

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 9 January 2018

Present:

Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillors Bialyk, Brimble, Denham, Gottschalk, Leadbetter, Morse, Packham, Pearson and Sutton

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Director (BA), Chief Finance Officer, Director (DB), Service Lead Housing Customers, Service Improvement Lead (Benefits) and Democratic Services Manager (Committees)

1

MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 14 November and 12 December 2017 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

2

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

3

IMPACT OF AND PREPARATION FOR UNIVERSAL CREDIT ROLL OUT

The Director (BA) presented the report to inform Members of the Full Service rollout of Universal Credit in Exeter from September 2018. From that point on, all claims to legacy benefits would be claims to Universal Credit. Universal Credit Live Service had been in Exeter since November 2015 for single jobseekers with no dependent children. The rollout of Full Service would vastly increase the rate at which households move onto Universal Credit and would expand the groups who would be affected.

Members were advised that the impact of Universal Credit rollout was difficult to forecast; officers had used experiences from other areas as well as data on the Council's existing caseload to prepare for the impact. At the present time it was proposed to implement the scheme with existing staff resources and, should there be an increase demand on staffing, officers would come back to Members with the details. The Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) could also be affected. As the Council was legally able to spend up to 2.5 times its yearly DHP allocation and was legally unable to refuse an award on the grounds that the DHP award had been spent, this could have an impact on the Council's finances. Members would be updated on the demand for DHP as the scheme was rolled out.

The Director (BA) stated that Members were asked to agree that the Council deliver digital and budgeting support to Universal Credit claimants as a delivery partner for the Department for Work and Pensions Universal Support scheme for 12 months from April 2018.

The Leader brought to Member's attention the concerns of People Scrutiny Committee regarding the significant human costs the changes could bring, such as

threat of eviction, increased homelessness and a growth in demand for food parcels.

Members thanked the officers for their work over the last two years to prepare for the rollout of Universal Credit. They raised concerns with regards to the impact that the rollout could have on individuals and possible financial implications for the Council.

People Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting on 4 January 2018 and its comments were reported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the contents of this report and the background information paper attached be noted;
- (2) support that could be given to customers impacted by Universal Credit via the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), and Local Welfare Support (LWS) budgets, as currently administered, was limited, and therefore the possible need for it to be reviewed be recognised;
- (3) without reliable predictions of the amount of extra demand that will be placed on affected services as a result of Universal Credit rollout, no further resources are requested at this present time. However, it be noted that there may be a need to request additional resources in the future. If evidence shows such a need, this data will be presented to Members for their decision; and
- (4) the Council deliver digital and budgeting support to Universal Credit claimants as a delivery partner for the Department for Work and Pension's Universal Support scheme for 12 months from April 2018.

4

HOUSING RENTS AND SERVICES CHARGES 2018/19

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report setting out the proposed changes to council dwelling rents, garage rents and service charges with effect from 1 April 2018.

Members were advised that this was the third year, of a four year, 1% reduction as set out in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. The garage rents were proposed to be increased by 4% and the majority of service charges would remain at existing levels with the exception of those advised in the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing commented that the reduction in rents had reduced the Housing Revenue Account funds by £8 million and consequently had impacted upon the Council's ability to invest in much needed new homes.

People Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting on 4 January 2018 and its comments were reported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) rents of Council dwellings are reduced by 1% from 1 April 2018;
- (2) garage rents are increased by 2% from 1 April 2018; and

- (3) service charges remain at their existing levels, with the exception of charges specified below from 1 April 2018:-
- (a) 7% increase in respect of water at Magdalen Gardens in line with rises in water and sewerage charges;
 - (b) 5% increase in electricity service charges to reflect utility contract costs;
 - (c) 2.5% increase in respect of the Older Persons' property service charge in line with rises in employee costs; and
 - (d) 5% reduction in respect of door entry systems in line with system maintenance costs.

5

2018/19 COUNCIL TAX BASE AND NNDR1

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report on setting the 2018/19 Council Tax base in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012. The report also sought to delegate to the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer) the Council's estimate of Business Rate Income (NNDR1) for the next financial year.

Members were advised that the proposed Council Tax Base for 2018/19 was 36,547, an increase of 350 over 2017/18.

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 2018/19 shall be 36,547; and
- (2) responsibility to approve the Council's NNDR1 return by 31 January 2018 be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer).

6

REPORT ON THE LAINGS PROPERTIES TO APPROVE ADDITIONAL BUDGET OR CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The Service Lead Housing Customers presented the report setting out the options for the 17 non-traditional Laings properties. Members were advised that currently nine of the properties were vacant. It was highlighted that further consultation would be undertaken with residents, both those within the occupied Laings properties as well as those who occupied attached private properties.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing supported recommendation five to rebuild the properties and increase the life span of these family homes.

Members supported option five to demolish and rebuild.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the expected life of the remaining properties and the works required to bring them up to standard be noted; and

RECOMMENDED that Council approve:-

- (2) option 5 to demolish and rebuild and increase the existing project budget of £586,700.

PYRAMIDS POOL AND LEISURE FACILITY

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Communities and Sport updated Members on the position with regards to the Pyramids Pool and Leisure Facilities following on from the report to Council on 19 December 2017. Discussions were on-going with the operator and a full report would come forward in due course. He clarified that, whilst the roof of the Pyramids would not need to be replaced, some repairs would need to be undertaken to it.

RESOLVED that the position 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.

RE-ORGANISATION WITHIN THE FORMER PUBLIC REALM, TO RE-BALANCE SKILLS TO MEET SERVICE DEMANDS

The Director (DB) presented the report on the former public realm proposed restructure to ensure that the right skills were in the right place to meet service demands. This follow up report sought to approve the restructure following a consultation exercise. The proposed establishment changes would be in accordance with the Management of Organisational Change/Redundancy Policy.

Members welcomed the restructure which would rebalance the skills across the service.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves:-

- (1) the former Public Realm restructure to rebalance the skills across the service following consultation in accordance with the Management and Organisational Policy; and
- (2) the changes to the posts as set out in the report noting that the posts were subject to Job Evaluation.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.00 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 20 February 2018.