

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY**

11 March 2010

### **Present:**

Councillor Margaret Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Gale, P J Brock, Coates, A Hannaford, Martin, Robson, Sheldon, P A Smith and Wardle

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

### **Also present:**

Councillor Peter Wadham - Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport  
Councillor Stella Brock - Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism

### **12 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2010 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the correction that in Minute 9 (Reducing Carbon Emissions in Exeter) Councillor Martin was a member of 2020 Vision Exeter, not Exeter Vision as stated.

### **13 Declarations of Interest**

Members declared the following personal interests:-

<b>COUNCILLOR</b>	<b>MINUTE</b>
Councillor Gale	16 (member of Exeter Community Transport Association ECTA)
Councillor Martin	16 (member of Exeter Community Transport Association ECTA)
Councillor Martin	17 (Chair of the Regional Co-operative Party).

### **14 QUESTIONS FROM A MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER 20**

In accordance with Standing Order 20, Councillor Martin asked a question of the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism and sought reassurance that the thriving Farmers Market would remain in its current location for the foreseeable future. He suggested that such an affirmation would benefit both traders and patrons and they could more fully celebrate their prosperity.

The Portfolio Holder welcomed any opportunity to celebrate the success of the Farmers Market and confirmed there were no plans to move from its current location in the foreseeable future.

### **15 UPDATE ON THE EXETER VISITOR/TOURISM STRATEGY 2007 - 2010**

The Head of Economy and Tourism updated Members on progress with implementation of the Exeter Visitor/Tourism Strategy 2007-2010. The aim of the Strategy has been to encourage more shortbreak, day visitors and groups to the city

and area, with the consequent benefit for local businesses and jobs. He responded to a Member enquiry on tourist spend in Exeter, and highlighted the difficulty of making up to date comparisons with other locations. He suggested, however, a more useful parallel might be made with cities with similar characteristics such as Norwich or Chester.

A Member suggested more use of social media web sites could help develop new markets and he asked whether there were any such plans for Exeter. The Head of Economy and Tourism advised that greater use of sites such as Twitter and Facebook were not currently possible through the City Council web site, but he would explore other opportunities through partnership based sites. He noted a Member's comment that the forthcoming 150 years anniversary of the London Waterloo train services coming to Exeter Central Station and a similar anniversary next year of the Exmouth to Exeter branch line were tourism opportunities.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the progress made with implementing the 2007-2010 Exeter Visitor/Tourism Strategy and supported the actions proposed to be undertaken during 2010/11.

(Report circulated)

## 16 **EXETER POSITIVE STEPS FUND**

Councillors Martin and Gale declared a personal interest on ECTA (Exeter Community Transport Association)

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented a report which informed Members about the outcomes and outputs from activities and projects funded by the Exeter Positive Steps initiative since September 2008. The report included a request for a further financial contribution from the City Council to help continue this support to assist individuals into employment and training.

Members welcomed the report and agreed that this had been a worthwhile project. Further information on the expenditure was sought and the Head of Economy and Tourism advised that the current year's budget was allocated to existing clients, but further funding was needed to continue the work. He addressed a comment on the importance of meaningful performance monitoring, stating that close links with the respective parent organisation was maintained, but he acknowledged follow-on information was limited due to the resources needed to undertake this. A Member referred to the difficulty of quantifying outcomes from a mentoring experience with ex-offenders, despite fairly generous funding from the Prison Service.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and supported the release of £31,250 from the Economy and Tourism Budget 2009/2010 and from the next financial year to support the Exeter Positive Steps Fund.

(Report circulated)

## 17 **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SUPPORT**

Councillor Martin declared a personal interest as Chair of the Regional Co-operative Party.

The report of the Head of Economy and Tourism was submitted, informing Members of a City Council initiative to establish appropriate business support within Exeter for new and existing social enterprises through the Community Enterprise Unit (CEU).

The initiative aims to boost business development and growth and include an enhanced service for a trial period of a year. This was complementary to mainstream business assistance available through the Exeter Business Support Initiatives which was also supported by the City Council, the University of Exeter and Business Link.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and supported the release of £25,000 from the 2009/2010 Economy and Tourism Budget to fund a new initiative to promote and support social enterprises in Exeter.

(Report circulated)

## 18 **Economy Scrutiny Stewardship to December 2009**

The report of the Head of Treasury Services was submitted, advising Members of any forecast variations to the budget, based on the first nine months of the financial year 2009/10. The differences were highlighted by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first six months of the financial year up to December 2009, compared with the annual approved budget. During this period the total of variances indicate that the overall net expenditure for this Committee will increase by £66,540, which represents a variation of 5.33% from the revised budget of £1,247,700. This includes supplementary budgets of £125,930.

The Director provided an update on a number of budgets and confirmed that Parliament had formally approved a sum of £1.65 million grant for concessionary fares, which almost closes Exeter's concessionary fares funding gap. There had been positive feedback from two very successful Anti-Recession projects - the Debt Advice Service operating from the Customer Service Centre and the Home Repossessions Service based at the Courts, both developed from additional funding as part of a Response to the Recession package. In reply to Members' questions he confirmed that negotiations for the archaeological work on the St Loyes' site was continuing, with Exeter Archaeology ready to commence work as required. He also clarified the arrangement for Residents' Parking, explaining that the service should operate on a cost neutral basis with the costs being recouped from the County Council.

Scrutiny – Economy noted the contents of the report.

(Report circulated)

## **MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE**

### 19 **Parking Enforcement at the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital**

The Director Economy and Development presented the report which advised Members of a number of issues regarding the enforcement of parking restrictions at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. The report also included the details of a legal challenge relating to the use of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 powers.

The Director fully appreciated the deep concern of Members about the Council being in the position of having to face a legal claim in such a difficult financial period. In reply to a number of questions, he stated there could be no redress on the advice given by the Department for Transport as it was appropriately interpreted at the time. He was asked about the Authority's wider exposure to legal risks and responded that the Authority's staff exercised hundreds of legal powers every month and had to work on the reasonable basis that they were all valid. Identifying risk remained a key priority across the range of the Authority's business and the Council's Risk Register

sets out those activities deemed to be of particular risk and the appropriate mitigating action.

In consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport, it has been agreed that from 31 May, the City Council's parking enforcement regime at the RD&E Hospital would cease. The Council will provide an interim enforcement service until that date using the Council's trading powers. It was noted that the City of Exeter Parking Places Order 1994 must be revoked which is a formal process requiring Executive approval.

Scrutiny – Economy noted the contents of the report and recommended that Executive approve the revocation of The City of Exeter Hospital Parking Places Order 1994 and the process necessary to achieve this.

(Report circulated)

## 20 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

**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 Paragraph 3 of Part I, Schedule 12A of the Act.

## 21 **Exeter Business Centre - Options on Lease Expiry**

The report of the Head of Estates Services was submitted, which set out the options on expiry of the current Exeter Business Centre Ltd lease. The Director, in presenting this report, confirmed that the premises provided much needed flexible, low cost, managed space for start up and small businesses.

A Member welcomed this facility and the practical help that had been given to a wide mix of businesses. He suggested that such accommodation could be beneficial to eligible participants supported by the Exeter Positive Steps Fund projects. The Head of Economy and Tourism agreed to look into this.

Scrutiny Committee - Economy supported the following recommendations that Executive:-

- (1) endorse the principle of Exeter Business Centre Ltd taking a further lease of the premises at Marsh Green Road on the terms set out in the report, with the Council standing as guarantor to that further lease; and
- (2) agree to the revenue funding for the duration of the proposed new lease to meet any annual shortfall in the Company's revenue account for that period, the anticipated extent of such shortfall to be reported as part of the annual City Council budget setting process.

(Report circulated to Members)

## 22 **Retirement of John Rigby**

The Chair formally recorded the appreciation of the Scrutiny Committee – Economy for the significant contribution made by John Rigby, Director Economy and Development. He had always provided professional and valuable support and advice, and they thanked him for his hard work and dedication, and wished him well on the occasion of his retirement.

The Director returned the vote of thanks and referred to the many challenges and wide ranging aspects of his public service with Exeter. Members would be aware, that his interim successor, Karime Hassan had been appointed as Interim Director of Economy and Development, from 1 April; but he would not be able to be a regular attendee at Scrutiny meetings. He also confirmed that his colleague, David Prosser, Head of Estates Services would be leaving the Council at the beginning of May. Members also wished to record their thanks and appreciation for his excellent record of achievement. It was noted that the Property Manager, Michael Carson would take on the role until the management structure for the Council as a whole had been resolved.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.00 pm

Chair