

PUBLIC QUESTION RECEIVED for Place Scrutiny Committee – 9 November 2017 from Mr Mike Walton

To Cllr Rachel Sutton, as Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture.

Increasing productivity in our region and our city is crucial to growing the economy, strengthening business and increasing employment. It is to be welcomed therefore that the Heart of the South West Partnership is consulting on its Productivity Strategy. There is one major inhibitor to productivity that all citizens of Exeter will be familiar with. It is something that inhibits the free movement of goods and employees across the city and places a drag on our economy and our productivity growth. Exeter is not alone in facing this issue, by some measures this costs the UK economy £21bn a year. This inhibitor is congestion.

It is surprising therefore that the Productivity Strategy appears to make no mention of, and have no plans to address, congestion in the region or the city of Exeter.

There is some value in 'connecting' the towns and cities of the South West by investing in rail and road links, as the Productivity Strategy proposes. However, unless the congestion within these towns and cities is addressed then this greater 'connectivity' leads only to increased congestion, and with increased congestion comes decreased productivity.

Since this Productivity Strategy is currently undergoing consultation there is an opportunity to shape it. Will the Place Scrutiny Committee therefore request that Heart of the South West Partnership's Productivity Strategy includes measures for reducing congestion in our region and city?

The Chair, Councillor Sills read out the question from Mr Walton as he was unable to attend the meeting. The Portfolio Holder Economy and Culture, Councillor Sutton responded to the question. She thanked both Mr Walton and the Exeter Cycling Campaign for their question, which had raised an important issue currently affecting the city. Exeter City Council has been consulting with Exeter businesses to contribute to an Exeter wide response on the Heart of South West Productivity Plan. The Exeter Cycling Campaign had been included in this consultation.

The same issue raised by Exeter Cycling Campaign has been highlighted by officers of the City Council and will be included within the Exeter response. She encourage Exeter Cycling Campaign, as well as many other businesses in Exeter, to formally respond to the City Council consultation on the Productivity Plan.

The City Council consultation period closes 20 November, which provides time to compile a formal Exeter response to the Heart of the South West Productivity Plan by their closing date of 30 November 2017.

The consultation was being hosted on Torbay Council's web site at www.torbay.gov.uk/devolution

Members discussed congestion levels in the city. A Member considered that the levels were unacceptable and he would be raising the issue of congestion with Devon County Council. He also referred to the Exeter Board which could discuss this subject. A Member agreed that whilst the County Council were the Transport Authority, both Councils worked in partnership with all agencies to try and mitigate the impact of any changes to the bus service as well as looking at ways to reduce congestion.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture, Councillor Sutton referred to lengthy correspondence, lobbying and a meeting held last summer, which had been attended by representatives from Exeter City Council and Devon County Council as well as representatives from Exeter Chamber of Commerce, Highways England and the Police. The consensus had been that the current levels of traffic in Exeter were a major problem. She welcomed the comments from the Member and an undertaking to raise some of the issues at the Exeter Highways and Traffic Orders Committee. She hoped that it would be possible to set up a Transport Board to help address some of the issues raised more quickly and include partners such as Highways England.