

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 26 January 2016

Present:

Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillors Denham, Hannaford, Leadbetter, Morse, Pearson and Sutton

Apologies:

Councillor Owen, Chief Executive & Growth Director and Deputy Chief Executive

Also present:

Assistant Director Finance, System Lead - Finance, Service Improvement Lead (Payments), Economy and Tourism Manager, Service Lead Performance, Strategy and Resources, Senior Housing Development Officer, Digital Media Officer and Democratic Services Manager (Committees)

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 November, 1 December and 8 December 2015 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

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DEVELOPMENT OF COUNCIL'S HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY - DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

The report of the Assistant Director Customer Access was submitted introducing the draft Homelessness Strategy for Exeter and Teignbridge which had been developed from the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group. The group had been convened to review homelessness in the city and to help form and shape the new Homelessness Strategy and action plan.

The Systems Lead – Housing advised Members of the work of the Task and Finish Group and of the themes of a Place to Live; Access to Services; Health and Protection; Money Matter set out within the draft strategy.

The consultation would run from 12 February 2016 until 25 March 2016 with respondents asked to consider the themes, aims and actions. Stakeholders would be asked how they can help the Council to deliver a better offer for local residents facing homelessness in the area.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Access thanked the officers for all their hard work on the draft strategy.

Members thanked Councillor Morris for her work in driving the strategy forward.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at its meeting on 19 January 2016 and its comments were reported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the content and aims of the draft Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2021 as a draft for Consultation, be agreed; and
- (2) a public consultation be undertaken to gain feedback from stakeholders and other interested parties.

HOUSING RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES 2016/17

The joint report of the Assistant Director Finance and Assistant Director Housing was submitted recommending a 1% rent decrease for council dwellings from 1 April 2016.

The Service Lead Performance Strategy and Resources advised that the 10 year inflation linked rent settlement had been replaced with a new rent reduction policy announced in July, requiring social landlords to reduce rents by 1% annually for each of the next four years. This would result in an expected loss in income to the Housing Revenue account of £7.9 million.

The Leader commented that, whilst this reduction was good news for tenants, it would result in a loss of income for the Council.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at its meeting on 19 January 2016 and its comments were reported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) rents of Council dwellings are reduced by 1% from 1 April 2016;
- (2) garage rents remain at their existing levels from 1 April 2016; and
- (3) service charges remain at their existing levels, with the exception of charges specified below from 1 April 2016
 - (a) 1.2% increase in respect of cleaning communal areas in line with anticipated rises in cleaning contract costs;
 - (b) 3.5% increase in respect of fire alarm testing in line with rises in maintenance and monitoring contract costs; and
 - (c) 5% increase in respect of repair costs in line with Building Cost Information Service (BCIS) rates.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

The report of the Economy and Tourism Manager was submitted advising Members of the progress made in supporting businesses through Exeter Business Support and the Exeter Pop Up Shop and in expanding the contract for this service for the 2016 financial year to cover the Exeter and Heart of Devon area.

Members were advised that the Council had previously invested £42,000 in Exeter Business Support and that the proposal was now to invest £25,000 together with £25,000 from each of the neighbouring local authorities East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Councils. The new contract to manage business support was currently being put out to tender.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture welcomed the partnership which would work for the benefit of the Greater Exeter Area.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy considered the report at its meeting on 21 January 2016 and its comments were reported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) continuing to fund business support for embryonic, new and existing businesses in providing opportunities for individuals to secure the means of improving their financial position and promoting job creation, at a cost of £25,000, be supported; and
- (2) following an advertisement for the continued delivery of services outlined in this report under the banner of Exeter Business Support with £25,000 secured from each of the neighbouring local authority areas of East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge to match that of the Exeter Contribution also of £25,000, officers within Economy & Tourism be authorised to negotiate a contract for £100,000 for 2016/17.

RUGBY WORLD CUP 2015

The report of the Chief Executive & Growth Director was submitted updating Members on the activities undertaken as part of the City Council's support for Exeter being a successful Host City for the Rugby World Cup 2015 tournament which took place between 18 September and 31 October 2015, including an update on the extensive legacy activities encouraged and developed as a result of being involved.

The Economy and Tourism Manager referred to England's early exit from the games and the effect on the Fanzone, despite the capacity numbers of the earlier matches. The promotional benefit to the city had been very significant in that advertising value of more than £1.5 million was achieved through press and media coverage.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy considered the report at its meeting on 21 January 2016 and its comments were reported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the wide-ranging benefits resulting from the tournament including those anticipated from the programme of legacy activities in contributing to the well-being of residents and the positive profile of the city, be welcomed; and

- (2) appreciation be expressed to all the agencies and especially the volunteers and staff for all their commitment and hard work to make the event such a success.

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RAMM DIGITAL MEDIA ROAD MAP AND PROGRESS

The report of the Museums Manager and Culture Lead was submitted advising Members on RAMM's digital roadmap for the period 2015-18, this timescale having being set by RAMM's Major Partner in Museum Funding (in partnership with Plymouth Museum & Art Gallery) and from the Arts Council England (ACE). The road map was to provide a structure to digital development and allow progress to be tracked against timescales.

The Digital Media Officer advised that the digital roadmap would build on RAMM's innovation and success with its digital work.

In response to a Member, the Digital Media Officer clarified that work was planned to develop the RAMM website and good practice was being shared with Strata.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy considered the report at its meeting on 21 January 2016 and its comments were reported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the RAMM digital road map as set out in the report as extant at December 2015, be implemented;
- (2) the Museum Manager be given delegated authority to apply any necessary adjustments to the road map as necessitated by changes in resources or funding from external factors;
- (3) a follow up report is produced for Members to present the results and findings around the implementation of the road map with regular reporting to ACE and the Council to capture changes to existing digital products; and
- (4) outcomes of the work that deliver both Exeter City Council objectives and those of its partner, Arts Council England, be noted.

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2016/17 COUNCIL TAX BASE AND NNDR1

The report of the Assistant Director Finance was submitted looking to set the 2016/17 Council Tax base in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012. The report also sought approval to delegate to the Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) the Council's estimate of Business Rate Income (NNDR1) for the next financial year.

Members were advised that that the net Council Tax base for 2016/17 would be 35,429 being an increase of 679 over the 2015/16 figure. Under the new Business Rates Retention funding, the Council had to provide Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) with an estimate of its Business Rate Income for the forthcoming year. However, due to the changes in the funding and the local/central share, DCLG required the estimate to be compiled and formally submitted by 31 January. The Council must also share this information with Devon County Council and Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service who were also affected. DCLG had stated that, in their view, the decision to approve the NNDR1 could be delegated to the Section 151 Officer.

In response to Members, the Assistant Director Finance commented that the Government had yet to consult on the retention of Business Rates, and that once the Council had further information the impact upon the Council could be assessed.

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 2016/17 shall be 35,429; and
- (2) responsibility to approve the Council's NNDR1 return by 31 January 2016 be delegated to the Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer).

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DEBT COLLECTION POLICY IN RESPECT OF COUNCIL TAX RECOVERY, RENT AND FORMER TENANCY ARREARS RECOVERY, HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENT RECOVERY AND RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS RECOVERY

The report of the Assistant Director Customer Access was submitted to propose a policy for the collection of debts owed to the Council with respect to Council Tax Recovery, Rent and Related Charges Recovery, Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery and Rechargeable Repairs Recovery. This policy proposed a transparent and consistent way to collect these debts.

In response to Members, the Service Improvement Lead (Payments) clarified that each customer that came through 'one view of debt' was dealt with on a case by case basis.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the Debt Collection Policy.

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COUNCIL TAX PENALTY POLICY

The report of the Assistant Director Customer Access was submitted to seek Member's approval for a Council Tax Penalty Policy that allows the Council to impose financial penalties, under legislation, where a person fails to supply information or provides false information in respect of Council Tax discounts, exemptions and liability.

The System Lead – Finance advised that the aim of the policy was to give clear guidance regarding the responsibility of residents to provide accurate information and information regarding discounts and exemptions which would affect their Council Tax. The Council could impose a penalty where a person fails to provide information requested and with regards to changes within 21 days.

In response to a Member, the System Lead – Finance clarified with regard to the proposed single occupier discount review, that the Council already undertake checks against the electoral register through the National Fraud data base, and that the administration of the review would be out sourced to 'Capita'.

Members welcomed the introduction of this policy to help prevent and detect fraud.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the Council Tax Penalty Policy.

STAFFING WITHIN THE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT TEAM

The report of the Assistant Director Housing was submitted requesting an increase to the staffing establishment within the Housing Development Team for an additional full time post to assist with reducing the number of empty homes. This post would be working on a shared basis for the Council and for Mid Devon District Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Revenue Account highlighted that the Council benefited from New Homes Bonus monies when empty homes were brought back into use.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the increase in the establishment of the Housing Development Team; the contract term to be in accordance with the legal agreement with Mid Devon District Council.

DELEGATED DECISION - WAIVER OF CONTRACT REGULATIONS

RESOLVED that the Delegated Decision – Waiver of Contract Regulations be noted.

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 paragraph 3 of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Act.

FUTURE OF OLDER PERSONS' HOUSING SERVICES

The report of the Assistant Director Housing was submitted recommending on how best to provide housing and housing-related services to tenants in the City Council's older persons' accommodation in the coming financial year.

It was the intention to continue the current arrangements for this service for a further year and, in the meantime, develop an alternative model for supporting these tenants, which would be reported to Members for approval in due course.

Members discussed how many people could be affected by the proposal to only offer new tenancies in older persons accommodation without the warden service to those age 60 and over.

Scrutiny Committee – Community considered the report at its meeting on 19 January 2016 and its comments were reported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) no major changes to be made to the provision of the warden service in 2016/17. The HRA will continue to fund both the warden service and the emergency alarm system as it has been doing this year. The cost will not exceed £131,000 which includes £51,000 for supporting the emergency alarms. These arrangements will apply to existing tenants only;

- (2) new tenancies will only be offered to people over 60 years old who will not receive the warden service;
- (3) new tenants will have the use of a dispersed emergency alarm (paid for by themselves and provided through Home Call). Any hard-wired alarm will be removed prior to their moving in;
- (4) the contract for the maintenance of the current hard-wired system will be extended from April 2016 to March 2017. This will cost no more than £20,000 and is necessary to maintain the system; and
- (5) the part-time Housing Community Partnerships Officer will start to explore initiatives for combating loneliness and isolation among older residents, with particular emphasis on social activities in the communal rooms which are currently under-utilised, with a view to moving to an alternative model of service delivery from 1 April 2017, subject to further consideration and approval by Members.

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EXETER HEART OF DEVON GROWTH BOARD MINUTES - 17 DECEMBER 2015

Scrutiny Committee – Economy considered the minutes at its meeting on 21 January 2016 and its comments were reported.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Exeter Heart of Devon Growth Board meeting held on 17 December 2015 be noted.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.32 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 on 23 February 2015.