

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

17 January 2008

Present:

Councillor Fullam (Chair)

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

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

Also present:

Councillor Sheldon - Portfolio Holder Economy and Tourism
Councillor Shepherd - Portfolio Holder Sustainable Development and Transport

1. Minutes

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

2. Declarations of Interest

Members declared the following personal (prejudicial*) interests:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Gale	5*(his wife is an employee of the Northcott Theatre)
Councillor Choules	5 (employee of University of Exeter)

3. Estimates 2008/09

The Director Economy and Development presented a report outlining the strategic framework within which the draft Estimates had been prepared. He identified changes in accounting practices which affect all budgets and summarised significant changes in the Management Unit estimates. Schedules containing the Capital Programme and proposed Fees and Charges for Scrutiny Committee – Economy were also circulated.

The Director referred to the effects of a challenging period and responded to a number of comments in relation to the significant pressure on the Capital Programme. He reported that:-

- The assumptions made for pay included individual pay increments. He would respond directly to an enquiry relating to the number of staff in receipt of a shift allowance.

- The sum allocated for the Central Station Gateway related to an outline design concept prepared by City and County Council staff. Network Rail has had the design concept for sometime but no feedback has been provided.
- A logical end to the priority projects within the floodlighting programme had been reached and the reduction in funding would have minimal effect on any remaining priorities.
- The environmental enhancements in Heavitree had reached the detailed design stage, whilst the Cowick Street scheme was not yet designed. Funding for the Heavitree project included Section 106 money and City Council capital funding. He would respond directly to Members on the detail of the Heavitree funding.

Members also discussed the future timing of the informal meeting of the Scrutiny Committee – Economy to discuss the Estimates which normally take place in December and agreed that in future that these should be at 5.30pm.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the draft Revenue Estimates, Capital Programme and proposed Fees and Charges for 2008/09 for approval by the Executive.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 43 Councillors Fullam, Hannaford, Pettinger and Wadham wished to be recorded as having abstained in respect of the recommendation.

(Report circulated)

4. **Review of Business**

The Chair presented the report proposing the structure of business for the next year.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the report.

(Report circulated)

5. **Exeter Northcott Theatre**

Councillor Gale declared a prejudicial interest, as his wife works at the Northcott Theatre and withdrew from the room whilst this matter was discussed. Councillor Choules declared a personal interest as an employee of the University of Exeter.

The Head of Economy and Tourism referred to the high level of activity aimed at raising awareness and support for the campaign to address the Arts Council South West's decision to withdraw funding from the Northcott Theatre. Key stakeholders such as Exeter City Council, Devon County Council and the University had all made significant capital investments in the Northcott on the understanding that the Theatre had a viable long term future. He outlined the legal challenge by the City Council and Devon County Council as part of a coordinated campaign requesting that the Arts Council do not withdraw their funding. Lobbying would continue after the deadline of 15 January. The Arts Council South West is due to meet on 21 January, but the outcome would not be known until after any decision is ratified by the Arts Council England on 1 February.

A Member commented on the apathy of the Arts Council and his disappointment at the standard response to his individual letter which failed to address any of the issues he had raised. The Northcott Theatre faced a dilemma in trying to address a balance between meeting artistic challenges and their social responsibility. Members voiced their concern about such decisions being taken behind closed doors by Arts Council Members who were not publicly elected.

Councillor Hannaford moved and Councillor Martin seconded the following resolution: -

Scrutiny Committee Economy Members strongly supported the actions taken by officers in support of the Northcott Theatre, including the prepared legal action. Members hoped that the Arts Council will respond positively to the views expressed by this authority, other major funders and by the community.

The resolution was put to a vote and supported.

(Report circulated)

6. **Archaeology Research Progress**

The Head of the Archaeological Field Unit presented the report advising Members of progress with archaeology reports and projects funded from the Economy and Tourism budget. He also updated on current information relating to projects carried out in the city both for the City Council and for external clients. A PowerPoint presentation of a selection of the Unit's recent work was made at the meeting.

In response to a comment by a Member, he advised that the Unit's contact with schools was carried out through the Museum Service with a link to the Education Service. They had provided other material for the *TimeTrail* web site and a teachers' pack on the excavation of Princesshay had been sent to local schools. The suggestion that the work of the Unit would be a good topic for a future Community Forum would be passed on. Members welcomed this Exeter-based resource and asset and congratulated Exeter Archaeology on a very successful period. The Director reported that visitor numbers to the Underground Passages for the third quarter of 2007/08 were considerably higher than the same quarter in 2004/05 and he expressed his appreciation of the work of both the Economy team and Exeter Archaeology in making the Passages re-launch a real success.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the progress made with the projects.

(Report circulated)

7. **Economic Development Service Overview**

The Head of Economy and Tourism provided Members with an overview of the activities undertaken by the Economic Development Service. He outlined the work being undertaken to review and update the Exeter and Heart of Devon Economic Development Strategy which provides a framework for the activities of the City Council, neighbouring authorities and key agencies.

A Member commented on the success of the Positive Steps Fund and sought information on levels of take-up from the area west of the Exe. The Head of Economy and Tourism would respond directly to the Member. The value of the project was recognised and it was noted that with over 80% of the set up costs in place, it would be able to continue subject to more funding being identified. A Member also referred to the significance of funding from East Devon and Teignbridge for an Economic Development post to deal with investment enquires. He regarded this as an acknowledgement from neighbouring authorities that Exeter remains the economic driver. The Member added that both the delivery of the service and a recent investment service award to a relatively small unit should be acknowledged.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

8. **Tourism Charter for Destination Management**

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the report seeking support for the City Council becoming a signatory to the ‘Partners for England Place Making Charter’. He provided a summary of the national and regional tourism structure. In response to Member comments, there was no financial cost to the Authority, just confirmation of the role to continue to support the development of the visitor economy. The Charter was part of a national initiative driven by both local authorities and the RDA, and would help to recognise the work by Exeter City Council to develop the visitor economy.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the City Council becoming a signatory to the Partners for England Place Making Charter.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.35 pm

Chair