

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 June 2024

Present:

Councillor Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)
Councillors Mitchell, M, Atkinson, Ellis-Jones, Haigh, Hughes, Jobson, Moore, D, Rees,
Rolstone and Snow

Apologies:

Councillors Knott, Palmer and Williams, M

Also present:

Service Lead - Active & Healthy People, Director Finance, City Surveyor, Service Lead -
Communications, Tourism & Culture, Service Lead Legal Services, Democratic Services
Manager and Democratic Services Officer

In attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk	- Council Leader
Councillor Naima Allcock	- Portfolio Holder for City Development
Councillor Matthew Vizard	- Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities
Councillor Duncan Wood	- Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services and Healthy Living

20 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2024 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the addition of a vote of thanks given to Sharon Sissons.

21 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

22 **Questions from Members of the Public Under Standing Order No.19**

There were no questions submitted by the public.

23 **Questions from members of the Council Under Standing Order No.20**

There were no questions from members.

24 **Commercial Property Review**

Chair proposed that Commercial Property Review be heard.

The Director Finance introduced the report stating that there were around 600 leases and licenses, many historic owned since wartime and all were within the city.

The City Surveyor presented the report making the following points:

- There was a substantial asset value of £98.5million with an annual rental income of £8.38 million;
- In addition, land ownership strengthened strategic control of land use and regeneration
- A review of disposals would be coming to Executive as a more proactive approach was needed;
- There were recruitment issues within the team and innovative approaches were being explored to address this; and
- the funds for the Guildhall were ring-fenced.

The Director Finance and the City Surveyor answered questions from Members as follows:

- any sales funds not used for debt repayment would need to be invested and may break-even but longer-term interest rates may fall and impact on investment;
- rents were reviewed with new leases and rent review events. There were opportunities for restructuring of leases in locations such as the High Street and Marsh Barton;
- there was a budget of £1.7million to address Environmental Performance Certificates when properties were returned;
- it was requested that the Scout Hut make contact with the team with a proposition and the lease length could then be discussed;
- the wider corporate aims to reduce carbon impact to objectives would be added;
- Capital receipts go into the General Fund and were treated as any other funding;
- interest and capital were paid, as fixed rate loans and all would have a zero balance at the end;
- there were a number of capital requirements which would need to be prioritised;
- the government were not encouraging the acquisition of commercial property, hence the Guildhall funds were ring-fenced for use on regeneration activities;
- Office occupancy was down but Senate Court was amongst the most modern offices in the city which people are willing to pay for, but re-investment was needed to continue this;
- an asset strategy review was required but should take place after the corporate restructure;
- some historic assets were used as operational spaces and the Council worked with the historic organisations;
- there were not many applications under community asset transfer;
- the city wall was not strictly commercial but a member of the team was working on a repair project;
- a report would be coming on Belle Isle. Mary Arches was on the market and CityPoint and Clifton Hill will follow;
- there were government rules around paying back and re-financing of the Guildhall, with a management agent in place dealing with billing, tenants and maintenance, which was also monitored by a Council accountant;
- there were not really any post-covid trends around voids. The long-term void in the Guildhall was paying rent in full and not sub-letting; and
- recruitment issues within the team were problematic.

Councillor Mitchell proposed and Councillor Moore seconded the following recommendation which following the vote was carried.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive Committee consider a review of the current Asset Management Policy in relation to commercial property.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

25 **Leisure Service Update**

The Service Lead - Communications, Tourism & Culture presented the report making the following points:

- leisure was taken back in-house in 2020;
- the team had bucked the national trend and were trying to improve daytime footfall;
- there was a lot of competition, but the rise in budget gyms was now falling;
- work was being undertaken on linking with other teams to meet corporate priorities;
- there had been successes in joint working with GP Referral Schemes being nationally recognised, which saw over 200 people per week, with a waiting list of 80 and making a profit. There were strong links with NHS teams and the voluntary sector;
- the staffing model had changed following received advice and research undertaken about what people want and need;
- diversification work was ongoing for the digital offer;
- there was a need to be cost-neutral, which was a challenge with aging stock. Northbrook would come to Council, St Sidwell's Point required updating, Wonford had proposals on the table and Riverside had ongoing challenges;
- the team was still recovering from staffing changes;
- there were just under 12,000 members with 47,000 pay as you go members. Attrition had also peaked with university students leaving;
- work was being undertaken on creating social cohesion using the available space, such as the Northcott Theatre using space for junior sessions;
- Active Devon were a critical partner for benchmarking; and
- the net cost of the service for 2024-35 was £2.8million

The Service Lead - Communications, Tourism & Culture answered questions from Members as follows:

- data had been collected from projects such as Pelican and each one was reviewed to enhance and improve accessibility;
- data was also shared between teams, with Active and Healthy People looking at areas of deprivation and reach out to where there was no leisure facility;
- there is potential to increase income as St Sidwell's and Riverside had reached capacity;
- the pricing structure would be reviewed for implementation next year, and would consider peak/off-peak;
- the revenue cut had been difficult but would not compromise Health and Safety; There was no date for becoming cost-neutral due to the aging buildings;
- most swimming pools generally loss money but St Sidwell's Point bucked this trend;
- junior and family options would be considered when addressing prices, as current 12 for 10 didn't apply;
- there were no outcomes from the travel plan which had been worked on with the bus station. The report would have gone to Devon County Council but there were no final results currently;

- the Council continued to encourage sustainable travel through green tourism and had arrangements with Stagecoach and GWR;
- car parking pricing was being looked at to see if there was anything which could be done for members;
- Northbrook was in an area of deprivation and was a fantastic facility, however it required a Member decision in future;
- Riverside didn't always look clean despite using appropriate cleaning chemicals. Issues raised at the meeting would be picked up with operational team; and
- a breakdown of memberships would go to the Executive, but the highest was adult gym memberships, followed by adult swimming and then junior and swimming lessons.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

26 **Live and Move Strategy**

The Service Lead – Active and Healthy People presented their report and made the following points:

- a further application for funding had been made to Sport England, the outcome of which would be determined in a couple of weeks;
- there had been a focus on lower super-output areas;
- the Active Lives survey provided rich information to inform where resources were pointed;
- there was a focus on those doing no activity, and the survey demonstrated a year-on-year reduction of those doing zero activity;
- there was a £4.50 return on every £1 invested, which could be greater for those increasing from zero activity;
- work was being undertaken with Inclusive Exeter to improve activity in diverse communities;
- the Live and Move programme was nationally recognised as being innovative; and
- there had been an increase in the proportion of families who were active.

The Service Lead – Active and Healthy People answered questions from Members as follows:

- through partnership with Devon County Council and the LCWIP, support had been provided for a number of schemes however, Sport England work had supported Newtown area;
- Alphington Green Circle diversion would have a consultation later this year and may potentially require partner finance;
- the Ebrington Road area was contained within the St Thomas priority area
- governance belonged with the Council as the host organisation and was contracted until the end March 2025 subject to the further ask of funding for 2025-2028
- Sport England would meet on 25 June 2024;
- data was based on the annual local lives survey and had a dashboard and focus on the 20 lower super-output areas;
- information could be provided on protected characteristics in future;
- there had been a focus on culture, long-term health conditions and low income;
- the Wonford Hub governance would be decided post-planning;
- the Alphington crossing idea had been appraised by Devon County Council and deemed not feasible;

- King George V playing field was a multi-use area for football, walkers and those enjoying the biodiversity. There was a shortfall of three ATP pitches and work with the Community Trust would be taking place;
- community builders were the eyes and ears on the ground, connecting directly with their communities;
- there was learning to be had from the programmes which have been in place such as those for girls and women;
- teenage girls showed the largest drop-off in activity;
- it was a great time for girls' rugby with two city teams and another about to begin ahead of the Womens Rugby World Cup in 2025; and
- there was a focus on the city working with Cranbrook as a satellite town to identify barriers such as single car occupancy, which for Cranbrook, was the highest in the country.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services and Healthy Living was invited to the table and answered questions as follows:

- he acted on HATOC as an independent Member, rather than as a Portfolio Holder;
- he supported Devon County Council with elements which learned from and work with local communities;
- work was being looked at for improvement to transport options and seeking more active travel;
- HATOC were undertaking an equalities impact assessment and seeking legal advice and there will be learning from the analysis; and
- the Live and Move Strategy would support Devon County Council to learn and it was important to note Exeter City Council only monitored emissions.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

27 **Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan**

The Chair shared that the Scrutiny Programme Board had been re-scheduled and would be meet on 17 June 2024.

The Service Lead Legal Services, in responding to a question from a Member, agreed to look at the Scrutiny forms and processes for submission, with the Scrutiny Programme Board.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.34 pm

Chair

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