types of HMO's throughout Exeter. It also sought approval for the Designation of an Additional Licensing Scheme.

Responding to Members queries, he advised that the purpose of the scheme was to both improve standards of those properties deemed sub standard and to relieve the pressure on the general fund as part of the on-going savings drive to help address the severe financial pressures faced by the Council. It reflected a move from a reactive to a proactive delivery of the service and to the need for the Council to look at more efficient and cost effective ways of delivering services.

It was explained that the timeframe for the new methods of operation was governed by regulations and that February 2015 was the earliest the scheme could come into operation, thereby generating income in this financial year.

Scrutiny Committee – Community supported the report and requested Executive to:-

- 1) make a Designation for an Additional Licensing Scheme, covering the whole of the Exeter City Council administrative area, for the types of HMOs specified in Appendix 1, annex B of the circulated report;
- 2) agree the fee structure set out in Appendix 2 and the licence conditions detailed in Appendix 3 of the circulated report;
- 3) agree 23 February 2015 as the start date for the implementation of the Scheme; and
- 4) authorize the Assistant Director Housing, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to periodically review the Scheme, its implementation and resourcing to ensure that the principles of the Scheme are achieved.

ITEM FOR INFORMATION ONLY

51 Spotlight Review on Anti Social Behaviour/Noise Nuisance and how the Council currently deals with these issues

The Scrutiny Programme Officer presented the report updating Members on progress with the Spotlight Review in respect of the way in which the Council deals with anti social behaviour and noise nuisance which had been highlighted as a high priority topic for scrutiny investigation, particularly as Community Patrol had ceased to exist and had been replaced by a new team with a different approach.

Members welcomed the report and progress being made in tackling anti social behaviour, in particular the recent action taken in South Street following the introduction of new anti social legislation.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

52 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public**

RESOLVED that, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Act.

ITEM FOR EXECUTIVE

53 **Community Asset Transfer**

The Assistant Director Public Realm presented the report advising Members of the potential to divest the Council's assets into community use and ownership.

The proposals were being brought forward because of the need to introduce new ways of working necessitated by the ongoing pressures on the Council budget and the need for significant budget cuts over the next three years.

Further details were provided on the progress of discussions with Exeter College on the Exwick Sports Hub at Flowerpot Playing Fields and with community groups using Heavitree Park. It was noted that Devon Wildlife Trust had, for many years, worked in partnership with the City Council.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to:-

- 1) endorse the principle of asset transfer to community organisations;
- 2) progress the expressions of interest in asset transfer already received from Devon Wildlife Trust, Exeter College and Exeter Saracens;
- 3) agree the principle of granting a lease or licence on the tennis facilities at Heavitree Park to Tennis for Free on terms to be negotiated by the Corporate Manager - Property, with further consideration about the long term transfer of this asset to Park Life once the Community Hub and Café re-development are completed;
- 4) support the commencement of discussions with the clubs associated with the Council-owned bowling and croquet greens and facilities with a view to supporting them to take on responsibility for these assets over the next two years; and
- 5) highlight to the Government the barriers that high costs of insurance can create for community groups.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.25 pm

Chair