

## **EXETER CITY COUNCIL**

### **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY 29 JUNE 2004**

### **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY 1 JULY 2004**

#### **REVIEW OF CULTURAL STRATEGY**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To review the progress of the Cultural Strategy and its action plan, and propose a revised action plan for the forthcoming year.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Council adopted its first Cultural Strategy in March 2003, following a period of development and consultation. The Strategy was a short document, designed in parallel with the Exeter Vision, using the same themes, and demonstrating how the City's cultural activities could help meet the objectives set by that overarching document.
- 2.2 It was agreed that the Strategy, and particularly its action plan, should be reviewed annually.

#### **3. REVIEW**

- 3.1 The profile of culture (using the government's wide definition, which includes sport, tourism and countryside as well as the more usual fields of arts, architecture and museums) has continued to grow in local authorities since the Council adopted this strategy just over a year ago. Paradoxically the government removed the possession of a cultural strategy as a formal performance indicator at the beginning of 2003, but at the same time required the inclusion of culture as an element in community strategies. The Exeter format of a cultural strategy written using the same framework as the community strategy therefore proved to be particularly useful. Again although the Comprehensive Performance Assessment did not directly include any inspection of cultural activities, the fact that the City's cultural services contribute so heavily to the social inclusion, health and youth agenda's of the Council ensured that we were given credit for a practical and positive approach.
- 3.2 In the realm of museums, the government has sanctioned the direct funding of regional museums services for the first time, with the express intention of building real educational capacity to serve the wider community, and Exeter City Council is benefiting to the tune of almost £2m over 3 years.
- 3.3 The argument put forward by local authority leisure departments for over 10 years, that simple physical activity is the best preventative medicine there is, for almost everything from obesity to poor mental health, is finally receiving recognition: the Council has made a bid to Sport England for a major project targeting physical activity in the workplace, and is hopeful of achieving it.

- 3.4 The Council continues to support an extended programme of festivals and the extensive range of arts provision through revised Service Agreements with six key organisations. A new Arts and Media Strategy was adopted in January 2004 which sets out the priorities and actions for developing the contribution of arts to the cultural life of the city.
- 3.5 Exeter's cultural services therefore, primarily provided by the Leisure and Museums and by the Economy and Tourism Units, are well placed to continue to contribute to the aims of the cultural strategy, and to bring in substantial outside funding to assist with the work.

#### **4. THE ACTION PLAN**

- 4.1 Attached as Appendix 1 is a first review of the Action Plan, showing progress on its key elements. While progress is good in nearly every area, we have yet to develop a cultural partnership to bring together the cultural organisations of the City and provide support and advice for the Vision Partnership. An initiative of the Vision Partnership, which brought together a cultural focus group, was begun during the year but it is now more likely that the City Council will convene a broad coalition of organisations in the city. There is no current mechanism which can easily bring together sports organisations with arts groups, with heritage societies, mixing the statutory, voluntary and commercial sectors as it must. There is broad agreement that a loose Cultural Forum, meeting perhaps only once or twice a year, focusing on the issues which every activity shares, like funding, grants, social inclusion, marketing and so on, is a model which will work best. It is planned to set up an initial meeting in the autumn of this year.
- 4.2 In some other areas of work, lack of capacity has held back progress – for example under the Electronic City theme it has not been possible to work on the idea of building some educational capacity into every website, because of the amount of work necessary in other areas.
- 4.3 Because most of the action plan items are long term issues, we do not intend at this stage to write a new plan: there is further work to do on nearly every objective. Possibly at the review in 2005 it will be possible to replace some completed objectives with new ones which have moved up the priority scale.

#### **5. RECOMMENDED**

That Scrutiny Committees Community and Economy note the review of the Cultural Strategy.

HEAD OF LEISURE & MUSEUMS

HEAD OF ECONOMY & TOURISM

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H:LP/Committee/604SCC5  
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COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

**Background papers used in compiling this report:**

Equality Impact Assessment

