

# REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 5 October 2023

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

### COUNCILLOR WILLIAMS PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PLACE AND CITY MANAGEMENT

#### **1. Issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities**

**1. Parks and Open Spaces & Cleansing:** The recruitment of temporary and full time operatives remains difficult across Public Realm Services, with a particular impact on the low skilled roles within Street Cleansing and Parks.

The service has implemented statutory prioritisation plan that reduces the short-term reliance on temporary staffing to cover absences and immediate labour requirements, however this does leave temporarily resource shortages in non-statutory provision.

The service has identified career development pathways for low skilled roles, and are using apprenticeships to motivate and upskill existing employees. Alongside the recent pay agreement, the Public Realm employment offer is now a more competitive offer as a result, and whilst this has not seen a the complete resolution of recruitment constraints, it has reduced recruitment constraints in comparison to 2021-2022.

**2. Parks and Open Spaces:** Heightened rainfall over spring/ summer has prevented operational teams suspending grass cutting to allow maintenance of city wide shrub beds and overgrowth. Operations offset seasonal maintenance in order to achieve both grass and shrubs annually within budgets and available resource. Rain has enabled grass growth to continue throughout the season, preventing operations from releasing resource from the 12 FTE grass team to carry out other works.

To reduce the impact of resource shortages parks and open spaces will be prioritising safety related shrub and overgrowth works until grass season ends later in the year. This will include assisted living sites and encroachment.

**3. Allotment Availability:** Allotment service demand continues to exceed available sites. Currently up to 800 residents have expressed an interest in having an allotment with only 300 possible tenancies becoming available.

To reduce waiting times and increase availability the service currently:

- Limits the size of leasable plots to 5 rods, to ensure maximum tenancies are available on each site.
- Carries out ongoing clearances of redundant/ neglected plots to increase the leasable portfolio where resources and budget allow.

- Manage tenancies and enforce allotment rules and regulations ensuring best- value across sites.
- Work closely with, planning and provide commentary on development proposals with a view to identifying and extending allotment provision within the city where practicable.

**4. Car Parking Maintenance:** As part of their daily enforcement rounds, the Car Park team carry out adhoc visual inspections for both surface and multi-storey car parks. They also carry out monthly recorded inspections which are recorded on AssessNet. Inspections are from an operational point of view such as potholes, broken Pay & Display machines, broken fencing, electrical faults and any other immediate H&S issues. If works are required on a surface car park the team arrange the works, if work is required within a Multi-Storey car Park, the fault/issue is reported on the Corporate Property Asset database from them to address.

Engineers carry out annual detailed inspections on surface car parks, developing a list of maintenance required, broken down into High, Medium and Low priorities. Once the annual inspections have taken place, the car park team meet with Engineers to develop a programme of works.

Corporate Property carry out annual inspections in Multi-Storey Car Parks on items such as drains, M&E, dry risers, lighting and fire alarms. On occasion, they carry out Condition Surveys on Multi-Storey car parks to identify any structural defects within the building. If any defects are identified and dependant on the severity, actions are taken to reduce usage or even closing parts of or all of the Multi-Storey car park.

As of April 2023, a small maintenance budget of £72,080 was introduced within car parking to address the backlog of issues and faults. A programme of works have been developed to address the long list of H/M/L issues/faults that have been identified from Engineering and Car Park inspections.

**5. Waste Management:** Recruitment continues to be problematic with respect to drivers of 7.5 tonne and 26 tonne vehicles as well as in other roles such a loaders and MRF operatives, as is the case with many Councils and Businesses nationally.

However the service has been embarking on an internal development programme giving opportunity to a number of staff within the service the opportunity to qualify as drivers. Whilst this is not a quick fix and completion of the various tests require can take a number of months, it has improved the number of drivers and business continuity of the service. To date 7 drivers have become drivers through this scheme.

**6. Waterways:** Moorings & navigation aids servicing vessel Can-Doo has now been decommissioned. The replacement vessel that we intend to charter is not ready for service yet, I anticipate that it will be ready by mid-October. Because there has been a gap now without such a vessel, we have had to contract out to Teignbridge Harbour for a small number of important tasks that needed to be completed with the navigation aids. The costs of hiring in a vessel to do our work is currently £2.3K per day.

Staffing continues to be under pressure.

## **2.Update or commentary on any major ongoing programmes of work**

**1. Heavitree Paddling Pool Development:** Heavitree Paddling pool development is ongoing. It is anticipated that the contract tender will commence before December 2023, with a secondary public consultation on site designs carried out in the next financial year (May to July 2024). Pending the refurbishment of the play area as part of the programme, a number of new play items will be installed to replace recent removals. These will be incorporated into the final design.

**2. KGV/ Countess Wear road retaining wall remedial work:** Development and planning work has commenced to restore the embankment on Countess Weir road. Ground investigations are near completion and pending outcomes the initial designs are anticipated by the end of the year. The date for the commencement of works is dependent on design approval by the Highways authority, however it is anticipated that works will commence in full by mid-to- late 2024.

**3. Brohmams Farm playing field re-establishment:** Specifications and approvals have been finalised for Brohmams farm reestablishment. Public and Green Space anticipates the contract for works will be awarded mid to late January 2024. Operations permitting, site development will take place from spring 2024 with an anticipated opening date spring/ summer 2025 subject to change.

**4. Rougemont footpath work:** The redevelopment of Rougemont Park, castle wall footpath will commence and be finalised this year. This will see the footpath through the tower between Rougemont and Northernhay, resurfaced and reopened, enabling access egress between the two oldest parks in the City.

**5. Ash Die Back:** 2023/24 condition surveys are in progress with an anticipated completion date at the end of September. These inspections will inform levels of remedial works required over the next financial year. So far ADB seems to be spreading more slowly than expected.

**6. Play programme:** There are currently 8 play areas on the list for 2023/24 minor refurbishments based on equipment condition reports. Sites anticipating works are: Merrivale Road, Bull Meadow, KGV Inclusive, Lancelot Road, Fleming Way, Mulberry Close, George's Close, Exwick Play Area. Any further works required will be prioritised by risk and budget availability.

**7. Street cleansing service change:** Street cleansing optimisations are ongoing. To date the litter bin review and member meetings have been completed. Preliminary planning meetings have been conducted with the Route management consultants. Route management consultants will optimise delivery schedules for both deep clean and litter vans to support city

wide coverage post resource reductions. Schedule trials are anticipated in January 2024 and commencement of revised schedules end of March 2024.

**8. Car Park Capital works:** A programme is being developed for a series of structural repairs and general refurbishment works in the Cathedral and Quay, King Williams Street, John Lewis, Princesshay 2 and the Guildhall car parks. The work will be progressed by the Corporate Property Team as soon as resources become available.

**9. MRF refurb:** A report regarding the MRF Investment and Associated work will be presented to Executive and Council.

**10. Food waste** has now been rolled out to just over 20,000 properties in the city. Whilst there were teething problems with a minority of collections, the roll out has gone relatively well. Further roll out is dependent upon the MRF Investment and associated works, which will be discussed in more detail in the forthcoming report.

**11. Canal Gate and bank repairs:** Lock gates at the Turf and Kings Arms are leaking badly –these require capital expenditure. The banks at the lower end of the canal are leaking and in urgent need of repair.

### **3. Issues that may impact : services delivery/financial performance/future budget requirements**

**1. Inflationary increases:** supplies, materials, and commercial rates have continued to rise significantly this has seen prices increase substantially and will put strain on revenue budgets over the next financial year. This rise is universal across all services within Net Zero and City Management but is significantly impacting on Waste Management and Fleet, Public Realm, Bereavement Services, Public Toilets, Allotments and Engineering.

**2. Bereavement Services income:** Low income levels, likely to be ongoing putting strain on service budgets.

**3. Recruitment:** As mentioned in section 1, recruitment is still an issue across our entire front line manual workforce. Our neighbouring authorities are also struggling with the same problems so the issue isn't just confined to Exeter.

### **4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered**

**1.** The authority is still awaiting the government decision on changes in waste management and collection. Since my last report, the implementation of the deposit return scheme has been delayed until October 2024 at the earliest and no decision has been made on the type of scheme that will be implemented. The Extended Producer Responsibility Payments have also been deferred until 2025. The government has announced that it is looking at charges associated with household waste collection facilities (which will affect Devon County Council) and bulky waste collections (which are an Exeter City Council function). No detail on those reviews is available.

**5. Other matters the Portfolio Holder wishes to raise with the Scrutiny Committee**

**1. Belle Isle Relocation:** Development restrictions enforced by SWW have eliminated the use of the preferred relocation site, Exton Road Weighbridge. Alternative sites are being considered with no alternatives having been identified to date.

**2. Harbour Revision Order:** The application has been accepted by the Marine Management Organisation without amendment for validation.

**3. Removal of Wrecks:** A number of wrecks have been removed from the river and riverbanks and disposed of. Note: it is a statutory obligation on the port authority to lift and remove a wreck that may present a danger to navigation within port limits under the Merchant Shipping Act 1996.

**4. Heritage Harbour Festival 23-24 September:** a berth has been prepared for the Snark, and Britannia is to be craned in at west Quay.