

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

3 March 2015

Present

Councillor Norman Shiel (Chair)

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

Apologies:

Councillors Newby and Raybould

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Senior Housing Development Officer, Technical Accounting Manager, Principal Accountant Service (PM), Housing Performance And Project Manager, Environmental Health Technician (AB) and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

In attendance:

Councillor Owen

Portfolio Holder Environment, Health and Wellbeing

Traffic Congestion in Exeter

Trevor Preist : Transition Exeter Transport Group
Chris Lorimer : Exeter sustainable Business Network
Keith Lewis : Exeter Civic Society
Lynn Wetenhall : Cwest

Exeter College

John Laramy : VIVE Principal
Rob Bosworth : Assistant Principal of Exeter College

13 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2015 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

14 **Declaration of Interests**

No declarations of interest were declared.

PRESENTATIONS TO COMMITTEE

15 **Traffic Congestion in Exeter**

The Chair introduced the topic of this scrutiny investigation which had been arranged because of concerns raised not just by this Committee but by other groups in the City about traffic congestion in Exeter and what strategies are in place, or should be in

place, to ensure that the City's transport systems can cope with the significant development that is taking place.

The format was one of question and answers with Jamie Hulland, Devon County Council Transportation, Planning and Road Safety Manager and Mike Walker, Managing Director of Stagecoach forming a Panel with support from the City Council's Principal Project Manager.

The following organisations, who had expressed concerns were invited to provide a brief presentation on their principal issues, the first having submitted a paper which had been included in the agenda together with a follow up paper circulated separately to Members:-

Transition Exeter Transport Group - Trevor Preist
Exeter Sustainable Business Network - Chris Lorimer
Exeter Civic Society - Keith Lewis
Cwest - Lynn Wetenhall

The question and answer session took place, focusing on travel modes other than rail. It was recognised that rail had a significant part to play in Exeter's transport strategy; however, the Devon Metro project was progressing well, so the purpose was to explore what more could be done to promote other travel modes.

The report of the Principal Project Manager on the debate is attached to these minutes and will be circulated to the participating groups. It was proposed that a further report be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee in June

The Chair thanked the Panel and interested parties for attending and their contributions.

16 **Exeter College**

The Chair welcomed John Laramy, Vice Principal and Rob Bosworth, Assistant Principal of Exeter College. The following were highlighted:-

- the Sixth Form for Exeter and the Heart of Devon;
- a major provider of Apprenticeships, Higher Education, Adult and ESOL provision with NEET engagement work in Exeter and Exmouth;
- specialist academies - Michael Caines, Flybe, Reach, Enterprise, Journalism, Music, Sport;
- 24% cut for 2015/16 for adult provision and 22% lower funding for post 16;
- a further 17.5% cut for students who turn 18 at the start of the academic year;
- apprenticeships status quo, the 1,371 apprentices earning £14,000,000;
- students spending some £70,000 a week in and around Exeter;
- over £40 million spent on property developments over the last 12 years and plans for more; and
- challenging times ahead with curriculum changes and reduced Government funding.

They thanked the City Council for its significant support over recent years as part of a partnership approach and to innovative projects many of which had received national recognition such as the Exwick Sports Hub. The College was well placed to thrive as it was located in a forward thinking and growing City with outstanding strategic partnerships, built on trust and mutual gain. The "Exeter Factor" was key.

The following responses were given to Members' queries:-

- all College Higher Education courses were complimentary to the University's and did not offer competing or similar courses and were vocationally relevant e.g. aircraft engineering. A recent 10 week programme for Brazilian students was an example of outreach to international students which the College was keen to develop, subject to financial constraints;
- the College took its responsibilities to the local community seriously seeking to develop positive relationships with meetings held recently and new students, especially those from outside Exeter, expected to respect the local community;
- the requirement for youngsters to remain in education until 18 had now been introduced but there was no penalty for non attendance. It was apparent that some students, for whom further education would not have been a choice in the past, were experiencing difficulties in coping which the College was seeking to address through counselling etc. Transitional Co-ordinators visited the five Exeter Secondary Schools to prepare for transfer to further education;
- the three main courses were A Levels, apprenticeships and full time vocational learning. Keen to increase the latter's profile, the College looked to link all courses to industry and for a clear "line of sight" to exist so that all students experienced practical experiences in the work environment;
- all two/three year apprenticeships involved employment and, although a job was not guaranteed at the end of the course, the majority secured employment; and
- all students were encouraged to take up part time jobs to improve employability, time management etc. and an in house transitional team assisted with placements, compiling job opportunities etc.

Members and the Chair thanked Messrs Laramy and Bosworth for their interesting and impressive presentation.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

17 Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring to December 2014

The Technical Accounting Manager advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the revised budget. The total budget variances indicated that there would be a net surplus of £1,255,026 in 2014-15, representing an increase of £2,629,576 compared to the revised budgeted deficit of £1,374,550 for 2014-15; the main deviations from budget being set in the report.

The forecast HRA Working Balance as at 31 March 2015 was £4,218,245 and the current HRA Capital Programme showed a total forecast spend of £9,772,349 compared to the £12,723,080 approved programme, a decrease of £2,950,731.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

18 Community Budget Monitoring to December 2014

The Principal Accountant advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first nine months of the financial year up to 31 December 2014. The current forecast suggested that net expenditure would increase from the approved budget by a total of £189,240 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital. This represented a variation of 1.94% from the approved budget and included a supplementary budgets of £10,130.

The current Community Capital Programme showed a total spend of £896,360 in 2014/15 with £546,830 of the programme potentially deferred to 2015/16.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

ITEMS FOR EXECUTIVE

19 Support for Residents in Older Persons' Accommodation

The Service Lead Performance, Strategy and Resources presented the report explaining the continuation of the current arrangements for supporting residents in the Council's older persons' accommodation following withdrawal of Devon County Council's 'Supporting People' funding after 31 March 2015. The Council would continue to fund these services from the Housing Revenue Account for a period of 12 months.

He responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- discussions were on going with the voluntary sector regarding potential support. The Estuary League of Friends was particularly active in Topsham and Age UK were being consulted on possible areas where they could support; and
- the potential for consulting with the City's Housing Associations, who presently accounted for 7% of the City's housing, to adopt a common position on this issue would be explored.

A Member remarked that this initiative was one example of the Council responding positively to the Government's re-wiring of public services drive.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report and requested Executive to approve:-

- (1) the continuation of funding for the warden service (one Senior Warden and four Wardens) plus the Home Call alarm service to residents in the Council's older persons' accommodation from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for a period of up to 12 months in the first instance from 1 April 2015. The estimated cost of making up the shortfall following the withdrawal of DCC funding would be £182,000 (£131,000 for the wardens plus £51,000 for Home Call);
- (2) additional funding of up to £40,000 from the HRA to be used to fund community development/engagement worker(s) to build capacity among residents of older persons' accommodation and develop partnerships with the voluntary and community sector to reduce dependency on state provision; and
- (3) the investigation of different models of service delivery and funding arrangements to meet customer demand in the future.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

20 Adoption of the Low Emissions Strategy

The Environmental Health Technician presented the report advising Members about the development of a Low Emissions Strategy for Exeter, and requesting adoption of the strategy.

The Low Emissions Strategy had been developed to achieve further reductions in emissions of local and global air pollutants from traffic in the city, within the context of sustainable development of the city, by a range of proposed measures, as set out in the document. The Council had taken the lead in developing the Low Emissions Strategy but was just one partner involved in reducing emission of local air pollutants and their health impacts. The Strategy emphasised that, with vision and commitment, a step change in emissions in the city could be achieved, with benefits to the local population and economy.

Responding to questions from Members submitted prior to the meeting, she confirmed that:-

- any Devon County Council planning application for the Alphington Road Park and Ride and bus corridor would include an air quality assessment which she would review; and
- the emission rates shown for the City's road network and illustrated in the maps within the report did not relate specifically to peak hours but showed the average grammes per km per second emitted over a 12 month period.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to recommend that Council adopt the Low Emissions Strategy for Exeter for the period 2015-18.

21 **Empty Homes Strategy 2014 Review**

The Senior Housing Development Officer presented the report detailing progress with the Empty Homes Strategy approved in February 2014. It provided a clear strategic approach to returning empty homes back into use and outlined the key housing issues faced by Exeter and the tools at the City Council's disposal to deal with long-term empty properties. The current housing market pressures made it vital for the Council to maximise use of existing housing stock, in particular empty homes.

It outlined what had been achieved for empty homes in Exeter and provided an update on five objectives set out in the strategy to ensure that all priorities and commitments made by the Council towards empty homes were being met.

She encouraged Members to notify officers of empty homes encountered through their ward work.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the progress in taking forward the Empty Homes Strategy.

22 **Re-cycling Plan Annual Review**

The Cleansing and Fleet Manager presented the report updating Members on progress with the Re-cycling Plan since its approval in 2011 and seeking ongoing support for re-cycling initiatives.

With regard to the discussions on the potential for a shared waste management service with the County Council, Teignbridge and East Devon Districts, the latter had advised that it wished to retain independence but possible collaboration with the former was still being examined.

Excellent collaborative working continued with the University and its Community Liaison Officer in the development of more tailored information for students about refuse and recycling collection. The Green Team initiative would cease beyond July with schools seeking to focus increasingly on the national curriculum. The County Council however were funding a Resources Futures school visits, which were featured in the schools' curriculum. Seven Exeter schools had been provided with equipment enabling them to compost their own organic waste on-site, and one school now took part in food waste collections through the City Council.

Adding a separate food waste collection would increase Exeter's re-cycling rate. However, there was also a need to engage with residents on how to reduce unnecessary food waste. Home composting of unavoidable food waste, such as fruit and vegetable peelings, was a practical option for many residents and should be encouraged.

There had been a reduction in paper collection reflecting a national plateau but there was increased emphasis on collecting textiles and glass.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the Council's progress in implementing the Re-cycling Plan 2011-16 and supported the ongoing actions planned for 2015 as set out in the report.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.48 pm

Chair