

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

1 March 2007

Present:

Councillor Adrian Fullam (Chair)

Councillors Moore, M A Baldwin, Boyle, Choules, Gale, Noble, Pettinger, Sterry and Wadham

Also present:

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14. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2007 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

15. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following personal interest was declared:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Choules	18 (employee of Exeter University)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

16. **Wild City Proposal**

The Director Economy and Development reported on the development of a long term framework for managing Exeter's natural assets for promoting biodiversity and for enhancing where appropriate public access. In response to a Member query on the proposed green gyms, they would comprise a measured route for walking or running with a number of structures to allow the opportunity for individual exercise.

Members welcomed the report and made the following comments that:-

- much of the past work by the City Council may still be underplayed with many residents not being aware of what they already have. He welcomed the educational opportunities and hoped this initiative would be pushed as a priority, particularly as the local environment in the widest sense was often why people moved to Exeter.

- a Member Briefing would provide a useful opportunity to discuss particular issues. The Director advised that a Briefing would be arranged when the project had progressed.
- there should be effective management of the likely conflict between increased visitor numbers and a possible retreat by wildlife, with a potential loss of the very essence of the attraction. The Director agreed that management of such a valuable resource was paramount by encouraging access to areas with less biodiversity rather than those with more.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the recommendation to Executive of:-

- 1) the development of a Wild City Strategy and Action Plan; and
- 2) the proposal that a cross Directorate project team be set up to work with the Devon Wildlife Trust and other key partners to take this project forward, whilst incorporating elements of the concept in a revised Sustainable Community Strategy.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

17. Walking Project Update

The Director presented a report, which referred to recent improvements to walking routes across the city and outlined the proposed focus for 2007 and beyond, which included an Exwick Loop and also a Topsham walking route to Countess Wear (via Sir Alex Walk). A Member advised that accessibility to parts of Exwick could be an issue for some, but although the terrain was not clear from the accompanying maps, local residents already use many of the routes. The Director replied to a suggestion that dog bins be included on the routes advising that the cost of collection and disposal rather than the siting of dog bins was a budgetary consideration for Scrutiny Community. The Director would reply to the Member who queried the Green Circle's shared use status between cyclists and walkers. A Member added that a significant part was not accessible for bikes, but the routes provided an excellent circulation of the city and a structured opportunity for both tourists and residents to explore new places.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the progress to date on the walking project and supported the outline proposals for enhancing Sir Alex Walk and providing a circular route in the edge of Exwick.

(Report circulated)

18. Proposed Science Park - Progress Update

Cllr Choules declared a personal interest as an employee of the university.

The Head of Economy and Tourism updated Members on progress towards developing the Science Park. He anticipated that a draft business plan would be completed by the end of April.

A Member commented on the working title, which he felt should include recognition for all partners and not just to the University. The Director confirmed that professional advice on brand marketing would be sought.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the progress made with developing the proposed Science Park.

(Report circulated)

19. **Update - Global Grants**

The Head of Economy and Tourism updated Members on progress in the delivery of activities under the European funded Global Grants Programme, known as the 'Exeter Positive Steps Fund.' An additional update was given on a number of projects. Cllr Martin requested permission to offer Members an insight into the work of the Olive Tree Project and circulated photographs taken at St Sidwells Centre where a programme of self-development, language and practical skills is offered to improve student self esteem and employment prospects. This was welcomed as an illustration of how funding is used.

A Member enquired about the overall funding package and queried the shortfall and how the Council might have used this money if not for the Global Grants Project. The Head of Economy and Tourism replied that the City Council had provided funding for this project as part of a partnership approval including support from a bank. The bank funding had not reached the anticipated level of funding, but it was important to both receive full benefit from the various projects requiring support and measuring the draw down of European funding. A budget had been allocated to support skills training in key wards and this programme had been the most pragmatic way of addressing this issue at a very local level and in a very targeted way. Although the project is geared to finish in December 2007, there will be some work to see if it can be continued in some way. There is no further funding from the City Council.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy:-

- 1) noted the report; and
- 2) supported the further release of £30,000 from the Economy and Tourism Budget to support the delivery of the Fund and finance additional projects with European Social Fund (ESF) monies.

(Report circulated)

20. **Exeter Autumn Festival 2006**

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented an evaluation of the Autumn Festival, which took place between 3 and 19 November 2006, and sought support for the development of the Autumn Festival 2007 to take place between 2 and 18 November 2007.

A Member requested more consistency in including reporting detail such as capacity and venue as is provided in the Summer Festival report. He enquired about the inclusion of numbers of visitors to Museum exhibitions, which would have taken place there in any case, and level of officer time committed to this Festival. He also felt that emphasis should remain on the Summer Festival. The Head of Economy and Tourism replied that he would look to provide a more consistent reporting approach in terms of staff time. The Autumn Festival took the least effort as staff efforts were concentrated on marketing and providing a platform for events performed by local performers. In line with Council policy, each of the Exeter Festivals have a different target audience and correspondingly different levels of work.

The Scrutiny Committee – Economy:-

- 1) noted the report; and
- 2) agreed that support be given to develop proposals for the delivery of a 16 day Autumn Festival for 2007.

(Report circulated)

21. **Property Voids and Debts**

The Head of Estates Services submitted a report, which informed Members of the position regarding void properties for the period 1 August 2006 to 31 January 2007 and debts for the four quarters ending on 24 December 2006. An update on short-term voids and the successful letting of two long-term void properties was made. He responded to a Member's comment on the Custom House, and clarified the position of Exhibition Fields, which had to be looked at in the wider context of delivering the Local Plan allocations.

Members welcomed the positive report.

(Report circulated)

22. **National Performance Indicator Results 2005/06 and How Exeter's Results Compare**

The Director Economy and Development provided an overview of the performance of the Council, followed by a summary of the performance of those services covered by this Committee. He highlighted Planning, which hit their range of targets in the upper middle quartile; Land Charges with a 100% target achieved, and Conservation where a good rate of Conservation appraisals were achieved. The Appeals target at 28% was deemed the optimum level. A Member enquired about the process for reviewing sections where targets had been reduced. The Director confirmed that Exeter was still achieving the Government's national targets.

The Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

23. **Economy Scrutiny Stewardship to December 2006**

The Director Economy and Development reported on the differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first nine months of the financial year up until 31 December 2006, compared with the approved annual budget with a variation of 6.37%.

The Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the contents of the report.

(Report circulated)

24. **Operation of Scrutiny - Work Programme**

The Director Economy and Development tabled a report following discussion by the Scrutiny Economy Working Group which met to discuss a proposed means of restructuring the Economy agenda to facilitate a more in depth review of key issues. A paper setting out the proposed structure of business for the next year was circulated. The rationale of the steering group was the creation of a revised agenda to inform the work of the Committee and give key items the proper depth of scrutiny, with a general desire to have exception reporting of non key issues.

A Member thanked the Scrutiny Resources Working Group and referred to their approach, which included a restructuring of the agenda to include performance monitoring reports at the beginning of the agenda, giving the opportunity for advance questions and an informed question and answer session. The Chair agreed this was an interesting option but considered the reality was that the emphasis was often at the beginning of the agenda. When all of the varying scrutiny options were in place, there would be an opportunity to see best practice at work and make any appropriate changes then.

Members supported the revised agenda timetable to be implemented for the June agenda.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.45 pm

Chair