

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
(HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING)

2 July 2020

Present:

Councillor Luke Sills (Chair)

Councillors Newby, Atkinson, Buswell, Henson, D, Lyons, Moore, D, Moore, J and Pattison

Apologies:

Councillors Hannaford and Packham

Also present:

Director (JY), City Solicitor, Chief Finance Officer, Corporate Manager Democratic and Civic Support, Democratic Services Officer (SLS) and Democratic Services Officer (MD)

In attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk
Councillor Ollie Pearson
Councillor Duncan Wood

- Leader
- Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Physical Activity
- Portfolio Holder for Support Services and Procurement

Councillor Kevin Mitchell
Councillor Michael Mitchell

9 Apologies

These were received from Councillors Hannaford and Packham.

10 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee held on 16 January and 12 March 2020 were taken as read, approved as correct, for signing by the Chair at the earliest possible convenience.

11 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

12 Questions from Members of the Public Under Standing Order 19

No questions from members of the public were received.

13 Presentation on Covid-19 by Portfolio Holders and Questions from Members and Answers

The Chair invited the two Portfolio Holders to present their respective briefing notes which provided an update of their area of work during the current period of the CV-19 pandemic. A schedule of questions from Members submitted in advance of the meeting, together with the responses provided at the meeting were set out on the

appendix to these minutes. The supplementary questions and responses provided at the meeting are set out below for each Portfolio.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Physical Activity, Councillor Pearson presented his update. He referred to the significant impact that CV-19 had on the City Council's Leisure Services, their current closure, potential reopening and longer term future. The nature of risk had changed significantly and the re-emergence of the leisure facilities presented a number of challenges for the service, which had resulted in a proposal to bring the Leisure Services back in-house with reports to the Executive and Council. The update provided a brief update on Exeter and Cranbrook's Sport England's Local Delivery Pilot (SELDP), the ongoing build of St Sidwell's Point where work had continued safely observing social distancing measures, progress of the Playing Pitch Strategy, the Riverside Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre refurbishment, and the development plans at Exeter Arena and Wonford, the latter being part of SELDP but nevertheless the creation of much enhanced facilities for those local communities.

Responses to supplementary questions arising from the original questions from the Committee Members indicated.

- 1) Councillor J Moore – is it the intention that the in-house management will be via a Council owned private company or will it be fully incorporated in the services of Exeter City Council that we already have.
 - *that is to be determined and the best model needs to be worked out to achieve the best value for Exeter as well as making sure the service is run well and employees in the service are looked after. Initially given the timeframe, it will be necessary to transfer those staff directly into the Council.*
- 2) Councillor J Moore - our inner city green spaces have become so important over the lockdown and we need large amounts of accessible spaces to allow people to socially distance. The Clifton Hill Golf Range occupied a huge area of publicly owned inner city space which could be potentially used more widely, and if the space could be used in some other way for the public and enhanced with bio diversity. Is it possible to have a review of the Golf Driving Range at Clifton Hill?
 - *there is no review of the Strategy planned, but the Member will have seen or know the decision made on those spaces and the reference to the former Northbrook golf course and the decision to protect future use as a green space and consultation with the local residents. With regard to Clifton Hill, it is about listening to what the community wants on both spaces. With regard to the position at the Clifton Hill site, the Golf Driving Range has an ongoing lease and the green space already outlined is being kept. The Golf Driving Range still has a lease and there is no challenge to that at any time in the near future.*
- (3) Councillor D Moore - thanks to Councillor Pearson for circulating the Delivery Pilot documents but could he advise the details of the new governance system, its membership and accountability in the Council and explain the basis for the Livable Exeter Place Board to provide strategic oversight of the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot.
 - *the basis in the documents offer the most transparent oversight of this programme, with the best and most informed people around the table. If*

the Member required any more detail on the approach including the detail of the governance arrangements he would provide that information.

- 4) Councillor D Moore - the mutual aid groups across Exeter are producing a report of their experiences of the amazing community led response and if the Council would be willing to receive and consider this report and incorporate any key lessons into its future emergency plans

- *we welcome the opportunity to learn lessons where we can.*

The Chair said he would be happy to see that work.

Responses to supplementary questions arising from the original questions from the other Committee Members indicated.

Councillor K Mitchell – taking into account the response offered and looking at the services that are currently offered in the leisure services is there any review to minimise any financial risk that may occur

- *as of September the leisure service will be run in-house and there would be changes in the medium term in relation to what we do in leisure and how we provide it. In the context of coronavirus it was important to still provide the best and most cost effective leisure service for the people of Exeter. This will be taken into account in a future business case in how we run the service.*

- 2) Councillor K Mitchell – if the in-sourcing of our leisure facilities will give us lots of opportunity for joined up thinking in the future and allow different services and teams with the council to work together to ensure that all facilities work to the optimum level.

- *Councillor Pearson said he looked forward to the opportunity to make the Leisure Services the best that Exeter has ever had but it will be challenging because of the times we are in and there will be some difficult decisions ahead in relation to some of the things that we normally do in the next months.*

Councillor Pearson also responded to points of clarification from other Committee Members.

- there have been no complaints brought to his attention resulting from the building works of St Sidwell's Point.
- there were no plans with regard to the Clifton Hill Golf Driving Range when the lease expires at this time and they remained mindful as a Council that we remain fair to all parties and balance all interests of what people want taking into account representations from all bodies of the future of anything in the city.
- the Exeter and Cranbrook Sports England Local Delivery Pilot was a joint bid to improve the longer term health of both communities. Funding was for the delivery of the pilot to increase activity levels within the local population.
- the City Council was doing all it could in the support of Kier as the build contractor and delivering St Sidwell's Point Project.

- the completion of the work at the Riverside Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre was still on target for being completed in June 2021.

The Portfolio Holder for Support Services and Procurement - Councillor Wood - in presenting his update referred to the key work of the areas of work from the Finance Directorate services which provided sound fiscal direction for the Council and contributed to the city's economy through work such as the prompt payment of the Council's suppliers. He commented on the additional expenditure incurred by the Council during CV-19 and the significant loss in income, which cannot be recovered. He welcomed the prudent and good financial management by the Portfolios Holders and Directors to tackle a mid-year emergency budget which will be discussed at next week's Executive meeting. He additionally thanked the Directors working with other staff throughout the Council to identify further savings, as well as accelerating the agile and flexible working project combined, who had moved to a significantly changed working environment. He praised the teams across the Council who had responded so well.

He commented on the Council having held the first virtual Council meeting in the country and again the timely way in which Members and staff had adapted to ensure the democratic processes and the running of the Council were able to continue. He also thanked legal services for continuing and being at the forefront of ever changing legislation and being ready to continue to operate and offer guidance across all of the Council's sectors.

Responses to supplementary questions arising from the original questions from the Committee Members indicated.

- 1) Councillor K Owen - what are the arrangements for the annual canvass of those individuals who have not returned their electoral registration forms and what will be the procedures should the pandemic continue?

(to ensure political neutrality - the Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support offered the response)

- *existing procedures for the publication of the Register will continue including the annual canvass. The knocking on doors of those who have not returned the paperwork was the last resort and the public were reminded three times by letter of the need to register to vote as the canvass itself is a legal obligation. The advice is to carry on as normal, although further information is being sought from the Electoral Commission and the Cabinet Office to ensure staff safety.*

- 2) Councillor D. Moore –she was aware of the phenomenal job that the staff have done and continue to do as we move into a different phase of the pandemic and she asked what can the Council do to support staff's wellbeing and manage the very limited capacity to enable them to rest appropriately.

- *the Council had already introduced an Agile and Flexible system to the work place prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. With support from Human Resources, staff were consulted on different working patterns to help suit individual circumstances. Flexible working includes working at different hours if suitable and the opportunity to work from home has been significantly rolled out with one advantage being the removal, in most*

cases, of the need to commute. The Agile and Flexible approach has therefore increased significantly during the crisis; and

- the Senior Management Board considers staff welfare a priority. It is important for staff to take the leave due to them to recharge batteries. Staff can also avail themselves of the counselling service offered and T-Cup, the digital tool for staff to measure and monitor their wellbeing, which had recently introduced.*

3) Councillor D Moore – No supplementary question was put.

4) Councillor D Moore – asked when this would be coming available as some businesses such as language schools and smaller hospitality operators were unable to obtain support from the first round of discretionary grants as they did not meet the eligibility criteria and how will the needs of such businesses will be reflected in the Recovery Plan?

- the Recovery Plan was not yet finalised and is being progressed through a number of sub-groups, with the Portfolio Holder for Support Services and Procurement representing the Council on the City Centre sub group which covers retail outlets. The issues relating to the type of businesses referred to were being addressed and although he was not aware of the resolution yet and the fund had been available in a prescribed way, we are doing whatever we can to assist. He had heard of the particular businesses Councillor Moore referred to and those issues are under consideration*
- the second round of discretionary business rates was open although the criteria are not as strict. Businesses may therefore apply for support. The system includes robust procedures to prevent fraud. (NB This information was updated after the meeting with detail of the second round still to be advised)*

5) Councillor D Moore – referencing the Motion at the December Council meeting and whether the procurement approach would exclude the procurement of single use plastic unless it was required for health and safety reasons, including the production of personal protection equipment?

- there was nothing currently in the strategy which precludes that. However, Councillor Wood said that he, Councillor Moore, and the Procurement Lead had been due to meet to discuss the issues prior to the CV-19 restrictions. This was a good addition potentially, and it was something that they can consider building into contracts, but as the Council procures so many different services and items it may not be possible to apply uniformly cross all procurement undertaken by the Council.*

Responses to supplementary questions arising from the original questions from the other Committee Members indicated.

1) Councillor M Mitchell - what if any financial implications were there for the Council in holding three separate elections on the same day and the implications for next year's budget given that there were no elections this year?

(to ensure political neutrality in this matter - the Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support offered the response)

- the City Council's Elections were not originally scheduled for next year as the Devon County Council Elections had been due to take place. As three*

elections are now to be held in 2021, the majority of costs are likely to be shared between the City Council, the County Council and, in respect of the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections, by the Cabinet Office. The same will apply if all postal vote elections are mandated;

- *regular contact is made with the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators to ensure that all elections are carried out as smoothly and efficiently as possible; and*
- *many of the issues surrounding the postal votes, are governed by legislation.*

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.07 pm

Chair

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 JULY 2020

ITEM 6 : QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS ON COVID-19

Questions to the Portfolio Holder for –Leisure & Physical Activity - Councillor Pearson

Questions from Committee Members

1. **Councillor J Moore** - Will the pools and leisure centres at St Sidwell's Point and Riverside be included in the future in-sourcing of ECC leisure services?

Yes and they are crucial to that in-sourcing and part of the landmarks of the city and of the fantastic Leisure Services that we provide.

2. **Councillor J Moore** - Alongside the 2018 Draft Playing Pitch Strategy review, will there also be a review of other outdoor sports facilities?

There are no plans to review at a strategic level the Move Physical Activity and the Move More Built Leisure Facilities Strategies published in 2019 which guide the work of officers. The Parks, Play areas and Green Spaces strategy work will be led by the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Harvey and that is still under development and obviously there have been some delays due to the CV-19 pandemic. We are aware that outdoor spaces can be valuable and their value has been seen in a new light, and we have not seen anything in that strategy that did not value those outdoor spaces, and think that we need more in some cases as well as how we deliver.

3. **Councillor D Moore** - Please can the Portfolio holder expand on the second bullet point of the update of the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot and explain the new system and approach, and key outcomes from the evaluation?

A diagram (shown at the meeting and included below) illustrates the whole system approach in terms of the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot and that means bringing together aspects you may not always think of as relating to health and wellbeing. Such as transport and connectivity, our community and culture, housing, leadership and governance which all make our society work and how can they be used to improve the health outcomes of all those in our community, and particularly where health outcomes are not as good in parts of the city. The whole system approach therefore tries to effect all of those areas whether it is the work place, schools, and what we do as a Council, and not take a narrow view of health outcomes just being about sport and fitness. It was talking to the right people in schools and workplaces and making sure that we have the right relationships and trying things or taking a different approach. He would ensure that two documents referred to namely a report to the Sport England Exeter and Cranbrook Local Delivery Pilot Programme Board 15 January 2020, and Sport England Local Delivery Pilot Exeter and Cranbrook Interim Plan April – September 2020 would be circulated independently as they outline the details of the plan, the delivery and the challenges that we face and how they can be overcome. The whole system approach was about winning hearts and minds but they needed to make sure that they engaged with the right people in organisations in a positive way to bring it altogether to make it work. Coronavirus has had an impact on us doing that over the last couple of months and things have not progressed as you might have expected with resources going into making Exeter Community Wellbeing work.

Exeter & Cranbrook theory of change



Long term Impacts:

- Narrowing health inequality
- Improving inclusivity & sense of community
- Reducing congestion & improving air quality
- Embedded analytical approach

4. **Councillor D Moore** - For some people the experience of shielding or self-isolation has led to or increased anxiety and frailty. How will this change the Local Delivery Pilot priorities and /or approach to delivery?

There had been a great deal of learning and putting resources towards support for people with coronavirus. It was important to recognise about the delivery pilot that even before the coronavirus pandemic, the aim was to target groups in that category who have those issues and difficulty getting into that first step of physical exercise. Those things are the focus of the delivery pilot and he did not think that the approach would change drastically, but there was a lot of learning having said that, from what they have been doing over the last couple of months.

Questions from Non-Committee Members

1. **Councillor K Mitchell** - Social distancing measures are likely to be in place in the medium to long term as part of the new norm. Has this been factored into the revised likely income from the new St Sidwell's Point Leisure Centre (SSP) and our other leisure facilities?

No revisions have yet been made on the business case for SSP. The key issues in relation to this are set out in the Leisure Services Recovery Plan committee paper due to be considered by the Executive and Council in July. It was early days with regard to the Council's response to the challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic and the implications of living with this for a while but the realisation that the implications are still just starting, and we need to evaluate.

2. **Councillor K Mitchell** - Are there any plans to use our parks and open spaces over the summer months to provide exercise classes which would normally be offered within our leisure centres?

No there no plans although it has been gratifying to see people during the CV-19 pandemic finding really innovative ways to keep on with their activities on various platforms, but currently it is outside of the Government guidance to bring people together and important to note that and although we are coming out of it, but we still need to make people safe. We are working with people offering great things such as free movement in parks, but we are not making plans to offer traditional classes back in our leisure centres as we need to make sure that people are safe and can use our parks safely.

Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Support Services & Procurement – Councillor Wood

Questions from Committee Members

1. **Councillor K Owen** - An important piece of work carried out by the Council is ensuring that the maximum number of people are on the electoral register every year. The postponement of the May 2020 elections means that we will have city council, county council and police and crime commissioner elections next year. Can you please tell us what work on this (if any) has had to be postponed due to the pandemic and what plans are being made for the months ahead to maximise the numbers on the electoral roll.

To uphold the political neutrality of the Members in this matter the Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support responded –

Although the elections due in May 2020 were postponed, electoral registration work has continued. Those members of the public who wished to register to vote have continued

to be able to do so, and the ability for new applicants to register on line has continued unhindered. Only those new applicants who wish to register by way of paper application have had a slower response time since some members of the election team have been furloughed. Full staffing will resume from week commencing 6 July.

The annual canvass will be carried out from the end of July and during the autumn, with the intention of publishing a revised register on 1 December. The Cabinet Office have indicated that there may be legislation which allows a delay to publication of the electoral register until 1 February 2021. Plans for the canvass are in hand and on time and it is ultimately for the Electoral Registration Officer to decide when the Electoral Register will be published.

2. **Councillor D Moore** - What consultation with the Union has been held to enable their input to the redesign of safe working practices?

The decision was made some time ago to have a full time UNISON Secretary which has meant that we have daily contact with UNISON who help both staff and management teams in the redesign of the safe working practice across the organisation. Unison's involvement has been both invaluable and very welcome.

Indeed Stuart Ward, the UNISON Secretary actually walked the floors of the Civic Centre with Officers to ensure we have as safe a working environment as we can in line with the current Government Guidelines.

3. **Councillor D Moore** - Before Operation Shield ends, vulnerable people may need some support to make alternative arrangements for safe and timely access to food supplies. What Council notification and liaison will there be with charities, registered social landlords and other organisations to help people make these alternative arrangements?

Legal Services have worked extremely quickly and effectively analysing a huge range of regulations and legislation and providing advice and support on the interpretation as they apply to the full range of Council Services. This included the regulations and responsibilities involved in Operation Shield.

However, the operational implementation and service implications fall outside of my Portfolio and under the Equalities, Diversity and Communities Portfolio under Cllr Amal Ghusain. On enquiring I have been ensured that the Exeter Community Wellbeing network will remain in operation to provide support and lines of information and guidance being developed that will go on our web site and social media to provide information and support. If more information is required it would be better to approach the appropriate Portfolio Holder.

4. **Councillor D Moore** –What identification has been made of businesses that have fallen through the gaps of the various government financial schemes?

There have been a range of different grants coming through and there have been weekly meetings with Exeter Chamber, Exeter Federation of Small Businesses and InExeter; in which discussion takes place on the types of businesses that have fallen through the gaps from the financial support that has been available from central government. We also receive communications direct from businesses that feel they have not received financial support.

In developing the Exeter Discretionary Business grant, Exeter City Council followed national guidelines in developing this grant, which supports four types of businesses

listed within national guidelines, which fell through the gaps from the original business grants. As some funds remain, a second round of funding will be open to any business within Exeter, as long as they meet the mandatory eligibility criteria:

- *Were trading on 11 March 2020 and will continue to trade*
- *Need to be classified as a small to medium business*
- *Are not eligible for cash grants from any central government Covid-related scheme (apart from Self Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS) or Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS))*
- *Are not in administration, insolvent or a striking-off notice hasn't been made*

This second round of funding of the Exeter Discretionary Business Grant will support the remaining businesses that have not received any financial support to date.

5. **Councillor D Moore** - Will the emerging Exeter procurement policy set out measures to prioritise local employment by supporting local businesses and social enterprises, and contribute to Exeter's 2030 net zero carbon target as part of the city's recovery plan?

Exeter City Council has approved Devon District Councils Procurement Strategy and procures all contracts and work in line with this strategy.

The current Procurement Strategy has four key themes:

- *Contract Management*
- *Social Values*
- *Engagement with SMEs and Local Businesses*
- *Behaving Commercially*

The two elements which relate to this question are Social Value and Engagement with Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs) and Voluntary and Community Social Enterprise (VCSE).

The relevant actions set out in the strategy are to include social value and sustainability in all tenders both with a minimum weighting of 5%. Which means that an advantage is given to those suppliers who can demonstrate that they contribute to these twin aims.

In advance of developing our own additional elements to the Procurement strategy our Contract procedure rules require that the Real Living Wage is paid by all contractors.

We are committed to work with our Public Sector partners through the Devon and Cornwall procurement partnership. Exeter University has been successful in securing funding under the heading of Partnership and Collaboration. Part of which, is to work with partners such as the RD&E, DCC and ECC to work together to improve investment in the local economy through targeting our individual and collective procurement, and where activity and collaboration occur due to similar requirements in the contracts that we seek.

Questions from Non-Committee Members

- 1 **Councillor M Mitchell** - Arising from the likely continuation of restrictions related to the current pandemic does the council have the resources to support either 100 percent postal vote elections or a massive increase in voters requesting postal votes for the three elections being held on the same day in May 2021.

To uphold the political neutrality of the Members in this matter the Corporate Manager Democratic & Civic Support responded –

AS you would expect all aspects of next year's Elections are currently being looked at by the Cabinet Office and all in the Electoral profession, and the possibility of an all postal vote elections in 2021 is currently being explored. However, legislation would be required to enable this to happen. He wished to set a bit of context on the level of postal votes and what that would mean at the moment.

- At last year's City elections, ECC issued 13,806 postal votes
- At the European election 13,996 postal votes were issued

The number of electors in the city already requiring a postal vote was 14.5% of the electorate. If demand increased a 10% would add an additional 1400 to the postal vote numbers and as in the graph, a 200% increase would mean a 42,000 postal vote figure or 44% of the total electorate.

We are about to start on the annual canvass and the number of postal numbers may increase and also likely the number of postal votes required increases when any Election is called

% increase	Additional Amount	New Total	% of electorate
10	1400	15400	16%
20	2800	16800	17.5%
30	4200	18200	19%
40	5600	19600	20.5%
50	7000	21000	22%
100	14000	28000	29%
200	28000	42000	44%

We are about to start on the annual canvass and the number of postal votes required may increase, as it does when any Election is called. It is likely that any increase in demand will be sudden, and will be triggered by the issue of poll cards about 5-6 weeks prior to polling day and probably peaking at about 2-3 weeks prior to polling day. A 10% increase would be manageable but a 50% per cent increase would have significant impact. Much will depend on how the CV-19 situation develops over the next few months. An assessment of the prevailing circumstances will need to be made at a national level, in sufficient time as to ensure the smooth conduct of the relevant elections.

It may also be worth mentioning that as the questioner has also said that we are due to have three elections on the same day on the first Thursday in May 2021, the City Council, the scheduled Devon County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioners Electione.

There is also a strong possibility that, due to the combination of elections next year, we may need to issue two sets of postal votes. One for the City and County and one for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections. This will be due to the physical problem of fitting them all into one envelope and the different voting systems which will be in place.

If all postal elections were mandated, we need to issue 96,000 postal votes.