

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY
2 SEPTEMBER 2008

EXECUTIVE
16 SEPTEMBER 2008

LEISURE & MUSEUMS STRATEGY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members that the Leisure & Museums Strategy adopted as a draft last year has been subjected to wide consultation and broadly welcomed and supported.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Last year the Committee received and adopted a draft strategy for the work of the Leisure & Museums Unit. Final adoption was subject to public consultation, and the Unit drew up a consultation plan (Appendix I). Although somewhat delayed by pressure of work elsewhere, the Unit's staff carried out consultation during the second quarter of 2008. The results are set out in Appendix II.
- 2.2 The strategy itself takes a different line from previous strategies, in that it concentrates on outcomes rather than services or projects, which it places into four basic categories: physical activity and sport, play, canal and countryside and museums. It can be found on the City Council website at http://www.exeter.gov.uk/media/doc/3/k/Draft_Leisure_Museums_Strategy.doc.

3. RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

- 3.1 The consultation was conducted in a number of ways. Questions were included in Wavelength, the regular consultation tool used by the Council, and this prompted a good level of returns. The opportunity to comment was flagged on the front page of the Council's website, with links to the strategy and to the questionnaire, and copies of the questions were also sent to a number of organisations representing minorities in the community. It is the combined results which are displayed in the Appendix.
- 3.2 The five basic aims of the Leisure & Museums Unit, (improving health, offering learning, creating greater community involvement, enhancing the environment and improving the quality of life) received strong support, with improving health and enhancing the environment receiving the strongest backing.
- 3.3 We also set out the four basic services (canal and countryside, physical activity, play and museums) which the Unit provides through its various teams to achieve those aims, and asked how important each is to the city. The answers (Q7 in the appendix) showed remarkably strong agreement, with 99.3%, 92.2%, 94.3% and 96.1% respectively saying they were very important or important.
- 3.4 Questions 2,3,4 and 5 asked about the importance of the service objectives of the four different services, and again there was almost universal support for them.

- 3.5 Satisfaction with events and facilities was also high, although there were high numbers of respondents who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with them. This would appear to correspond in some degree with the numbers who did not report using facilities in the last 12 months.
- 3.6 The consultation also offered an opportunity to make comments and suggestions, and a number of respondents took it up. They are re-produced in their entirety in Appendix II, and offer a useful insight into people's interests and requirements. Our take on them as a whole is that all of them are important and relevant, but that they are effectively comments on our operation rather than our approach, with the exception of one or two dealt with below. As a result I have asked the section managers and team leaders to consider these items when preparing their service plans.
- 3.7 The most pertinent strategic questions from the consultation relate to the issue of how to measure what we do. While benchmarking, measurement and target setting has come, and to some extent gone, in local government, there has been little progress in finding ways of measuring the real worth of cultural services, in terms of quality and real effect at least. The government's Department for Culture Media and Sport has struggled long and hard to find indicators that would be realistic and at the same time measure something of value, but there has been little progress, beyond counting how many people visit museums, or take part in physical activity. We have tended to take the view that further search for quantitative measures is probably futile, and that the future lies with quality assurance systems, which mean that all services must address the issues of audience research, reflection on lessons learned and so on. This Council is using the Charter Mark route to do this, and all the Leisure & Museums services are part of the Community and Environment Charter Mark accreditation which has now been in force for a year.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The consultation has not thrown up any serious flaws or omissions in the Leisure & Museums strategy, and has demonstrated a strong degree of support both for the strategic approach and the current service provision. It is important not to be complacent about this, but to continue to seek ways of improving service, of listening to our customers, users and stakeholders, and maintain a creative approach through new services and funding streams.

5. RECOMMENDED

That Scrutiny Committee Community supports and Executive approves the formal adoption of the Leisure & Museums strategy.

HEAD OF LEISURE & MUSEUMS

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report: