

EXECUTIVE

Tuesday 10 January 2023

Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)

Councillors Wright, Denning, Ghusain, Morse, Pearce, Williams and Wood

Also present:

Councillor Jobson (as an opposition group Leader)

Apologies:

Councillors Parkhouse, Jobson and K. Mitchell

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Deputy Chief Executive, Director of City Development, Director Finance and Democratic Services Team Leader

1 **ALDERMAN HILDA STERRY AND TONY BUCKLEY**

The Leader passed on his condolences and respects to Honorary Alderman Hilda Sterry who was also a former Lord Mayor of Exeter, who had recently passed away and passed on his thoughts to her family.

The Leader also passed on his condolences to Tony Buckley who had also recently passed away. The Leader advised that he had served as a Council Leader in London before moving to Exeter and he passed on the thoughts of the Executive Members to his family.

2 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2022, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members declared the following interests:

- Councillor Denning - Minute No. 9; and
- Councillor D.Moore - Minute No. 9.

4 **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 19**

A member of the public, Mrs Thompson submitted the following question, related to Minute No. 7:-

- As Planning Consent for a Hub on Station Road Playing Fields Pinhoe was granted on 4 February 2020 with work to be commenced not later than the expiration of three years, could the Leader confirm if agreement has been reached with Corporate Property for a lease/transfer to create this Hub on Council land?

The Leader responded that no agreement had been reached for a lease/transfer for the creation of the Hub on Council land.

Mrs Thompson asked a supplementary question on clause 3N of the Planning Consent, which required details of how the change to the facilities would be maintained, what arrangements had been considered, and what were the long term future proposals of the transfer?

The Leader confirmed that no agreement had been reached for a transfer or lease to create a hub on Council owned land, but work was being undertaken to ensure that the project would be brought forward.

5 **URGENT MATTER - RESPONSE TO THE TORBAY LOCAL PLAN UPDATE CONSULTATION**

The Executive noted the urgent matter of the response from Exeter City Council to the Torbay Local Plan update consultation, which had been run by Torbay Council until 5 December 2022. Members noted that this was the second consultation on the Torbay Local Plan update which was considering housing needs and various site development options which could be taken forward into a further draft document at a later date.

Members were advised that due to the timings of the consultation and Exeter City Council's meeting dates it was not possible for the Executive to consider a draft response in advance of its submission and that the response to the consultation was treated as an urgent matter. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, it had been discussed with the Council Leader, the Portfolio Holder for City Development & Planning and the Chair of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee.

Members noted that the letter had objected to the Torbay Strategy on two key areas. The first reason was that Exeter was working to deliver the Exeter Plan to deliver housing on brownfield land, which was a more sustainable option and aligned with Government policy. Torbay were being encouraged to also deliver housing on brownfield sites in their area. The second concern was on the challenge in developing on brownfield sites in Exeter and issues of meeting further additional housing requirements.

RESOLVED that the urgent matter be noted.

6 **EXETER CITY LIVING BUSINESS PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Executive received the report which provided a progress update on the production and proposed timetable for Exeter City Living's (ECL) Annual Business Plan 2023-24 and confirmed that the 2023-24 Business Plan would not be seeking any further new loans from the Council.

Particular reference was made to the Management Agreement which stated that the draft business plan must be prepared by November each year, ahead of the new Financial Year. One significant site was subject to the tender process and the cost information arising from the tender was still being assessed. The report sought Council approval to vary the Management Agreement to allow the Business Plan to be brought to Members in April 2023 to ensure it included appropriate information arising from the tender process.

The Leader advised that he had received questions in relation to the report from Councillor Jobson, and that he had provided written responses to the questions, which are appended to the minutes.

Councillor D. Moore, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item. She welcomed the report and supported delaying the report to ensure accurate information was provided to Members. She enquired about the process of producing the Business Plan and whether it had been produced internally by Exeter City Living and would there be any cost to the Council for producing the Business Plan?

The Leader advised that he would provide a response to the question raised, which are appended to the minutes.

Members supported the recommendation to vary the Management Agreement to allow the business plan to be brought to Members in April 2023.

RECOMMENDED that Council agree that the timeline for the submission of the Exeter City Living Business Plan 2023-24 be moved for Council consideration to the Executive meeting on 4th April 2023 and the Council meeting on 18th April 2023.

7

2023/24 BUDGET STRATEGY AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Executive received the report on the strategic overview of the budgetary position for the 2023/24 financial year and beyond, which included the likely level of available resources, the known demand for resources and proposals to ensure that a balanced budget could be achieved. Members noted that the Council was required to set a balanced budget and Council Tax prior to the start of the financial year.

The Leader moved an amendment to the wording of the report recommendation as follows:-

- That the contents of the report are noted and that the principles of establishing a balanced revenue budget and Capital Programme are approved.

The Director Finance made particular reference to:-

- the provisional one year settlement had been received from the Central Government in late December 2022, with indications on what was expected in 2024;
- the Government had provided additional funding in the settlement, the majority of funding went to upper tier authorities but a guaranteed minimum funding grant had been provided to District Councils, with Exeter to receive £849,000;
- all Councils would receive a minimum increase of 3% in their funding, which was higher than was anticipated in the Medium Term Financial Plan, but was still below the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation;
- the Service Grant had been retained which Exeter was awarded £160,000, which was less than the previous year, due to part of the grant being given for National Insurance contributions funding, for the now abandoned Health & Social Care Levy;
- the New Homes Bonus had been renewed for one year only at £672,000, with no more legacy payments;
- the principles of the Council Tax Referendum had been increased for District Councils, who must set a Council Tax of less than 3% or £5, or otherwise a referendum would be triggered. For the first time an increase of 2.99% would be marginally higher than a £5 increase for the Council;
- the other budgetary assumptions in the report, showed an increase of 98% for electricity and 158% for gas, which highlighted the challenges to the Council's budgets;

- a significant amount of work had been undertaken by officers to make suitable proposals to help balance the budget, totalling £3.8 million for the next financial year. More detail would be provided ahead of Council on 21 February 2023; and
- the General Fund Capital Programme had been reviewed to bring forward a more affordable programme. The cost of the programme had increased during the financial year from interest rate rises and construction costs. A draft programme had been put forward based on officer recommendations to deliver the minimum programme required to keep the Council safe. Some projects which may not be included, were deemed as non-essential projects to address the financial pressures. Some projects would be carried forward and the draft programme would be finalised ahead of Council in February.

The Leader advised that he had received questions in relation to the report from Councillor Jobson and Councillor D. Moore and that he had provided written responses to the questions and the responses are appended to the minutes.

Councillor D. Moore, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item. She thanked the Leader for responses to her previously submitted questions and asked the following questions:-

- it would be useful for the budget report to have clarity on what had been removed and what had been completed;
- there was an increase in the Capital Budget for IT, with a recurring cost of £200,000 a year to Strata. Was the Council getting value for money from this service?
- was there a specific maintenance budget for equipment at St. Sidwells Point?
- the removal of Mallison Bridge from the budget especially with partner commitment to match funding was a concern. Discussions had been held about including Mallison Bridge for either CIL or Section 106 funding which needed to be addressed; and
- Northernhay Gardens had been closed for several months and investment needed to be made on refurbishing the infrastructure and maintenance as a location of civic pride and green space for the city centre.

The Leader thanked Councillor D. Moore for the further questions and requested that the questions be sent to him, so he could provide a response.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- Directors and officers were thanked for their hard work in addressing the vast challenges needed to make savings for the financial year; and
- there had been many cuts made to local services and funding over the last decade, however, service expectations had not changed. It was disappointing that there had been another one-year settlement received from the Government, rather than a long-term plan to help the Council in delivering its services.

In response to a Member's question, the Director Finance advised that although part of the budget had been deferred as part of the re-profiling of the Capital Programme, Corporate Property had re-profiled £100,000 for the roof on Bradninch Place into this financial year.

The amendment to the recommendation was seconded by Councillor Wright, which was voted on, and unanimously supported.

RECOMMENDED that Council note the contents of the report and approve the principles of establishing a balanced Revenue Budget and Capital Programme.

8

COUNCIL TAXBASE AND NNDR 1 2023/24

The Executive received the report which set out the 2023/24 Council Tax base in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012. The report also sought approval to delegate the estimate of Business Rate Income (NNDR1) for the next financial year to the Director Finance.

Particular reference was made to the proposed Council Tax Base for 2023/24 of 38,247, which was an increase of 581 Band D equivalent properties which was considered to be a positive increase compared to the budgeted 1% increase over the past few years. Members noted that a system software update was required to produce the NNDR1, which would take place in later January 2023, and to meet the legal requirement to notify interested parties and Government accordingly, delegated authority was sought to approve the NNDR1.

The Chair enquired on the 581 Band D equivalent properties, and requested a breakdown of the properties, to see if they were new or existing homes.

In response to a Member's question, the Director Finance advised the money from Council Tax and Budget Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan would be used to set balance budget.

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 2023/24 shall be 38,247; and
- (2) the responsibility to approve the Council's NNDR1 return by 31 January 2023 be delegated to the Section 151 Officer.

9

HOUSING RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES 2023-24

Councillor Denning and Councillor D. Moore declared pecuniary interests and left the meeting during consideration of the following item.

The Executive received the report which set out the proposed changes to Council dwelling rents, garage rents and service charges with effect from 1 April 2023.

Particular reference was made to the Governments long term rent policy which enabled an annual rent increase of CPI plus 1% for a five-year period, which commenced in 2020. The CPI figure for September 2022 was 10.1%, which would have enabled the Council to apply a 11.1% increase on housing rent, however, the Government having reviewed the policy, had allowed a standalone 7% cap for 2023/24.

Members noted that the 7% rent increase was higher than anticipated in the HRA Medium Term Financial Plan at the start of the year. It was below the cost increases seen in the HRA and would support covering the cost of the challenges seen in the HRA budget.

The proposed garage and service charges were proposed to also be raised by 7%. The service charge was intended to cover the cost of providing services to support

balancing the account. One exception, however, was the 12% increase in contents insurance to reflect the anticipated increase in premiums.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- thanks were given to officers for the work and effort provided in supporting tenants. It was noted that, although the rent increase was capped at 7%, it was still below the rate of inflation of 11%;
- rental income could not be used to support other Council areas and could only be used to support housing; and
- the Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Council Housing had previously spoken with tenants who had provided a positive response to the rent increases.

In response to a question raised, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council was mindful of tenants going into rent arrears and additional support would be provided to tenants. The Council would continue to do all it could to support financial challenges faced by residents.

RESOLVED that the Executive approves:

- (1) the increase of Council dwelling rent by 7% from 1 April 2023;
- (2) the increase of garage rent by 7% from 1 April 2023; and
- (3) the increase of service charges by 7% from 1 April 2023, with the exception of charges specified in paragraph 11.3 of the report presented at the meeting.

10

LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2023

The Executive received the report which sought Member's agreement on the Local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for working age residents for 2023/24, which Members were required to approve annually.

Particular reference was made to maintaining the current local Council Tax support scheme for the financial year. A fuller review of the scheme would be undertaken by officers during the financial year to bring forward a new proposal for 2024.

Councillor D. Moore, as an opposition group leader, spoke on this item. She welcomed the report and the Equality Impact Assessment, which had provided a thoughtful response to each characteristic.

During the discussion the Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Council Housing, commented on monitoring the level of support for residents going into arrears with their Council Tax. She advised that impact assessments would be undertaken and support would be provided to residents.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve that the Local Council Tax Scheme in place for the current year continues for 2023-24 without substantive changes.

11

REPORT ON MEMBER TRAINING

The Executive received the report which provided an update on the progress of work on the Members' training programme. The also report highlighted Members' attendance for the various training sessions, which had been held since August 2022 and feedback statistical data on training or briefing sessions attended. The report also highlighted attendance for the various tour and shadowing opportunities

made available to Members during the period and highlighted the number of completed certificates received for the new on-line training platform.

Particular reference was made to:-

- the report had been updated to provide a statistical breakdown of the attendance and feedback data, allowing the report to be presented in the public part of the meeting;
- since the report publication, the number of completed certificates for the online training platform had risen to 17 and Councillor records had been updated accordingly; and
- there had been fewer training events held in the period, due to cancellation and rescheduling following the death of Her Majesty the Queen. The attendance figures presented, were on par with the previous quarter and the trend showed that had the training events continued, there would have been a positive improvement in the attendance figures.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- the City Council had been awarded the Carbon Literacy Bronze Award status based on the number of staff and Members who had undertaken the training;
- the report reflected the significant improvement in attendance, which was supported by the different ways in which training was undertaken. Thanks were given to all the officers who provided training, tours and shadowing opportunities to Members;
- it was encouraging to see Members undertaking the training opportunities provided and thanks were given to the Democratic Services team for their work on expanding and improving the training programme; and
- The Councillor Development Steering Group would be looking to contact more experienced Members to help with training new Councillors, following the election in May 2023.

In response to a question raised, the Democratic Services Team Leader advised that at the time of writing the report, the data for the Carbon Literacy training was not available, but would be included as part of the figures in the next quarterly report.

The Chair welcomed the work being undertaken by the Councillor Development Steering Group and recognised the need to have training available to develop Councillor skills and using experienced Members to support new Members.

RESOLVED that the Executive note the Members' Training report.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.27 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

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