

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 21 November 2019

Present:

Councillor Sills (Chair)
Councillors Newby, Buswell, Lamb, Lyons, Moore, D, Moore, J, Owen and Pattison

Apologies:

Councillors Atkinson and Hannaford

Also present:

Director (BA), Director (DB), City Solicitor & Head of HR, Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

In Attendance:

Councillor Bob Foale - Portfolio Holder for City Development & Planning

1

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the former Place Scrutiny Committee held on 12 September 2019 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the following amendment:-

In Minute 47 (Public Questions) and the correction of the name of a member of the public asking a question to read Tere Wells and not Williams.

The minutes of the meeting of the former Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee held on 26 September 2019 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

Councillor D Moore sought some further information relating to the following which officers would respond to: -

- Minute 32 - budgets relating to the public conveniences, and the income changes derived from the offer of free car parking on Thursday nights;
- Minute 34 - update on Zebcat and
- Minute 35 - update on health and safety information.

2

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 19

In accordance with Standing Order 19, a member of the public, Mr J Burns submitted the following question on the potential roll out of 5G in the city:-

5G represents untested, uninsurable, exponential escalation of wireless communications technology already considered a fundamental threat to the health of all living organisms.

Will Exeter City Council please interrogate the independent research with impartiality and integrity, resisting the introduction of 5G and proliferation of other frequencies for the sake of citizens and eco-systems?

Councillor Foale, Portfolio Holder City Development & Planning, made the following points:-

- no requirement for planning permission for multi-national companies who may erect the necessary poles,
- the varying medical opinion on the safety of 5G,
- Planning Member Working Group on behalf of the Council had responded to a Government consultation,
- he was aware of the strength of feeling by a large group of local residents and suggested that Members convene a task and finish working group.

Mr Burns on putting a supplementary question hoped that Councillor Foale would continue to be involved in this regard. Councillor Foale confirmed that he would be available as appropriate.

4

NEW SCRUTINY PROGRESS

The Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support referred to the recent review of the Governance arrangements resulting in the establishment of two new Scrutiny Committees. The Strategic Scrutiny Committee cuts across the corporate priorities of the Council. He identified the changes in the scope, and although there was no longer the role of pre-scrutiny, there were other enhancements such as a greater opportunity to hold Executive to task, and for Members to initiate a call-in of decisions. Members would also be asked to suggest a study of specific areas of interest through the setting up of task and finish working groups. The Scrutiny Programme Board would provide a sounding board for the business of Scrutiny Committee, as well as promote an understanding of how scrutiny would continue to operate. A further meeting of the Scrutiny Programme Board would be held on the 16 December to pick up on the discussions and business identified at this meeting. A Member's comment on the inclusion of a proposed draft framework in relation to consultation and engagement was noted and would be progressed.

Members noted the presentation.

5

PRESENTATION OF HALT 5G PETITION

The Chair welcomed the public to the meeting and referred to the receipt of a petition referred from Devon County Council from the Exeter Halt 5G Group, as the City Council had responsibility for planning permission in the city. The petition contained 107 signatures, with 47 signatories identified with an Exeter address. It was noted that there was an ongoing petition on Change.Org from the Halt 5G in Exeter with over 1,000 signatures. The petition had been initiated to show the Group's concerns regarding the installation of 5G transmitters in Exeter, with an appeal to postpone the rollout of 5G in Exeter pending the outcome of an independent investigation. A briefing note circulated to Members set out the main issues.

Members were supportive of the formation of a Task and Finish Group to discuss this matter further and during discussion raised the following points:-

- experts in the field with a good level of scientific and technical knowledge should be invited, including those with a medical and planning background.
- technical corporations should also be invited to be held account.

- whether Exeter could follow Brighton and Hove City Council who had recently banned the installation of 5G masts, due to perceived public health concerns. The Director (BA) referred to the briefing note which set out some of the context in terms of health grounds and the limited role as a planning authority.
- whether lampposts owned by Devon County Council were 5G enabled. The Director (DB) advised that Devon County Council had discussed the enablement of lampposts. Many local authorities had street lighting systems that were low powered, wireless and remotely controlled, but he could obtain further information from the County Council if required.

Following the debate, Councillor Lyons formally proposed the formation of a Task and Finish Group to discuss 5G, which was seconded by Councillor Pattison. The nomination was unanimously agreed by Members.

The Chair welcomed the establishment of a Task and Finish Group, and advised that any such requests would be taken to the Scrutiny Programme Board to be assessed against Council priorities, and any resource implications. It would be necessary to identify a scoping document, the number of meetings, membership, and invitations to experts in the field. A group of five members, with Councillor Newby from the Conservative Group and Councillor J Moore from the Progressive Group, together with Councillors Buswell, Owen and Pattison from the Labour Group were identified. It was noted that other Members with an interest in this subject could be invited to contribute.

The Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support responded to a Member's enquiry about the opportunity for recommendations to be made to Executive. He also reminded Members of the timeline of the forthcoming Programme Board, meaning that the first meeting of the task and finish group would not be convened until at least the New Year. Three or four meetings were likely to be held over a period of two or three months before coming back to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee. The Director (BA) responded to a Member's concerns about any future rollout of 5G before the discussions were completed, and reiterated that there was currently no roll out of 5G planned, but any such requests would be dealt with through the normal planning process.

Strategic Scrutiny Committee noted the petition and supported the formation of a Task and Finish Group, with the above membership, which would be discussed at the forthcoming Scrutiny Programme Board on the 16 December with the results of that meeting being reported to the next Strategic Scrutiny Committee.

6

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chair referred to a number of items for future consideration by the Scrutiny Committee which included:-

- Exeter City Futures an update on Progress and
- Climate Change Neutral agenda

A Member also requested an update on Implementation of the Air Quality Improvement Plan.

Strategic Scrutiny Committee noted the items.

(The meeting commenced at 5.40 pm and closed at 6.15 pm)

Chair