

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

4 September 2008

### Present:

Councillor Margaret Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Gale, P J Brock, Coates, Martin, Newcombe, Sheldon, W M Starling, Winterbottom and Mitchell

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

### Also present:

Councillor Wadham                      Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport

## 27      **Declarations of Interest**

The following personal interests were declared:-

<b>COUNCILLOR</b>	<b>MINUTE</b>
Councillor P J Brock	29 (shareholder with British Gas)
Councillor Martin	31 (a prison service employee)
Councillor Gale	30 (wife is employed at Northcott Theatre)
Councillor Sheldon	32 (patient at Beacon Heath Surgery)
Councillor Newcombe	32 (Vice Chair of Health and Adult Services Overview Scrutiny Committee DCC)

## **MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE**

## 28      **Draft Economic Development Strategy 2008 - 2013**

The Head of Economy and Tourism sought Members' final views on the draft Economic Development Strategy for Exeter and the sub-region for 2008 – 2013, following the comments received from the consultation process. He circulated a copy of the consultation responses together with a revision of the Action Plan, which set out a number of objectives and priorities for the Exeter and Heart of Devon area. These actions would be monitored and were subject to review to ensure that they remained realistic, particularly in view of the current economic down turn.

The following responses were given to issues raised by Members:-

- Funding for the enhancement of the London Waterloo line, is now in place and will enable the creation of a dual passing loop at Axminster and an hourly service by the end of 2009, with the railway station and other infrastructure at Cranbrook likely to be in place before any housing. Other transport improvements included funding for junctions 29/30 of the M5. There is little progress to date on the dualling of the A30/A303 through to Wiltshire and

Somerset and the projected costs of the improvements of the A358 from Ilminster to Junction 25 of the M5 have risen dramatically.

- Detail on the distribution of employment by occupation is drawn from Government data. The definition of each category was outlined particularly for skilled work or trades, which showed as a lower percentage than the rest of Devon, because of Exeter's relatively low level of manufacturing, compared with other parts of Devon and the national average of 16%.
- Exeter's educational attainment levels had recently improved and when the latest exam results were collectively available, they would be included in the final Strategy document. Members noted the improvement which had been achieved despite the change in the age of pupils moving onto senior school and disruption from the building of the new schools.
- Cooper Simms had identified the need for a new conference facility and whilst Members referred to alternative facilities at Thomas Hall, the Rugby Stadium at Sandygate, and the University, each was not ideal in terms of scale, availability and location. The consultant's view was that a large dedicated city centre facility with access to restaurants and transport was more appropriate.
- The progress on Skypark had been very slow – planning consent was sought in 2000, but detailed information was still being supplied by Devon County Council to the local planning authority. The County Council was now seeking a joint venture partner and although some of the biggest issues around planning had been addressed, others were still to be resolved.

A Member referred to the focus and the strength of the Strategy and its proposed solutions for urban areas and commented on the future potential for loss of focus on the city, if there were a change in Exeter's administrative status.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the proposed strategic priorities and action plan for the city of Exeter and supported the recommendation that Executive approve the Exeter and Heart of Devon Economic Partnership's Economic Development Strategy 2008 – 2013.

(Report circulated)

## 29 **2008 Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan: Proposed Exeter University Feasibility Study**

Councillor PJ Brock declared a personal interest as the holder of British Gas shares.

The Director Economy and Development presented a report which sought Executive approval for the Centre for Energy and Environment (CEE) at Exeter University to undertake an initial feasibility assessment of options looking at low carbon energy solutions in those parts of Exwick without a mains gas connection; and shared energy solutions for the City's industrial estates, drawing on a survey of energy use in these areas. This study provided a good opportunity to look at a sample of households in Exeter without gas, and identify more sustainable and economic solutions. He responded to concerns that there would be enough participation from domestic households and businesses to make significant changes in their energy use.

A Member queried whether these households would be able to look at the investment to replace uneconomical systems such as night storage heaters. The Director referred to the importance of developing a comprehensive action plan to support a more sustainable approach to energy use. This study should come up with viable

and economic solutions which might result in future grants to help a good proportion of public housing in Exwick.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported approval by the Executive for additional expenditure of £14,500 from the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) Performance Reward Grant and a contribution of £5,000 from the Economy Development Partnership reserve to fund feasibility work by Exeter University as outlined in the report.

(Report circulated)

## **MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY**

### **30 Arts and Media Strategy**

Councillor Gale declared a personal interest as his wife is an employee at the Northcott Theatre.

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented a report which set out the issues and priorities for the draft City Arts and Media Strategy, prior to wider consultation on the proposed strategic priorities and action plan, before a final draft is brought back to this Committee. The over arching aim of the Arts and Media Strategy has been to contribute to the Exeter vision of establishing a position as a 'cultural and fun place to be' and securing the city's reputation as an important regional centre.

In advance of the meeting, Councillor Martin raised concern over recent media reports, which suggested there may be a review of the future funding of Exeter's festivals and events. He requested additional information be provided for the meeting on the following: - Summer, Autumn, Animated, Vibraphonic and Open Studio Festivals in addition to the Exeter Respect Festival with financial detail for the past five years; including those events completed in this municipal year from the City Council budget; external funding from public sources; external funding from private sources and also surplus/deficit before and after subsidy from City Council reserves. He felt that the benefits of the individual festivals and in particular Animated Exeter and the Respect Festival events greatly enhanced the lives of Exeter citizens and met the vision theme of Exeter as a 'cultural and fun place to be'. However he considered that it may now be appropriate to take a fresh look at some of the events and in particular the Summer Festival to ensure that they still represented value for money and provided accessible entertainment. Some additional detail in reply to the question would be sent to Members. In response to further comments, the Head of Economy and Tourism stated that private sponsorship was increasingly harder to obtain resulting from the downward economic trend and change of policy of some organisations towards supporting the 2012 Olympics.

A Member referred to the dilemma of creating a balance between the costs of hosting events like the Summer Festival, the need to address the emphasis on profit and loss, and to allow the Strategy to pursue the chance for the citizens of Exeter to enjoy a sense of innovation and artistic excellence. The difficulty of quantifying the benefits of such events was acknowledged.

It was agreed that a working group be formed to discuss issues relating to the Strategy in more depth and for their findings to be reported back to the Committee. The working group would comprise the following Members - Councillors M. Baldwin, Coates, Gale, Martin and Newcombe.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the formulation of a working group to consider the Strategy in more depth and report back as part of the wider consultation of the draft Strategy and action plan to a future Scrutiny Committee.

(Report circulated)

### 31 **Global Grants - Exeter Positive Steps**

Councillor Martin declared a personal interest as a prison service employee.

The Head of Economy and Tourism reported on the outcome and success of activities under this initiative and the proposal to continue the project with a further financial contribution from the City Council. He responded to some disappointment in the relatively low number of recipients of the scheme coming off benefits, and acknowledged that this was a challenging client group. A Member welcomed the support of the officer within the Economic Development team who has developed the good relationship with the Devon Community Foundation and helped to ensure the quality of funding and feedback, and some work with ex offenders has been particularly beneficial. The joint DCF support was welcomed as this has reduced the cost of administering the programme whilst providing support to help applicants funding for meaningful activities.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and supported the release of £31,520 from the Economy and Tourism budget 2008/09 to support the continued delivery of the Exeter Positive Steps Fund.

(Report circulated)

### 32 **Beacon Heath Surgery**

Councillor Sheldon declared a personal interest as a patient at the Beacon Heath Surgery. Councillor Newcombe declared a personal interest as Vice Chair of Health and Adult Services Overview Scrutiny Committee, DCC.

The Director Economy and Development presented a report which provided background to the outcome of a petition presented by Councillor Martin to Council in July. The City Council had previously agreed a long lease of a suitable site at Exhibition Fields, and Planning Committee subsequently gave consent for a medical centre, pharmacy and associated works. The value of the scheme to the community is widely recognised, but it was noted that the initiative now lies with the partners of the GP practice and the PCT.

Councillor Martin confirmed that the petition had been presented to the Social and Health Inclusion Partnership (SHIP) Member Forum, and formally received by Dr Pearson, the Director of Public Health for the PCT. She had been unable to provide no additional news on progress other than an affirmation that the PCT was under great pressure to deliver services. Councillor Martin confirmed that officers in the Estates Team had done all they could to bring this facility forward, but he faced ever increasing difficulties justifying the delay to local constituents. County Councillor Westlake will present the petition at a forthcoming Health and Adult Services Overview Scrutiny Committee.

Members noted the report.

(Report circulated)

33 **Economy Scrutiny Stewardship to June 2008**

The Director Economy and Development presented the report advising Members of the overall financial performance of the Economy and Development Directorate for the first three months of the financial year 2008/09, for the period up to 30 June 2008. Details of the main variations were set out and a couple of trends were highlighted including car park income, which was 2% lower than anticipated. Planning income was also adversely affected which was not unexpected due to the current state of the construction industry.

The Director responded to a Member comment stating that there was no impact on parking income from the changes earlier in the year, and the management of parking enforcement. He also advised that there was now a full complement of civil enforcement staff, and parking enforcement would continue to increase in efficiency for all areas of the city, including Topsham.

Members noted the report.

(Report circulated)

34 **Local Government (Access to information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public**

**RESOLVED** that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Act.

**MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE**

35 **Restructuring of the Staffing Provision of Exeter's Underground Passages**

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the report which sought approval to redesignate and change the responsibility of a number of staff at Exeter's Underground Passages, to improve operational efficiency, allow further development of the facility and manage the increased visitor number more effectively. He provided an update on the income generated by the Underground Passages and confirmed this had increased to £69,829 with a total of 19,845 visitors in the ten month period since reopening in September 2007. It was noted that all of the tours were sold out in the last fortnight of August.

Members welcomed the report and noted the continuing success of the Underground Passages since their reopening, which provided a key attraction as well as representing good value for money. The Head of Economy and Tourism agreed that the flexibility of the Passages provided something for everyone, and work was about to commence on marketing and developing more tours aimed specifically at groups and school parties.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the proposal that Executive agree the proposed staffing changes as detailed in the report.

(Report circulated to Members)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.45 pm

Chair