

CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 27 September 2018

Present:

Councillor Sheldon (Chair)
Councillors Warwick, Hannan, Holland, Lamb, Musgrave, Thompson, Vizard M and Wright

Apologies:

Councillor Wood

Also present:

Chief Finance Officer, Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support and Democratic Services Officer

In Attendance:

Councillor Edwards - Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2018 were approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable interest were made.

35

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 19

No questions from the public were received.

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QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER 20

No questions from the Members of the Council were received.

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PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATES

Updates on the priorities of the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth and City Development for 2017/18 were presented.

Leader and Growth and City Development

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth and City Development presented the updates for City Development.

In response to Members' questions, the Leader reported the following updates:-

- The Greater Exeter Strategic Plan publication was a working party document providing details on how the various authorities would secure future five year housing supply. The report had been delayed due to one authority having withdrawn their input putting the publication on hold. It was now expected to be published in June 2019;
- There were no legal guidelines for the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan, which was a combined working arrangement between authorities. If one authority caused a delay it would impact on the other authorities;
- The new homeless winter shelter had been through planning and was on target for opening in the near future;
- The introduction of a pan-council performance framework was a part of the 2018-22 Corporate Plan. This was the vision for going forward and detailed how the Council would achieve its goals;
- There had been issues in Planning, relating to problems with maintaining staff, and recruitment. These issues had been resolved and new staff had been seconded on a temporary basis to assist with the back dated work.

Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee noted the report of the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth & City Development.

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OVERVIEW OF THE GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2018/19

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report which advised Members of the overall projected financial position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) & General Fund Revenue Budgets for the 2018/19 financial year after three months and sought approval for a number of supplementary budgets. He discussed the HRA working balance, highlighting that the first quarter showed a projected underspend of £50,000, but the Capital Programme remained on target and would remain so throughout the year.

He drew Members' attention to the General Fund balance, which predicted a deficit of £2,088,974. He stated that two supplementary budgets totalling £140,000 needed to be approved to cover refurbishment of car parks programme and to support the improvements at Exton Road. Both projects had been approved by Council but the budgets had been missed from the list approved in July 2018.

The year-end projection would see the Council's General Fund Balances fall under the minimum recommended level and that the report was a first warning that Council reserves may fall below the minimum recommended level and therefore careful control of spending was required.

The Strategic Management Board (SMB) were working with their Service Leads to identify opportunities to reduce expenditure and to bring the balances back to the recommended level. The Chief Finance Officer would report the SMB findings to the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee in the second quarter.

In response to questions from Members the Chief Finance Officer responded:-

- Members were provided with update reports on services as a whole only, rather than a subjective analysis for spending on agency, consultancy and employees expenditures etc;

- The first warning from the Section 151 officer was notification stating that it was predicted that reserves may fall below the minimum level recommended and action was required to reduce spend. The alert was to inform Members of the situation and the proposed action required.

A Member proposed to have a report brought to Executive Committee on the spending on agency staff and consultancy costs. Members discussed the benefits of reporting of spending on agency and consultancies, and noted that a recent spotlight review had been undertaken on these issues and the review minutes would detail the required information, avoiding any unnecessary work for officers.

The Chief Finance Officer stated he could generate a report from the finance system to include figures and comparisons and bring to the next meeting in November.

The Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee noted the report and requested the Executive to note the report, and Council to note and approve the following:

- (1) The General Fund forecast financial position for the 2018/19 financial year and the action proposed by the Strategic Management Board;
- (2) The HRA forecast financial position for 2017/18 financial year;
- (3) The additional supplementary budgets;
- (4) The outstanding Sundry Debt position as at August 2017;
- (5) The creditors' payments performance.

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CAPITAL MONITORING STATEMENT

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report which advised Members of the material differences, by management unit, between the 2018/19 approved budget and the current outturn forecast in respect of Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee. He explained that as a local authority there was a statutory duty to set and monitor budgets throughout the year and take necessary actions where required on potential overspending or potential shortfalls in income.

The estimated variation from the budget showed that net expenditure for the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee would be reduced from the revised budget by £50,000 after transfers to and from reserves which would include the supplementary budgets of £587,590 already agreed by Council. He confirmed that there were no issues on overspending.

The Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee noted the report and were assured that satisfactory actions were being undertaken by Officers to address the key areas of budgetary pressure, as highlighted in the report.

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BUDGET MONITORING (QUARTER 1)

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REPLACEMENT AUDIO AND VISUAL EQUIPMENT IN THE GUILDHALL & COMMITTEE ROOMS

The Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support presented the report which sought approval to replace some or all of the Audio Visual equipment at the Civic Centre and the Guildhall, to improve the meeting experience for those attending and watching meeting broadcasts through social media.

He explained that the existing Audio Visual (AV) equipment used in the meeting rooms at the Civic Centre had been installed as part of the Customer First project in 2005, and the previously used equipment was still in use at the Guildhall, making them over 20 years old. There had been several occasions of the AV equipment failing at both the Civic Centre and Guildhall, impacting on participants of the meeting and the public attending. Numerous complaints had been received about the quality of the broadcasts on Facebook Live.

He informed Members that a permanent solution had been looked at, and that technology had progressed significantly since 2005, allowing various options for Members to consider:-

- (1) Replacing the microphones at both the Civic Centre and Guildhall at a cost of approximately £40,000;
- (2) Replacement of the microphone systems as above, with an upgrade to the visual equipment in the main civic centre meeting rooms. This would include replacing the screens and projectors, with up to date LED screens and all the necessary other equipment at a cost of approximately £55,000;
- (3) Both of the options above, along with the following at a cost of approximately £100,000:-
 - Replacement of the speakers in the Rennes and Bad Homburg rooms;
 - Replacement of the repeater screens (used in the Bad Homburg room to replicate the image shown at Committees on the main screen in Rennes) with LED screens;
 - Replacement of the radio microphones used at some committee meetings;
 - The installation of permanent webcasting cameras in both the Civic Centre and Guildhall, to enable better screening of committee meetings.

The Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support provided a breakdown of the costs for the three options, and confirmed that the third option would future proof the facilities within the Civic Centre for a number of years. Although it was the more expensive option, it would save money in the longer term. He advised that any option would require a procurement exercise being undertaken, following the Councils policy guidelines on spending.

The Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support provided responses to questions from a Member, who had submitted questions in advance of the meeting.

A copy of the questions and together with the responses from The Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support are appended to the minutes:-

In response to questions from Members, the Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support responded:-

- Members could choose to split the cost of the available options over a number of years, however the option to buy all the equipment in one purchase would be more cost effective than buying separately;
- Other Local Authorities in the area, including Plymouth City Council, Teignbridge District Council and Devon County Council, had all invested in top of the range audio and visual equipment for their meeting rooms. However unlike Exeter, they had dedicated Council Chambers, enabling them to have hard wired installed equipment;
- Currently, livestreaming of meetings was done through Facebook Live, enabling anyone who followed Exeter City Council on Facebook, to be notified of meetings being broadcast. The livestreams had received excellent viewing figures, hit rates and comments from viewers. The Council would continue to look to make the meetings more dynamic for home viewers and improve engagement with the public;
- A standalone camera was currently used for Facebook streaming in both the Civic Centre and Guildhall. It was operated from a set position with limited scope to be manoeuvred. The audio was picked up through the camera microphone, but there was an option to add a microphone link to camera;
- Three technical specialists had been consulted on how to achieve the best audio and visual results for meeting.;
- The Council would comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), ensuring meetings were as inclusive as possible. Regardless of the decision outcome, the existing loop system in the equipment would be managed to ensure it was working correctly for viewers;
- All replacement options had been researched to suit the requirements of the Council. If approved, the next step would be to follow the procurement process to ensure the most cost effective solution;
- Training arrangements would be provided as part of the equipment package, to ensure the maximum benefit was achieved from the investment;

The Chief Finance Officer stated that the Capital Expenditure for replacing the equipment could be provided through revenue, grants and capital receipt money. He had a special reserve fund in place for such investments, and considered that the reported costs would not impact the balance.

The Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee noted the report and requested the Executive to considering approving to Council option 3 as detailed above.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT VERBAL UPDATE

The Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support provided Members with a verbal update report on Member Development. He discussed the training options for new and existing Councillors and the induction programme.

He explained that Teignbridge District Council had been looking at Exeter's Member induction training, for use, as appropriate, following their all-out elections in May 2019. Teignbridge Councillors would be welcome to attend Exeter training events as part of the partnership working arrangements in place.

A Member stated their appreciation of the training for new Members, following election.

The Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee noted the update report.

43 **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 for the consideration of the following item, on the grounds that it included the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3, of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

44 **MATTERS REQUESTED FOR CONSIDERATION BY MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE - POLICE NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAM CO-LOCATION TO THE CIVIC CENTRE**

Councillor Thompson requested that an item be placed on the agenda under Standing Order 18 and submitted questions in advance of the meeting. A copy of the questions and together with the responses from The Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support are appended to the minutes:-

The Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support stated that works to the accommodation would commence 1 October 2018 with the Police & Crime Commissioner's office paying for any refurbishment cost.

Minute 44 - Questions and Responses on the Police Neighbourhood Team co-location to the Civic Centre

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.40 pm)

Chair