

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

16 June 2015

Present:

Councillors Morse (Chair), Brimble, Buswell, George, Hannan, Holland, Morse, Newby, Packham, Raybould, Robson, Shiel and Vizard

Apologies:

Councillor Bull

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Deputy Chief Executive, Assistant Director Environment, Scrutiny Programme Officer, Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer, Principal Project Manager (Infrastructure Management & Delivery), Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, Environmental Health Manager, Service Lead Housing (Assets), Technical Accounting Manager, Principal Accountant Corporate and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

In attendance:

Councillor Keith Owen	- Exeter City Council (as Portfolio Holder for Health and Place)
Councillor Rob Hannaford	- Exeter City Council (as Portfolio Holder for the Housing Revenue Account)
Councillor Heather Morris	- Exeter City Council (as Portfolio Holder for Customer Access)
Councillor John Harvey	- Exeter City Council (Under Standing Order No. 44)

23 Councillor Shiel

The Chair thanked Councillor Shiel for his work during his Chairmanship of this Committee.

24 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2015 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

25 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were declared.

26 Questions from the Public under Standing Order 19

In accordance with Standing Order No. 19, a question in respect of transport from Trevor Preist and a question in respect of damp in Council flats from John Murphy were put to the Committee. Copies of the questions had been previously circulated to Members. Both questions, with the replies (in italics) to the latter, are appended to the minutes. With regard to Mr Preist's question, the response is covered within Min.

No. 27 below - Transport Strategy for Exeter. The Chair remarked that future reports on transport would be considered by the Scrutiny Committee - Economy which, unlike this Committee, was the relevant forum.

The Chair thanked Trevor Preist and John Murphy for attending the meeting and putting their questions.

27 **Transport Strategy for Exeter**

The Principal Project Manager (Infrastructure Management and Delivery) presented the report which was a follow up to the question and answer session relating to transport strategy held at the meeting of this Committee on 3 March 2015. The report included reference to a suite of policy documents on transport prepared by the local authorities and set out progress in implementing transport strategies in and around Exeter. Both authorities were limited to a degree by financial constraints, competing interests and national Government policies, but he confirmed that City and County Council officers were in regular close contact. As there was a significant interest in this issue from a number of parties, he felt that a Working Group reporting regularly to both the Scrutiny Committee - Economy and Exeter HATOC (Highways and Traffic Orders Committee) , together with an annual forum, was the best way forward and there would be no hard and fast rules regarding composition of the Group.

Councillor Harvey attended the meeting and spoke on this item having given notice under Standing Order No. 44.

He shared the concerns expressed regarding the future of the City's transport network and for the need for joined up thinking between the City and County Councils on this issue. He welcomed the establishment of the Working Group and update reports being submitted to the City Council's Scrutiny Committee - Economy and Exeter HATOC and asked for early meetings of the Group and the involvement of interested local groups such as CWest (the Campaign for South West Exeter Smarter Travel).

He stated that he was totally opposed to a new Park and Ride scheme on Oaklands Riding School as he did not think that it would be any better than one located elsewhere and also felt that a Park and Ride service using at least some of the Alphington Road corridor would not work, especially during peak congestion along that corridor. He also raised the following issues:-

- cycling - need to improve cycle routes from Alphington to the City Centre and increase pressure on the Local Economic Partnership to help fund the routes;
- timetable for the Bridge Road works; and
- timetabling for the delivery of the Marsh Barton station.

The County Council Transportation Planning and Road Safety Officer responded to the issues raised:-

- with the need for a new Park and Ride in the vicinity of the A30 junction confirmed, further consideration was being given to sites alternative to Oaklands to serve both the A30 and A38/380 - 60% of traffic on Alphington Road originated from the Teignbridge area;
- the £11 million Bridge Road widening scheme was out to tender, tenders to be returned by July with work on site to start in early 2016 to last for about 12 months;

- work on the Marsh Barton station would commence next winter and open in 2017; and
- a footway/cycle way crossing the A379 would facilitate access from Alphington to a new secondary school in the Teignbridge area. An Exeter Cycle Package Bid had been submitted to the LEP (Local Economic Partnership) as part of a Growth Deal Funding Programme for 2018 to include cycle links from Monkerton to the City Centre, Newcourt to the City Centre and the SW Exeter Bridge over the A379.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and agreed to:-

- (1) the creation of a Transport Strategy Working Group, as set out in the report, comprising an officer representing Exeter City Council (Principal Project Manager (Infrastructure Management and Delivery), Devon County Council (Transformation Planning and Road Safety Manager), representatives from Stagecoach South West and First Great Western and others, with particular specialisms to be invited to the Group on an ad hoc basis; and
- (2) the Working Group, following its first meeting, and annually thereafter, holding a forum to engage with Members and local groups interested in transport, with the minutes circulated to the City Council's Scrutiny Committee - Economy and Exeter HATOC.

28 **Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order 20**

In accordance with Standing Order 20, a question from Councillor Harvey was put to the Portfolio Holder for Health and Place. Councillor Harvey asked for an update on any work being undertaken with regards to safeguarding issues and young and vulnerable people, specifically in relation to safeguarding policies as they affect the private hire trade and Hackney Carriages. A copy of the question had previously been circulated to Members. The question, and the reply from the Portfolio Holder (in italics), are appended to the minutes.

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' STATEMENTS

29 **Portfolio Holders' Statements**

The Portfolio Holders for Health and Place (Councillor Owen), Customer Access (Councillor Morris) and Housing (Councillor Hannaford), presented progress updates against their priorities for 2014/15. The reports set out targets and milestones showing the aims of the Council during the year and what had been achieved by December 2014 and May 2015.

Portfolio Holders would work closely with officers to develop their priorities for 2015/16 which, when finalised, would be published in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015/16.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Access highlighted the following areas which she felt would be appropriate for consideration by Task and Finish Groups:-

- local welfare support funding; and
- homelessness, to include the involvement of outside agencies and Teignbridge District Council.

The Chair advised that these would be raised at the meeting of the Scrutiny Review Working Group on 17 June 2015.

The following responses were given to Members' questions in respect of the Housing Portfolio:-

- further updates would be provided to Ward Councillors in respect of ongoing maintenance to properties in Prince Charles Road and Lancelot Road;
- damp problems in flats, as reported in Min. No. 26 above, had been largely the consequence of a succession of very wet winters, with Mincinglake properties, because of their geographic position, the worst hit;
- there would be an increased emphasis for inspecting rendered properties to identify any need for re-rendering and inspection of properties with face brickwork to identify any need for re-pointing; and
- the consultation process on garage use was ongoing following a review of garage sites and recommendations for estate rationalisation. A number of options were being considered including re-development, disposal, investment to ensure existing garages are fit for purpose, demolition and use for storage. Following further consultation with new Members, a further report would be presented later in the year.

30 **Investing in Communities**

The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer spoke on supporting communities in Exeter. She explained her role as Community Involvement Officer and main areas of work including community engagement, neighbourhood planning, voluntary sector support and contact for Major Grants/New Homes Bonus and City and Ward Grants. In respect of the latter, she detailed the funding opportunities and gave examples of projects assisted. Her presentation also covered the work undertaken by community organisers and that of the Exeter Green Partnership as well as the creation of the Exeter Community Forum which comprised representatives from existing Community Associations, the St James Forum, Isca Church etc. and which would be developing a community strategy for the City. Recent months had witnessed the following local communities forming community hubs and taking on the work of youth centres.

- Phoenix Centre – transfer to Wonford Community Learning Centre;
- Westside Centre – transfer to Exeter YMCA; and
- Knight Club – transfer to Isca Community Enterprises.

The following responses were given to queries raised by Members:-

- although the Community Forum was largely comprised of existing groups, the key issue was to ensure that a geographical area was represented and that any further groups looking to join should do so on the basis of enthusiasm for developing a specific and easily identifiable area;
- the continuation of the service provided by the Knight Club was on the basis of the whole community being served and this was included within the terms and conditions of the transfer to ISCA, who were operating the centre on an inclusive and community orientated basis; and
- although work to railings in Beacon Heath had ultimately been undertaken by the Council following an offer by the local community to assist, all offers from volunteer groups were welcome and considered on their merits. Care would be taken to ensure that volunteer work did not conflict with work opportunities.

The Portfolio Holders for the Housing Revenue Account and Health and Place referred to opportunities for community participation in Wonford and parks and opens spaces generally.

The Chair advised that the Community Involvement Officer would report every six months to this Committee and that this would focus on new schemes rather than review the whole service. The Chair encouraged Members to liaise with the Officer on potential schemes.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSIONS

31 Council's Role in the Community and Tackling Isolation Task and Finish Group

The Scrutiny Programme Officer presented the report setting out the findings and recommendations of the Council's Role in the Community and Tackling Isolation Task and Finish Group.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and agreed that:-

- (1) the Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer provide an update to the Scrutiny Committee - Community twice a year detailing work in progress, results and any areas of concern;
- (2) the proposal that the Task and Finish Group hear from the two new Community Organisers in six months' time to find out what progress they are making and what issues they may identify as needing attention be supported, the Group to then report back to the Scrutiny Committee - Community; and
- (3) the proposal that the Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer, at any point in time, can ask for this Task and Finish Group to reconvene and consider any areas which she would suggest merit further investigation be supported, with a direct reporting line between the Group and the Scrutiny Committee - Community.

32 Annual Scrutiny Report - 2014/15

The Scrutiny Programme Officer presented the report providing an annual update as to the Scrutiny work achieved during the Municipal Year 2014/15. She advised that, with regard to the issue of improving transport links between the Quay and City Centre, the possible use of a ring and ride service had been suggested by the Future of Exeter Quay Task and Finish Group whose report was due to be considered by the Scrutiny Committee - Economy on 18 June 2015.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted and approved the Annual Scrutiny report.

33 Housing Revenue Account - Final Accounts - 2014/15

The Technical Accounting Manager advised Members of any major differences, by management unit, between the approved budget and the outturn for the financial year up to 31 March 2015 in respect of the Housing Revenue Account and the Council's new build schemes. An outturn update in respect of the HRA Capital Programme was also incorporated in the report in order to help provide a comprehensive financial update in respect of the Housing Revenue Account.

The 2014/15 financial year had resulted in a surplus of £1,809,184. This represented an increase of £3,183,734 compared to the revised budgeted deficit of £1,374,550, of which a projected underspend of £2,629,576 had previously been reported to this Committee as part of the quarterly budget monitoring updates.

The total amount of HRA capital expenditure for 2014/15 was £9,173,770, which equated to 94% of the revised approved capital programme.

In response to a question from a Councillor, the Technical Accounting Manager advised that the total expenditure in 2014/15 on scaffolding to enable works to Council houses was £313,000. A detailed explanation of the costs of scaffolding in respect of reactive repairs and planned works would be circulated after the meeting.

The key reasons for the reported surplus were:-

- significant savings had been achieved in respect of routine service and maintenance budgets including savings in general maintenance costs which reflected a reduction in the number of reported faults;
- lower repairs to voids due to the formation of a dedicated voids team, referral of kitchen and bathroom replacements to the capital programme and pre-void inspections, coupled with lower numbers of void properties;
- service contracts - significant savings had been achieved following the commencement of a new gas service and maintenance contract in July 2014; and
- postponement of external painting of properties affected by damp ingress and delay on other planned works.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

34 Community Services Final Accounts - 2014/15

The Principal Accountant advised Members of any major differences, by management unit, between the approved budget and the outturn for the financial year up to 31 March 2015 in respect of Community Services. An outturn update in respect of the Community Capital Programme was also incorporated in the report in order to help provide a comprehensive financial update in respect of the Scrutiny Committee - Community budgets.

The total variance for the year showed a surplus of £300,262 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital, as set out in the report. This represented a variation of 3.08% from the revised budget.

The Community Capital Programme showed a total spend of £1,093,345 in 2014/15 with £388,054 of the programme deferred until 2015-16.

The Assistant Director Environment explained that the overspend relating to Domestic Refuse Collection was largely attributable to the engagement of agency staff for refuse collection.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

ITEMS FOR EXECUTIVE

35 Environmental Health and Licensing Statutory Service Plan

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager presented the report seeking approval for the adoption of the Environmental Health and Licensing Statutory Service Plan 2015/16. The Plan set out the Council's regulatory function in respect of food safety, health and safety, licensing, Environmental Permitting and other statutory functions over the forthcoming year.

The Chair reported that a Spotlight review had been undertaken in respect of anti-social behaviour.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the work being conducted by the service in co-ordinating Anti Social Behaviour and also the Statutory Service Plan and asked Executive to support the Statutory Service Plan 2015/16 and to request Council to:-

- (1) approve the Statutory Service Plan 2015/16;
- (2) support the work being conducted by the service in co-ordinating Anti Social Behaviour;
- (3) authorise the Assistant Director Environment to change the Statutory Service Plan in the light of centrally issued guidance and/or to meet operational needs; and
- (4) note that a Spotlight Review had been undertaken on anti social behaviour during the year and that this report also acts as the update on the position as requested and approved by this Committee previously.

36 Amendments to the Mandatory Licensing Scheme for certain types of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) throughout Exeter

The Private Sector Housing Manager presented the report seeking authority to introduce a £125 discount on the licence fee charged for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) covered by mandatory HMO licensing where the landlord of the HMO is accredited under a nationally recognised accreditation scheme, and the property has been subject to an inspection by an inspector employed by the accrediting organisation. Such a discount was already offered to the landlords of HMOs licensed under the recently introduced additional HMO licensing scheme, and the proposal in this report would remove the inconsistency between the two schemes.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to introduce a £125 discount on mandatory HMO licensing fee where landlords are accredited under a nationally recognised accreditation scheme and the property has been subject to an inspection by an inspector employed by the accrediting organisation.

ITEM FOR INFORMATION ONLY

37 Private Sector Home Energy Conservation Strategy

The Private Sector Housing Manager presented the report informing Members of the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) 1985 further report submitted to the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) at the end of March 2015.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the content of the HECA further report.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.22 pm

Chair