

## Your Plymouth

**Monday 10 March 2014**

### **PRESENT:**

Councillor Tuffin, in the Chair.

Councillor Sam Leaves, Vice-Chair.

Councillors Casey, Damarell, Philippa Davey, Jarvis, Jordan, Martin Leaves, Michael Leaves, Rennie, Ricketts and Tuohy.

Co-opted Representative: Mr Steve Meakin.

Also in attendance: Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Community Development, Ann Thorp, Service Manager, Finance, Gareth Harrison-Poole, Waste and Street Scene Development Manager, Darin Halifax, Lead Officer, and Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 4 pm and finished at 5.35 pm.

*Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.*

### 32. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, the following declaration of interest was made –

<b>Name</b>	<b>Minute Number and Subject</b>	<b>Reason</b>	<b>Interest</b>
Mr S Meakin	37 – Emergency Welfare Support (Social Fund)	Money Advice Co-ordinator, Devon and Cornwall working with Citizens Advice Bureau whom hold a contract with the City Council	Personal

### 33. **MINUTES**

Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2014, subject to Minute 24 – Personal Debt – being amended to reflect that there were 8.8 million people in debt and not 8 million, as recorded.

### 34. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

### 35. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel considered its work programme with a view to identifying items to carry forward to the 2014/15 municipal year, bearing in mind the requirement to also scrutinise the Council's Transformation Programme. With regard to the Transformation Programme, the Chair reported that there may be an additional meeting of panels in April in order to brief members on the individual business plans and outline how the scrutiny process would be undertaken. Members were advised that the focus for Your Plymouth would be Customer and Service Transformation.

A concern was raised that there appeared to be duplication in the budget in terms of funding identified for Transformation with two separate budget line headings; one referring to Transformational Change and the other to Reshaping Council Services. As there was no detail provided against each of the budget headings it was difficult to ascertain exactly what each was for.

Agreed that –

- (1) two cooperative reviews will be carried forward to the 2014/15 municipal year, namely –
  - Personal Debt
  - The effects of the expansion of Plymouth University and its students on the surrounding residential areaswith Personal Debt to be undertaken first;
- (2) with regard to the query raised about the Transformation budget, clarification would be sought and circulated to panel members via e-mail.

### 36. **TREE MANAGEMENT**

The panel heard from Gareth Harrison-Poole, Waste and Street Scene Development Manager, who was in attendance to update members on progress with establishment of a Tree Management Policy for the City. Members were advised that –

- (a) trees enhanced the quality of life in the urban environment and formed an important part of its diversity. In addition, trees contributed to people's health and wellbeing and enhanced the enjoyment of the City;
- (b) the Tree Management Policy was designed to provide a framework for the management of trees owned and managed by the City Council and set out the guiding principles for managing the City's tree stock in regard to what will be done and how;
- (c) with regard to questions raised at the last meeting, responses had been circulated via the Democratic Support Officer and were attached as an appendix to the report.

In response to further questions raised, Members heard that –

- (d) the budget was spent by dealing with dead, dying and dangerous trees as a priority and then any remaining funds would be spent dealing with lower risk issues. However, the recent storm damage had impacted on the Council's ability to deal with lower risk issues at the end of this financial with many trees brought down in Central Park alone;
- (e) concerns over encroachment issues should be raised with the Council's Corporate Property and Legal teams;
- (f) the Council held regular dialogue with the Highways Agency and shared a tree maintenance inspection regime. This was particularly important where there were high risk trees on major trunk roads;
- (g) the Council had a duty to protect certain identified trees under Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), as detailed in the report. The removal of trees along Outland Road had been decided as part of a planning application process agreed by the Planning Committee on condition that replacement trees were provided elsewhere within the development site. A list of all trees covered by TPOs was held by the Council and was available for inspection by members on the GPS;
- (h) the City Council had no authority to take action on trees or hedgerows on private land. The services of the Council's Legal team were called upon when necessary on a case-by-case basis and they would determine whether or not a case was worth pursuing taking a risk-based approach;
- (i) relevant legislation relating to high hedges and the local neighbourhood act would be included in the policy document.
- (j) following consideration by scrutiny, it was anticipated that the Tree Management Policy would shortly be formally adopted.

Members welcomed and supported the Tree Management Policy and, on behalf of the panel, the Chair thanked the officer for his attendance and a well-written, easy-to-read report.

### 37. **EMERGENCY WELFARE SUPPORT (SOCIAL FUND)**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Community Development, and Ann Thorpe, Service Manager, who were in attendance to provide an update on progress with delivery of the Emergency and Welfare Fund (EWF) following its implementation in April 2013. Highlights of the report included –

- because of the lack of information available from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about allocations made under the previous scheme, it had been difficult to predict demand for the EWF and this had therefore resulted in the scheme being limited in terms of the scope and level of award;

- better promotion of the scheme had been undertaken with staff working closely with colleagues internally and partners externally to target those likely to be in need of support, this including working with Plymouth Energy Community (PEC) to promote switching to cheaper energy providers;
- a series of measures funded from the EWF had been agreed by Councillor Penberthy;
- customers were now provided with payments by BACS in order to secure white goods for themselves;
- 10,710 calls had been received since April 2013 with a significant increase since September;
- despite a slow take-up, spend projections indicated that the 2013/14 budget was now on track to be fully allocated.

In response to questions raised, Members were advised that –

- (a) the Government had recently announced that funding for the social fund replacement scheme would be cut from 2014/15. Consideration was being given to deliver the scheme for a further three years, operating on a reduced budget by being more creative with the money and focussing on prevention and early intervention work;
- (b) over 600 people in the City were waiting to downsize as a result of the impact of the bedroom tax. Those were being rebated as quickly as possible at an average cost of £500 each, however, this money was not coming out of the EWF;
- (c) the EWF was not designed to help support care leavers and it was not possible to keep the current system going without financial support from the Government. The Council was currently looking at alternative ways of providing white goods for care leavers;
- (d) further clarification on the number of posts in place to support the EWF and how they were being funded would be provided to the panel;
- (e) a fund for Medical Assessments and Disclosure and Barring Service Checks to assist people in accessing benefits and getting them back into work had been established where employers were asking the employee to pay;
- (f) consideration was being given to the Council offering a payday loan service for some payments through one of the City's credit unions. This was being done in London by a credit union who was offering a interest rate of thirty per cent, however, this was not something that Plymouth's credit unions felt they were currently able to take on alone;
- (g) credit reference checks would identify a person's level of borrowing and any borrowing requests, including any payday loans applied for.

The panel welcomed the update and the Chair congratulated the officers on how the EWF was being successfully managed.

Agreed that –

- (1) a report into the actions being taken to explore provision of white goods for care leavers following removal of funding from Central Government without consultation will be submitted to a future meeting of the panel;
- (2) the Cabinet Member for Cooperative and Community Development discusses with officers the possible implications of ‘naming’ and ‘shaming’ employers who were refusing to pay for employees Medical Assessments and D Disclosure and Barring Service Checks.

(Mr S Meakin declared a personal interest in respect of the above item).

(Councillor Ricketts left the meeting after consideration of the above item).

### 38. **COOPERATIVE REVIEW - UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS**

The Chair reported on the cooperative review into Unauthorised Encampments. He commented that it had been a difficult and emotive topic to cover, taking into consideration the concerns and expectations of the City’s residents and balancing those against the needs and rights of gypsies and travellers to be treated with dignity and respect. He thanked everyone who had been involved in the scrutiny process, particularly the officers involved in producing the final report which he described as constructive and well written.

Members noted the report which would now be submitted for consideration by the Cooperative Scrutiny Board.

### 39. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS**

Further to minute 35, the Chair welcomed approval of the review into Personal Debt by the Cooperative Scrutiny Board. He reported on his recent attendance at a debt summit where he had been astounded by some of the figures quoted and learned that some people often wait 12 months or more before seeking help. Members also heard that a report, which had been produced by the Debt Advice Service and published just after Christmas 2013, revealed that 29 per cent of adults in Plymouth were in debt.

The Chair explained that he had requested the review be webcast in order to try and get the message across that debt, and asking for help to address debt problems, was not something people should feel ashamed of. However, should this deter people from getting involved, consideration would be given to taking elements of the review in private session (Part 2).

The Vice-Chair highlighted the importance of ensuring the review was well-publicised before it started.

The panel noted its tracking resolutions schedule and, as this was the last meeting of 2013/14, the Chair thanked members for their contribution to scrutiny and stated that he looked forward to working with them in 2014/15.

40. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.