

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

8 November 2012

Present:

Councillor Crow (Chair)

Councillors Brock, Baldwin, Bialyk, Bull, Choules, Crew, Lyons, Mottram, Pearson, Prowse, Robson and Wardle

Also present:

Strategic Director (KH), Assistant Director Economy, City Arts and Events Manager, Events, Facilities and Markets Manager and Member Services Officer (SLS)

In attendance:

- Councillor Rachel Sutton - Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport
Councillor Rosie Denham - Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism

Also in attendance

- Richard Cohen - Deputy Chief Executive, East Devon District Council
Dom Jinks - Head of Arts and Culture, University of Exeter

42 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2012 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

43 Declarations of Interest

Members declared the following interests:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Bull	Minute 46 (associated with the Bike Shed Theatre and Member of the Exeter Canal and Quay Trust)
Councillor Pearson	Minute 46 (employee of Exeter Phoenix and contractor to the Bike Shed Theatre, Member of the Exeter and Canal and Quay Trust).
Councillor Wardle	Minute 46 (Member of the Exeter Canal and Quay Trust)

44 PRESENTATION BY RICHARD COHEN

The Chair welcomed Richard Cohen, Deputy Chief Executive of East Devon District Council, to the meeting. He spoke about the co-operation between the two authorities, and referred to their common interest in developing significant growth to

enable both areas to be as competitive as possible. He commented on the challenges and strategic issues facing East Devon including -

- Health issues against an ageing population
- Employment and Education and the efforts to drive up skill levels
- Environmental issues including managing recycling rates and access to and protection of the countryside
- Climate change, including dealing with the potential for significant flooding

Other changes in the population including an ageing profile, lower birth rate, young people finding it increasingly difficult to stay in the area, increased housing demand all provided pressures, which the Council was working hard to respond to as part of the Local Plan provision. It has identified 15,000 new homes and 170 hectares of employment land and final consultation was about to begin, with the formal Inspection in summer 2013. There would be significant opportunities, but it was recognised that this will be a challenging period and communication with the local community remained a vital part of the process. Mr Cohen concluded the presentation by referring to the shared vision with Exeter City Council to:-

- focus on the Growth Point and develop employment and community growth
- have a stronger voice with Government to lobby for further investment
- identify challenges and opportunities to champion jointly with the LEP, Devon County Council and Central Government
- develop the decision making process in relation to tighter resources against a backdrop of divergent demands
- develop infrastructure such as the Airport, Rail, and Superfast Broadband

Mr Cohen responded to Members' comments on the need to ensure there was an adequate range of employment, particularly for young people who needed good jobs and affordable homes. He acknowledged the comments made by Members on the potential for increased traffic levels from the planned development on the east side of the city. He responded to a comment on the A30 and A303 by advising that some support work had been undertaken by Somerset County Council with East Devon colleagues and the dualling of the A303 remained a key objective. The lack of post 16 education provision in Exmouth remained a concern, particularly as students had few options but to travel to Bicton, Exeter or further afield to Dorset or Somerset. It was an aspiration to encourage a College or educational satellite site to the town. Members acknowledged the development challenges faced by Exmouth and the need to freshen the image and increase the vibrancy.

Opportunities to secure funding for new infrastructure had also changed, East Devon District Council and its partners, including Exeter City Council, worked hard to keep on securing funding and it now presented more of a challenge. It was important to lobby as a partnership and joint negotiations should start to gather momentum and help build confidence in the private sector, albeit reluctantly. A Member referred to the Intermodal Freight Facility (IMF) which he hoped would help reduce the high levels of HGV traffic travelling through Exeter. Mr Cohen stated that projects such as the IMF were in the hands of the Church Commissioners, but further consultation was taking place.

The Chair thanked Mr Cohen for his presentation.

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS TO PRESENT THEIR HALF YEARLY REPORTS

Councillor Denham presented a progress report on priorities within the Economy and Tourism Portfolio for the forthcoming year. Responses to Members' comments and queries are set out below:-

- discussion on the relocation of the bus park for the proposed Bus and Coach Station was ongoing. When a realistic alternative to the Exmouth Junction site had been formally identified, Members would be involved in that process.
- the expansion of cultural activities in the city, including more innovative visual art projects should enable more unconventional spaces for performance to be identified.
- a register of commercial lets and employment sites were available on the Council's web site, but it was agreed that there was a need to increase awareness of the available database and support offered by officers to locate suitable accommodation for new and relocating organisations.
- there should be a cross section of representatives including local Councillors and traders to discuss ways of improving the public realm. St Thomas Community Association was an example of a group who have galvanised support and driven forward a commitment to improve the local environment. It was important to ensure there was support for other parts of the city to develop a social infrastructure, and opportunities to stimulate funding from funding streams such as the New Homes Bonus should be investigated. The interest expressed at the meeting to look at continuing the work started in Heavitree was noted.

Councillor Sutton presented a progress report on priorities within the Transport and Sustainable Development Portfolio for the forthcoming year. Responses to Members' comments and queries are set out below:-

- the annual report on parking tariffs would be made to the November meeting of Executive. The Strategic Director suggested if any Member wished to make a comment to contact one of their Executive colleagues, or the Assistant Director Public Realm.
- the Boundary Commission determined changes to boundaries on a rolling basis, with the most pressing areas likely to be considered first. Any comments should be directed to them in the first instance.
- a sample of the Princesshay artwork was on temporary display in Roman Walk. The City Council had contributed £40,000 to the project with an equal contribution by Land Securities. A cross party group of Members had agreed the design as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The art work would be installed on the curved wall of the Princesshay car park.
- the £3million contribution from the City Council to upgrade the city's flood defences was a substantial sum for a local authority to find, and every effort should be made to lobby Central Government to increase the support. It was important to have an effective partnership with the Environment Agency, the County Council, the LEP and local businesses particularly in low lying areas such as Marsh Barton.

- work on an open space strategy, looking at public space had commenced, but needed to be set in the context of the Council's Transformation Programme and restructured as part of the way the Council's services are delivered. An update in terms of the timescale would be provided at the next Scrutiny Committee - Economy meeting.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the priorities presented for the Economy and Tourism and Sustainable Development and Transport Portfolios for the forthcoming year.

(Reports circulated)

46 **THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR EXETER 2013 - 2018**

Councillor Bull declared a personal interest as he was associated with the Bike Shed Theatre and as a Member of the Exeter Canal and Quay Trust.

Councillor Pearson declared a personal interest as an employee of Exeter Phoenix, as a contractor to the Bike Shed Theatre, and as a Member of the Exeter and Canal and Quay Trust.

Councillor Wardle declared a personal interest as a Member of the Exeter Canal and Quay Trust.

The City Arts and Events Manager presented a report, which set out the initial progress towards developing a Cultural Strategy for Exeter covering the period 2013 – 2018, in co-operation with the Exeter Cultural Partnership. Members' views were sought on a draft framework, which would be brought back to Scrutiny Committee - Economy in March 2013, before going out for wider consultation. The Strategy would help to facilitate an increase in the commitment to the arts and culture, which can make such a difference to the well being and sustainability of a community.

The following strategic goals were proposed in the Strategy –

- to develop a vibrant cultural economy with Exeter as a cultural destination
- to develop cultural opportunities and experiences
- to enable wide and diverse participation
- to create capacity building and sustainability for the cultural sector
- communication and audience development

Dom Jinks, Head of Arts and Culture at Exeter University, attended the meeting and welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the development of the cultural economy in Exeter. The City Arts and Events Manager added that the strategy would encourage greater local participation and empower local communities. In response to a Member's question, she stated that the strategy and the consultation would be open to the wider cultural sector, to sports, heritage, lifelong learning organisations and independent creative industries such as designers and individual artists as well as them being involved in the arts and theatre. Dom Jinks also responded to comments on the scope and cost of the consultation, advising that an application had been made to the Arts Council to support the City Council's contribution to the next stage of the process.

Members supported the proposed approach to the delivery of a new Cultural Strategy for Exeter 2013 – 2018.

(Report circulated)

47 **MARKETS AND HALLS UPDATE**

The Events, Facilities and Markets Manager presented a report on the performance of the Markets and Halls team, including the managed facilities of the Matford/Livestock Centre, Exeter Corn Exchange and a number of markets within the city. The team had been working with colleagues in Economy to help facilitate the forthcoming Exeter Christmas Market on Cathedral Green, as well as organising the seasonal markets held in Castle Street and Fore Street. Members noted the improvement in the financial position of the budget, which had improved year on year, for the last three years. The forecast for the current year indicated a continuing upward trend. He responded to a Member's question regarding the increased livestock throughput at the venue in 2010/11 stating that this was due primarily to the high prices being achieved and also because of the relaxation on initial movement restrictions introduced in reaction to the bovine TB outbreak. There had also been an increase in the number and scale of events at the Corn Exchange, which had been made possible by the investment in tiered seating and a computerised box office which had enabled a more targeted mailing list to be developed.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

48 **PROPERTY VOIDS AND DEBTS**

The Assistant Director Economy presented a report which informed Members of the position regarding void properties as at 30 September 2012, and commercial rent debts for the four quarters ending on the September 2012 quarter day. The report identified key local property indicators against a relatively robust performance of the portfolio, in respect of regional and national trends.

An update was provided at the meeting. The latest position included three short term voids, and two short term lets. There were currently no long term voids. The net debt had reduced to £107,000, representing an outstanding debt of 2.3%. Every effort was made to ensure that premises remained occupied. It was noted that a number of tenants were trading at worryingly low levels, but with regular dialogue and management, every effort was being made to retain those tenancies. A Member asked whether the Estates Team would discuss or renegotiate terms. The Assistant Director Economy advised that they employed a range of options to assist business tenants, with each case being dealt with on an individual basis.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and the performance of the portfolio.

(Report circulated)

49 **BUDGET MONITORING REPORT TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2012**

The Strategic Director (KH) presented a report which advised the current revenue and capital position for the first six months of the 2012/13 financial year. Members were advised of any major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast up to 30 September 2012. During this period, the total of the variances indicated that the overall net expenditure for this Committee had decreased from the revised budget by £458,770. This included supplementary budgets of £71,060. The figures exceeded the anticipated budget projection, with Car Parks and Planning Services achieving better figures than expected.

The report also included a summary of the 2012/13 Economy and Development Capital Programme. Details of the individual projects were attached as an appendix. A review of a number of schemes had been proposed by the City Council's Strategic Management Team, in consultation with Portfolio Holders, and details of the variations would go forward to Executive on 4 December for approval. A response to a Member confirmed that further work on the environmental works in Cowick Street would be continued in the spring. It was also acknowledged that it would be appropriate to review whether to continue with the capital programme allocation for the Canal Basin and Quayside.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.15 pm

Chair