

**MEMBER QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER at Place Scrutiny Committee –  
8 March 2018 - Questions from Councillor Hannaford**

Response to be made by Councillor Sutton Portfolio Holder Economy & Culture

**Question 1**

Could the Portfolio Holder please briefly outline the City Councils overall strategy to promote and support small and medium sized businesses, including independent traders?

**Response** - Councillor Sutton, the Portfolio Holder, Economy and Culture confirmed that the Growth and Enterprise team supported a wide range of businesses from across the city in terms of size and sectors. Small businesses and independent traders made up the majority of businesses within the city and were a very important part of economy. The team oversees The Exeter Key Employer Programme, a wide range of businesses were included within the programme from 1 or 2 man bands to international companies such as the Met Office. Different sectors were also included, such as retail and hospitality to professional services and advanced manufacturing and tech companies. The team meet these businesses once a year to gather data on business performance and to find out if they were encountering any challenges and to ensure the business remains open and located in Exeter. One area of work where valuable business information had been gained was on broadband, as a result a bid to the Local Full Fibre Network to improve superfast broadband to ultrafast in Exeter and Greater Exeter had been submitted.

The team were currently working across departments to promote City Council services that businesses access, and they were due to attend the South West Business Expo at WestPoint on 15 March. Services that are attending include, Invest in Exeter, Business Rates, Environmental Health, Licensing, City Development, Exeter Business against Crime (EBAC), Recycling, Trade Waste and Exeter Business Centre to highlight the good work that is being done. It was not just about being a regulatory body, but supportive advice to businesses was also offered. The team are due to undertake a business consultation exercise at the show to develop a Business First Charter – and are keen to articulate that they are very much pro-business. This topic will be the subject of a future report to Committee.

The City Council also manage the Exeter Commercial Property Register, and website allows any type and size of business to search for vacant property and offices within Exeter. The team supports and guide businesses on suitable vacant properties.

A new area of work will be around supporting businesses around skills, and a new post of Skills Officer is currently being recruited, which will support small and independent businesses within Exeter to recruit and retain the right talent. This new post will also work with schools, Exeter College and the University in ensuring that there are the right skills for the right type of vacant jobs in the city – not just now but for 5 – 10 years' time.

The City Council also manage Visit Exeter, which promotes Exeter to attract new and repeat visitors to the city. A major part of their work is to promote the variety and quality of small retail, hospitality and cultural businesses that were in Exeter.

The City Council supports and promotes areas across the city that face adversity, such as the fire that occurred in the Royal Clarence Hotel and the current flood alleviation works on the Quay. Visits are made to businesses on a regular basis to discuss progress and to address challenges and issues they face as a business.

Councillor Hannaford asked a supplementary question as to whether the City Council had set out their stall as a local council to dispel the myth that they were anti-business and anti-enterprise.

Councillor Sutton, the Portfolio Holder, Economy and Culture, referred to the interesting work taking place, and stated that she was proud of the business support in the city and as a key element that support would carry on.

**Question 2**

Is the Portfolio Holder aware that there are plans to reboot and reform the St Thomas Traders & Business Association?

**Response** - Councillor Sutton, the Portfolio Holder, Economy and Culture said that she was aware of the aspirations, both as a Portfolio Holder and as a Councillor for Westex.

**Question 3**

What guidance and support could the City Council give to this process? And he also qualified that was in relation to the potential BID and any guidance and support the City Council would give.

**Response** - Councillor Sutton, the Portfolio Holder, Economy and Culture confirmed that a member of the Growth & Enterprise team would be available to support the St Thomas Traders & Business Association in their efforts to reboot and reform. She also referred to the potential for a BID and certainly would facilitate any proposed meeting with the City Centre BID and it was hoped that a decision would be made on that in due course.

**Question 4**

Should it be the wish of local traders, could the Portfolio Holder, please consider facilitating a meeting to look at progressing a St Thomas Business Improvement District, with local members, council officers and businesses?

**Response** - Councillor Sutton, the Portfolio Holder, Economy and Culture reiterated her delight at facilitating a meeting with St Thomas businesses and members, as well as a number of City Council officers to discuss progressing a Business Improvement District for the area. We could also include the Exeter City Centre Business Improvement District within the discussions to learn from their journey.

Councillor Hannaford asked a supplementary question and any plans to expand St Thomas and Cowick as a major district shopping centre as they will benefit from a robust business and trading association.

Councillor Sutton stated that she welcomed the opportunity to share best practice for such a thriving part of the city.