

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

11 November 2004

Present:

Councillor Browning (Chair)

Councillors D.Baldwin, M.G. Baldwin, Bennett, Branston, Griffiths, Hannaford, Moore and Pettinger.

Director Economy and Development, Head of Economy and Tourism, Head of Legal Services, Head of Archaeological Field Unit, Transportation Strategy Officer, Engineering and Construction Manager and Member Services Officer (HB).

Also present:-

Councillor Mills: Portfolio Holder Planning and Transport.

Councillor Shepherd : Portfolio Holder Economy and Tourism.

Also present:-

Tracy Langford : Employer Engagement Manager for Exeter and East Devon, Job Centre Plus

Peter Jones : Carplus

Mark Hodgson : Chair, Execar

87. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2004 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

88. **Declaration of interests**

The following personal interest was declared:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
D.J. Morrish	90 (Member of Devon County Council)

89. **Job Centre Plus**

The Chair welcomed Ms Tracy Langford, Employer Engagement Manager for Exeter and East Devon to the meeting. She outlined the work of Job Centre Plus.

Job Centre Plus

- merger of Benefits Agency and Employment Services approximately three years ago to provide a one-stop shop for benefits and job searches;
- Exeter office opened at Clarendon House approximately 18 months ago. Different job roles with focus on encouraging a better customer service have greatly improved the overall system;
- 'Welfare to Work' - 'Work for those who can, help for those who can't'; and
- aim is social inclusion.

Specialist roles

- Employment Route Way advisors for incapacity benefits - before, applicants did not go through the Job Centre but now they are also required to discuss job opportunities and capacity to work;
- Lone Parent Advisors - advice on childcare, in-work benefits etc. 50 plus advisors, Disability Employment Advisors and Financial Assessors; and
- New Deal - categories are 18-24, 25 plus and Under 18.

Employer Engagement Team

- nine staff covering Exeter and East Devon helping fill over 4,500 vacancies;
- talk to employers about their needs and advise on employer incentives i.e. Two Ticks disability symbol; and
- work trials, job fairs and advice on wages.

Job Centre Plus and the economy

- JCP talk up local wages;
- employers advised on incentives to attract workers such as pensions, crèche and subsidised meals. Employers such as Sainsburys, Marks and Spencers and Tesco, who have been struggling to recruit staff, are encouraged to offer higher wages;
- GPs and Primary Care Trusts asked to encourage patients to work; and
- estimated that of the 2.5 million in the country on incapacity benefits, 1 million are ready to work and these are encouraged to return to work.

Unemployment figures

- presently 1,300 people in Exeter are actively seeking work; and
- 3,560 were on Income Support in September with 4,760 on incapacity benefit.

Members put the following questions to Ms Langford.

- **what is breakdown of 4,500 job vacancies?**
- **how is benefit processed if individuals are in hospital?**
- **how are long-term unemployed or those over fifty assisted?**
- particular shortages in retail, care, construction, hospitality and catering all because of lower pay;

- special mechanisms for those in hospital; and
- specialist advisors assigned to long-term unemployed and those over fifty. Because of a buoyant economy their chances of securing employment are relatively good.

Advice to pensioners on collecting their pension has been poor in some cases - for example a surgery at the RD & E Hospital lacked facilities. Can this be addressed?

Pension unit is a separate arm of Department for Work and Pensions. An officer will contact the Councillor.

The Chair thanked Ms Langford for a tour of the Centre. He referred to the poor wage levels in the region, forcing some people to seek two or three jobs.

Job Centre Plus is increasing the number of higher paid jobs on offer with more enquiries from the professional sector. Website, which is the largest in Europe, has 100,000 hits a day and there is a general recognition of the need to increase wages.

The Chair thanked Ms Langford. She invited Members to visit Job Centre Plus.

MATTER TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE EXECUTIVE

90. Sale of Motor Vehicles on the Highway

The Head of Legal Service reported on the proposal to make a byelaw prohibiting the sale of motor vehicles in the course of a business.

Councillor D.J. Morrish attended the meeting and spoke on this matter having given notice under Standing Order No 44. He welcomed the swift progress towards implementing a byelaw, but urged caution with regard to the ability of the Police to undertake adequate enforcement because of pressure on their resources. Because of the scale of the problem around the City, the Chair suggested that should enforcement become an issue, a meeting be sought with the Police.

The Head of Legal Services clarified that the byelaw would not apply to individual householders who occasionally sought to sell their car. Enforcement would require a degree of preparatory work. She advised that the wording of the draft byelaw was not negotiable since the draft attached to the report was the only form the ODPM would approve. The Magistrates were guided by a fixed scale and could increase fines for persistent offenders.

A Member referred to the continuing problem of the sale of imported cars in the Sydney Road/School Road area which were blocking residents' parking spaces and was fully in support of the proposal.

Members supported the following proposals:-

- (a) Executive be requested to recommend to Council to resolve to make the byelaw under the common seal of Exeter City Council in the form as set out in Schedule of the report; and
- (b) the Head of Legal Services be authorised to:-
- advertise the Council's intention to apply to the Secretary of State for confirmation of the byelaw in one or more local newspapers circulating in the area;
 - deposit a copy of the byelaw in the City Council's offices for inspection by members of the public for at least one month before the application for confirmation is made;
 - apply to the Secretary of State for confirmation of the byelaw made after the expiration of one month from advertising the Council's intention to apply for confirmation of the byelaw; and
 - write to Devon County Council and the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary formally requesting they enforce the provisions of the byelaw once confirmed.

(Report circulated)

In accordance with Standing Order No. 43, Councillor Pettinger requested that his name be recorded as having abstained in respect of the above decision.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION
BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY

91. **Progress on development of a Car Club in Exeter**

The Transportation Strategy Officer updated Members on the current progress of the Exeter Car Club.

The City Council had agreed to provide funding of £10,000 a year over three years to help with the development of the Car Club. No payment had been made to date, but invoices were expected shortly which would include the preparation of a Business Plan (£1,400), the setting up of the Exe Co-Car club as a company limited by guarantee and the setting up of booking and other systems (£350).

The Chair welcomed Mark Hodgson the Chair of Execar and Peter Jones of Carplus, a national charity and Trust seeking to encourage the development of car clubs as a form of sustainable transport. Execar (soon to be called Exe Co-Car) was a non-profit making social enterprise with a local administrator handling the bookings. Execar were to participate in a seminar to be held on 8 December at the Met Office organised by the Association for Commuter Transport to explain how the scheme could fit in with Green Travel plans. Both the Environment Agency and the Countryside Agency were backing the scheme.

Execar was not meant to be cheaper than other modes of transport as it could encourage more car journeys, but its aim was to reduce dependency on private motor cars and encourage public and non-motor transport. The take up of car club membership tended to be slow to begin with as, initially, members were more environmentally conscious but membership increased gradually with publicity etc. Car journeys varied from local use to visits to Dartmoor or family in the Torbay area. Topsham was a particularly receptive area because of the recent reduction in the level of bus service. The Email address is drive@execar.org.uk. The Execar Website : www.execar.org.uk was linked to the Car share website.

The Chair suggested that the cost of the business plan was excessive and asked if a profit and loss account was available. He stated that membership in other Cities was not significant, for example, 25 members in Salisbury and 40 in Bath. He also asked if funding of the scheme could be provided through planning gain.

The Director Economy and Development confirmed that, although supplementary planning guidance was not yet available, it would be appropriate in certain cases to seek developer contributions from car free developments. Peter Jones stated that the first set of accounts would be available by 31 March 2005. In addition, the County Council were seeking to include an element for the scheme within its Local Transport Plan provision.

Members noted current progress and asked that feedback be provided in a year's time to determine whether a further £10,000 should be released.

(Report circulated)

92. Archaeology Research Progress

The Head of the Archaeological Field Unit advised Members of progress with archaeology reports and projects funded from the Economy and Tourism budget and information relating to archaeological projects carried out in the City both for the City Council and external clients. He circulated drafts of forthcoming publications together with interesting artefacts found at various digs.

Significant work was being undertaken on all of the school PFI sites. The Head of Economy and Tourism said that the reconstruction drawings had been included in the leaflets for the City Wall Trail. A Member referred to the quality of the drawings.

Members noted the report.

(Report circulated)

93. Report on Conference Devon

The Head of Economy and Tourism reported on recent developments within Conference Devon.

The Chair remarked that South Hams had only contributed £500 to the initiative, despite bookings to the value of £60,000 and asked that they be requested to increase their contribution.

Members noted the report.

(Report circulated)

94. **University of Exeter Innovation Centre and Innovation Exeter Project**

The Head of Economy and Tourism updated Members on progress with the expansion of the Innovation Centre at the University of Exeter including the support given to this initiative as an integral part of moving forward the proposed Science Park. He provided figures as evidence of this area's ability to attract and set up new businesses and sustain job increases in the knowledge based sectors of the economy which the Innovation Centre sought to encourage and support. Employee figures had increased by 27% (4,600) between 1998 and 2002 compared with 12% for the South West as a whole.

The background to the negotiations between various parties over the last two years for expanding the project by creating a Phase II Innovation Centre complex was explained. The RDA had purchased the current centre from Abbey Manor Group and the construction of a new building of approximately 34,000 square feet would be about twice the size of Phase I. The RDA had committed some £6 million to the project and the University were already contributing £125,000 leaving a funding gap of £135,000 to be split three ways between the University, the City Council and Devon County Council.

Some Members were concerned that the City Council had contributed to the funding gap and felt that this should not have taken place without full details of the Council's involvement on the Board of the enlarged Centre having been finalised. They asked for clarification on the structure of the board in terms of membership numbers, when the company was to be set up and the extent of the Council's involvement. One Member also felt that a share of the equity of any future growth of the companies based at the Innovation Centre should be reclaimable by the City Council. It was confirmed that the City Council could not recover any of its contribution to the funding gap since this contribution was to the Centre itself, not individual companies. Other Members indicated their general support for this important initiative.

Members noted:-

- (a) the report;
- (b) the decision to contribute £45,000 to the shortfall in funding for Phase II of the Innovation Centre to enable the project to progress; and

- (c) the need for a further report during 2005 on the membership of the Innovation Centre Board.

(Report circulated)

95. **Exeter Festival of South West Food and Drink**

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the report informing Members of support for the second Exeter Festival of South West Food and Drink to take place on 18-20 March 2005.

Members welcomed the initiative, noting the limited City Council contribution of £5,000 towards a very innovative project which would be of considerable benefit to the City. On the recommendation of the Head of Economy and Tourism a letter of thanks would be sent to Michael Caines for his participation. The Head of Economy and Tourism, in response to a Member's question, confirmed that officers were directly involved in the organisation of the event.

Members noted the report and the City Council's contribution of £5,000 to the costs of the Exeter Festival of South West Food and Drink 2005.

(Report circulated)

96. **Exeter Summer Festival 2004**

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the report on the overspend on the 2004 Summer Festival and provided a further update on the results of the Festival. He reported that the Festival Committee had decided not to use Killerton in 2005. Killerton had increased its charges and the dates they were able to offer did not fit in with the revised timing of the Festival.

The Chair reported the receipt of a letter from the organiser of the Powderham events seeking synergy with the Exeter Festival which he had passed to the Head of Economy and Tourism. Although consultations would be held with the promoter to see if common ground could be found, it was likely that the City Council would not be able to link in with this very commercial operation. It was agreed that it would be preferable for the Festival to offer alternative events.

Members were critical of the overall results and confirmed the need for stronger financial control in the future.

Members noted:-

- (a) the action to be undertaken following a management review of the Festival, as approved by the Executive and as set out in the report; and

- (b) Executive's approval of the funding of the 2004 deficit from the Festival Reserve.

(Joint report circulated)

97. **Concessionary Travel Schemes**

The Transportation Strategy Officer updated Members on the current position with concessionary travel schemes operating in Exeter.

She referred to the following suggested improvements considered by the Devonwide Partnership:-

- allow use of buses at earlier times - operators would examine this but in the absence of information on likely take up a response could take some time;
- allow the blind or visually impaired to travel free - this was supported in principle by the operators who were examining the mechanics of delivery;
- introduction of tokens for travel on other forms of transport such as taxis - likely to be rural districts only; and
- travel to more places beyond the current Devonwide boundary - agreed to extend existing practice for all origins in Devon, although not from Plymouth.

With regard to the 16-18-year old student scheme, 644 passes had been issued in the academic year 2003/04 and 545 in the current year up until mid-October. Stagecoach had been asked to ensure that their drivers were clear about the validity of the Exeter student scheme.

Members noted the continued membership of the Devonwide Partnership.

(Report circulated)

98. **Refurbishment of Mary Arches Street Car Park**

The Director Economy and Development advised that, at an estimated cost of £15,000, it was proposed to remove three existing trees and various shrubs, plant new shrubs and five new trees at a uniform height along the length of Bartholomew Street East façade of the car park and erect a retaining wall of up to about four feet in height. The area between the wall and the car park building would be 'backfilled' to allow the planting scheme and a large brick petrol intercept chamber would also be repaired as part of the changes. Works were unlikely to start before April 2005.

The cost of replacing the existing bars with a glazed infill to modernise the appearance of the North Street footbridge was £25,000, an increase of £13,500 over the original budget which provided for repainting only. After more detailed design however it had been revealed that the estimate was insufficient to meet the cost. It was proposed therefore to revert to repainting only.

Members supported the proposals for improving the landscaping on Bartholomew Street East and the re-painting of the North Street footbridge.

(Report circulated)

99. **Engineering and Construction Workload**

The Engineering and Construction Manager reported on the current workload in relation to that expected when the section had been created in April 2004.

The Chair congratulated the team for securing additional work.

Members noted the report and asked for an end of year report to be submitted in Spring 2005.

(Report circulated)

100. **Construction Training Centre – Brief Update**

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the report updating Members on progress with establishing improved facilities for construction skills training and development.

Members:-

- (a) noted the progress made; and
- (b) asked the Head of Economy and Tourism to convey to Exeter College the Council's very positive support for this successful initiative.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

101. **Property Performance Indicators**

The Head of Estates presented the report on the position regarding the Council's performance on Property Performance Indicators and the proposal to establish further targets for those indicators.

Members:-

- (a) noted the report; and
- (b) adopted the Property Performance Indicators targets for 2004/05.

(Report circulated)

102. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**
EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 11 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION
BY THE EXECUTIVE

103. **Re-structuring of the Archaeological Field Unit and Temporary Staffing Provision for the Princesshay Project**

The Director Economy and Development presented the report setting out the proposed permanent staffing structure of the Archaeological Field Unit and outlining proposals for temporary staffing arrangements to cover the additional workload arising from the Princesshay scheme commencing in 2005.

In response to the Chair, it was confirmed that university students, who were required to undertake archaeological work as part of their course, were used as temporary staff as well as recent graduates.

Members requested that Executive be asked to approve the following:-

- (a) posts ED06/111, 114, 115, 119, 120, 121 to be made permanent;
- (b) new posts *Nos. ED06/128-132* Project Archaeologist x1, Archaeological Assistant x3 and Illustrator x1 to be created within the existing AFU structure;
- (c) recruitment to the Princesshay project in line with the proposals set out in the report, following the definition of an agreed construction programme;
- (d) the overall structure and resources be reviewed on an annual basis in the light of on-going workload and reported to Scrutiny Committee - Economy; and
- (e) recruitment for the Princesshay project be undertaken using delegated powers by the Head of the Archaeological Field Unit, subject to agreement with the Director Economy and Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism.

(Report circulated to Members)

104. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next Scrutiny Committee - Economy will be held on Thursday 20 January 2005 at 5.30 p.m.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30pm and closed at 8.15pm)

Chair