

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

6 September 2007

### Present:

Councillor Adrian Fullam (Chair)

Councillors Martin, Choules, Coates, Mrs Evans, Gale, Moore, Pettinger, Prowse, Sterry, Wadham and Winterbottom

Head of Economy and Tourism, Director Economy and Development and Member Services Officer (SLS)

### Also present:

Councillor Greg Sheldon - Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism

#### 35. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2007 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

#### 36. **Declaration of Interest**

Members made no declaration of interest.

#### 37. **Festivals Review 2007**

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented a review and report on the performance of the portfolio of Festivals and outlined proposals for the 2008 programme. He responded to a number of questions from Members including future funding and sponsorship, the relationship with partners, and involvement of the Programming Group. The efforts of the small Festival team who have to meet the ever increasing challenges of programming and attracting sponsorship was acknowledged. He also commented on a Member suggestion of a comparative assessment of the financing/sponsorship levels of different Festivals, adding that the return of ticket sales to income was not always the best reflection of the value of a particular event and that like for like comparisons were difficult. The Director referred to the outcome of a Best Value Review, which provided limited comparative information, and whilst a further exercise could be conducted, it was not clear how useful that would be. A Member welcomed the opportunity to review each of the Festivals, but in terms of political involvement suggested there was a delicate balance between offering expertise and not overwhelming the programming process.

A Member enquired if there was a strategy to deal with the consequences of any future shortfall in sponsorship. He was advised that one of the first actions in response to this would be to adjust the programme according to the projected budget available. Support from the business community would again be sought for next year's Festival. Members were reminded that sponsors could contribute cash as well

as ‘in kind’ contributions and any assistance in lobbying local businesses for additional sponsorship would be welcomed.

The Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the future programme and broad content of events for 2008 and wished their congratulations on the hard effort made by the team to bring in the Festivals on time and on budget to be recorded.

(Report circulated)

**38. Draft Local Transport Bill - Government Consultation**

The Director presented the report summarising proposals contained in the draft Local Transport Bill and invited comments on and sought Member endorsement of the proposed City Council response to this consultation.

A Member referred to the lack of social cohesion in terms of creating an integrated transport system and he hoped that the Government were sincere in their aim to improve public transport. A Member also sought clarification why franchising of ‘quality contracts’, was seen as ‘the option of last resort’, and in respect of the road pricing proposals, the potential lack of public consultation. The Director responded stating that the phrase ‘option of last resort’ reflected the Government’s approach but that he personally fully supported franchising. Full public consultation would be essential for the introduction of road pricing. A Member supported the response’s increased emphasis on the local transport policy.

The Scrutiny Committee – Economy endorsed the City Council’s response to the Government consultation on the Draft Local Transport Bill.

(Report circulated)

**39. Devonwide Bus Operator Audit and Plans for the Delivery of the Nationwide Free Local Bus Travel Scheme**

The Director presented the report which summarised the results of audit work to examine the accuracy and reliability of bus operator ticketing and recording procedures and outlined plans for the introduction of free nationwide local bus travel for the over 60s and people with disabilities from April 2008. The reimbursement of the Nationwide free local bus scheme was a key issue for Exeter, as a major regional transport hub and final detail of the reimbursement has yet to be determined. However he was able to reassure Members that an independent Audit concluded that there was a low error rate of recording passenger journeys, and the fear of overcharging was not well founded. The third element of the audit had yet to be completed. He would respond directly to a Member request for more detail on the funding basis for this work, which was commissioned by Devonwide.

A Member also commented on the potential misuse of the system particularly as he was aware that a doctor’s note had secured a pass. He felt more supporting information should be required by the issuing and monitoring department. The Director explained that certified evidence was required and invited the Member to contact him as he could not comment on an individual case without further information. A Member suggested that the extended free travel scheme would skew

the market further and so caution was needed over the effects of an increased volume of passengers on the previous base line. The Director advised that new guidance contained a provision for smart cards, which would record volume and provided a more reliable way of monitoring usage and the calculation of average fares.

The Scrutiny Committee – Economy: -

- 1) noted the findings of the Devonwide audit programme and supported regular mystery shopping exercises in relation to free local bus travel as a tool for on-going monitoring and to receive strand 3 audit results as soon as they become available; and
- 2) noted and endorsed plans for the future organisation and delivery of free nationwide local bus travel in Exeter from April 2008.

(Report circulated)

#### 40. **Economy Stewardship to June 2007**

The Director presented the details advising Members of forecast variations to the budget, based on the first three months of the financial year 2007/08.

The Director updated Members on staffing advising that the recent recruitment exercise had been successful and all vacant positions were now filled. He requested that Members always considered approaching him directly with any matters concerning performance within Planning Services to help maintain staff morale.

Members noting recent comments reported in the press regarding the Planning Service, expressed their support for the service. Councillor Mrs Evans moved and Councillor Gale seconded the following resolution -

“That this Scrutiny Committee wishes to disassociate itself with the comments reported in the local press and attributed to Cllr Hannaford, as they feel that on the whole, Planning Services are doing an exceptional job under the circumstances”.

The resolution was put to a vote and supported.

The Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the stewardship report.

(Report circulated)

#### 41. **Public Art**

Councillor P Smith attended under Standing Order 44 and spoke on this item.

Councillor Wadham requested that an item be placed on the agenda under Standing Order 18 in the following terms –

“that a transparent process for the selection of public art and those commissioned to produce it to be laid down by this Committee”.

The Director had circulated a briefing note on this prior to the meeting.

Councillor Wadham also expressed concerns about the transparency of the process and advised that he wished to raise the issue of how public art from the old Princesshay would be re-positioned in the new scheme. He thanked officers for the circulated briefing note, which clarified the process for the commissioning and selection of public art.

Members discussed the number of Councillors involved in the decision making, which included in many cases, the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and the Planning Member Working Group and it was acknowledged that this part of the process had worked well to date. The Director added that public art needed to challenge and despite the benefits of a range of opinions there was also more likelihood of a more cautious approach in the final selection of individual projects if a very large number of Members were involved in approving proposals. Councillor Wadham agreed that the quality of art was very subjective, but his aim had been to highlight the transparency of the process and he felt that this had been achieved.

Councillor Smith who spoke under Standing Order 44, welcomed the recent additions in the city and particularly The Riddle sculpture in High Street. He was satisfied with the protocol and also supported the need for a transparent process. He reiterated the need to ensure the details were known when the City Council had a stake in terms of either land or money.

Members noted the briefing note and supported the current approach to public art.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.05 pm

Chair