

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY 08 SEPTEMBER 2005

INVESTMENT AND RELOCATION ENQUIRIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on the handling of investment and relocation enquiries and to outline the support provided and recent developments in the service.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The City Council has recognised in its Economic Development Strategy that providing local, new and relocating businesses with advice and information on finding suitable accommodation is a high priority in retaining and attracting employment opportunities.
- 2.2 A paper outlining progress with the service was last presented to Scrutiny Committee - Economy in January 2004.

3. KEY OUTPUTS

- 3.1 The Senior Economic Development Officer continues to be recognised as the key link with enquiries. The postholder provides a comprehensive information and advice service, working together with commercial agents and developers, the Exeter Ambassadors, the Heart of Devon Enterprise Agency, the County Council and the Regional Development Agency. This service provides completely confidential advice, often a prerequisite of relocating organisations.
- 3.2 Since the last paper presented to Scrutiny Committee in 2004, the following improvements have been made to the service:
 - In April 2004 the Exeter Commercial Property Register was expanded to cover the local authority areas of East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge. The Exeter & Heart of Devon Commercial Property Register now lists details of almost 500 available offices, industrial units, retail units and development land compared to the 250 commercial properties previously listed on the Exeter Commercial Property Register.
 - Following advances in digital photography the vast majority of commercial agents now produce property particulars in electronic formats. This has enabled the Unit to hold property particulars electronically as well as in hardcopy format and to respond to enquiries entirely by electronic means (e-mail or CD-ROM) as well as the more traditional means of fax and postal correspondence.
 - With the assistance of IT Services a database has been created linking the Exeter & Heart of Devon Commercial Property Register to the City Council

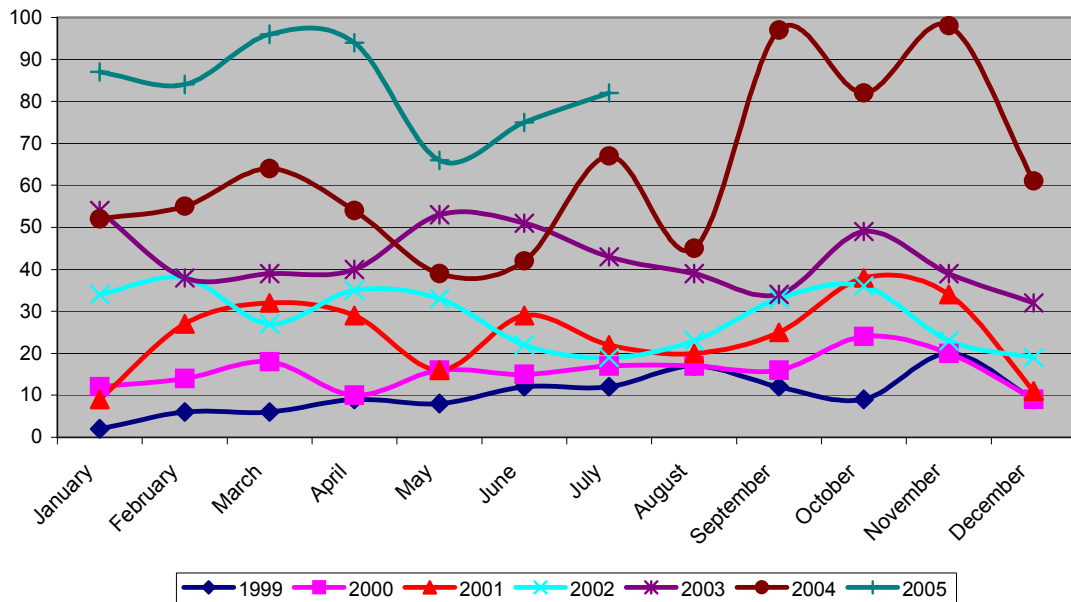
website. The Property Register was first published on the City Council website at the end of August 2004. The Property Register continues to feature widely on the City Council's Business web pages. Partners in East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Councils are linking their Business web pages to the On-line Property Register. As users of the On-line Property Register need to register their details before gaining access to the Register, the database is able to capture a certain amount of information to enable the analysis of enquiries being received.

- The Business section of the City Council website is regularly reviewed and has continued to expand, now containing some 400 pages containing useful information and statistics for businesses. In October 2004 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) published the results of an audit of all local authority websites in association with the 'Working with Business' national project, to examine provision of information and services for businesses via local authority websites: The City Council website www.exeter.gov.uk was rated in the top 5 sites in the South West (out of a total of 43 councils) and in the top 5 sites for shire districts nationally (out of a total of 238 councils). The City Council website has regularly been rated highly by other independent studies such as Better Connected.
- Early this year the City Council invested in a new Content Management System (CSM) to run the website. During February, March and April all the Business web pages were reviewed and transferred with some new pages added to take advantage of new features provided by the system.

3.3 The number of investment and relocation enquiries being received has continued to increase. In the first year of the service 1 January – 31 December 1999 there were 122 enquiries – an average of 10 enquiries a month. Between 2000 and 2004 the total number of enquiries each year increased to 188, 292, 342, 511 and 757 respectively (monthly averages of 16, 24, 29, 43 and 63 respectively). In the 6 months from 1 January – 30 June 2005, 492 enquiries were received increasing the monthly average to 82 enquiries.

3.4 The chart below shows the number of enquiries received each month since the start of the service in 1999. The notable increase in the number of enquiries received from September 2004 is primarily explained by the On-line Property Register, as enquiry numbers almost doubled overnight when the Property Register went live on our website. The chart also shows that since September 2004 monthly enquiry numbers have remained significantly higher than the same month the previous year.

Enquiries by month 1999 onwards



- 3.5 All enquiries receive a same day response. In the past each enquiry would have received a follow-up within a week of their initial enquiry and subsequent contact would be tailored to the company's requirements and timescales. Because of the large volume of enquiries now being received, the Senior Economic Development Officer has not had the capacity to follow-up on the majority of enquiries. As at the end of June 2005 there were 869 enquiries logged on the Investment Enquiries Database in need of a follow-up, with new enquiries being received all the time.
- 3.6 In 1999 there were 12 successful projects (companies deciding to go ahead to locate or invest in Exeter), compared to 32 in 2000, 41 in 2001, 42 in 2002, 47 in 2003, 72 in 2004 and 39 so far this year. This business activity during 2003 and 2004 created in the region of 600 and 500 jobs respectively for Exeter. Companies don't always let us know when they have been successful in their relocation or search for commercial premises.
- 3.7 Of the 757 enquiries received in 2004 (figures for 2003 shown in brackets), 26 - 3% (22 - 4%) were international enquiries, 377 - 50% (294 - 58%) of enquiries were from national companies / organisations not currently based in Exeter, with the remaining 354 - 47% (195 - 38%) of enquiries coming from indigenous / Exeter based companies.

3.8 Summary tables of the types of enquiries received are as follows:

Type	2002		2003		2004	
Retail	123	36%	181	35%	236	31%
Industrial	78	23%	133	26%	250	33%
Office	118	34%	174	34%	257	34%
Other ¹	23	7%	23	5%	14	2%
Total	342		511		757	

Type	2002	2003	2004
Start-up businesses	143	218	280
Existing business relocating	119	158	230
Existing business opening additional branch	80	135	247
Total:	342	511	757

3.9 Of the 511 enquiries received in 2003, 171 (34%) were received via the business pages of the City Council website: www.exeter.gov.uk/business. With the help of the On-line Property Register the numbers of enquiries received via the Business web pages has increased to 333 (44%).

3.10 The increased number of enquiries is also explained by close partnership working with the Commercial Agents, Exeter Ambassadors, Heart of Devon Enterprise Agency, Chamber of Commerce, the Regional Development Agency and the University continuing to spread the word regarding the availability of the service being provided by the City Council.

4. FUTURE SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

4.1 The service will need to be further streamlined in order to manage the ever-increasing number of investment enquiries. The following service improvements are planned and it is hoped that they will be operational in 2006/2007:

- Make adjustments to the Property Register on our website to enable users to view on-line the 500 or so property particulars we currently hold.
- Create a new database for logging enquiries, which automatically registers the details of enquirers using our website. This will replace the current database where all enquiries need to be logged manually.
- Expand the Business web pages to cover the whole of Exeter and the Heart of Devon and make use of the new website: www.exeterandtheheartofdevon.org.uk.
- Make use of the new website statistical package, Livestats, to gain greater market intelligence on businesses using the City Council website.

¹ Other – Including investment and leisure uses.

- 4.2 Bids have been prepared as part of the budget process for 2006/07 to secure the necessary funding to action these improvements.
5. **RECOMMENDED:-** that the progress with the Council's handling of investment, relocation and development enquiries be noted.

RICHARD BALL
HEAD OF ECONOMY AND TOURISM

ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background Documents

1. Economic Development Strategy 2000 - 2003
Available for inspection from the Economy and Tourism Unit