

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

2 September 2010

Present:

Councillor Winterbottom (Chair)

Councillors Coates, A Hannaford, Payne, Sheldon, Taghdissian and Wardle

Interim Director Economy and Development, Head of Economy and Tourism, Projects and Business Manager and Member Services Officer (SLS)

Also present:

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

34 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2010 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

35 **Declarations of Interest**

The following personal interests were declared:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Coates	39 (Member of Exeter Arts Council)
Councillor Taghdissian	40 (Member of the Exeter Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC)

36 **Devon County Council Street Lighting Policy**

The Interim Director Economy and Development presented the report which outlined proposed changes by Devon County Council to reduce lighting in residential areas throughout Devon as part of a five year programme. The proposals included an exemption criteria with street lights remaining lit overnight in the city centre and the main roads within the city. Exeter City Council had been asked to contribute to the consultation with dispensation given to comment after the closing date of 20 August. The Interim Director discussed an approach that the City Council might take with a trial period of reduced lighting for a selected number of streets. A street plan of the city was circulated identifying the residential areas. The cost of conversion amounted to between £20 and £30 for each street light, with savings expected after three years.

Members made the following comments in response to the proposal -

- Disappointment that there were no comments available from other stakeholders such as the Police, particularly as there may be a possible impact on crime rates.
- That the function of the Local Authority was to work with the Community Safety Partnership to improve the perception rate of Exeter being a safe place to live. Turning lights off on the basis of a money saving exercise or to save energy was

not appropriate in that context. It was also suggested that whilst the city centre met the exemption criteria, many pedestrians walking back late at night from the city centre would be equally vulnerable when they turned off the main road.

- That street lighting provision may be at a higher level than was needed, and there could be other technical innovations in lighting quality and energy that could produce similar savings.
- A trial period might be a viable way forward but the entire city could fulfill the exception criteria; and
- The costs of the trial of modifying each lamppost column would mean a lengthy period before any savings were made.

A letter would be sent to Devon County Council rejecting the County Council's proposals and also to reiterate Member concern over the scope of the consultation carried out.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy did not support the proposed implementation of a trial period by Devon County Council to reduce street lighting within residential areas in Exeter.

(Report circulated)

37 **Business Improvement Districts**

The Head of Economy and Tourism provided a further progress report, seeking Members' views on the proposed Exeter City Centre Business Improvement District (BID). He outlined the scope of the BID, and the focus of the steering group, made up of city centre businesses and preparation of a business plan and a set of priorities. If those businesses within the BID area agree to the proposals, an additional charge of 1% to 1.5% would be levied on their business rates which will be used to support improvements in the area. It is anticipated that a ballot considering the main elements of the BID proposal and recommended levy would take place in March 2011.

A Member commented on the business community's strength of opinion and whether this was just a way of increasing business rates. The Head of Economy and Tourism stated that the level of support will be up to local businesses, but one of the main selling points has been that these additional funds will be spent on projects set out by businesses themselves. In response to a comment on the BID's governance structure, he advised that the steering group will include representatives from the Federation of Small Businesses, Exeter Chamber of Commerce as well as the City Council. He added that as many businesses as possible will be encouraged to be involved in progressing the BID area approved. This BID covers an area slightly wider than the city centre area with the challenge being to include the office quarter around Southernhay and smaller businesses on the edge to ensure that they enjoy the benefits. It was noted that the additional levy would only be paid by those businesses paying over £10,000 in rates. An equitable representation and voting process should enable both large and small businesses the chance to comment on any proposed projects.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the proposals for the Exeter City Centre Business Improvement District.

(Report circulated)

38 **Economy Update**

The Interim Director Economy and Development provided Members with the latest of a regular update on the national and local economic performance. Following some discussion, additional briefings for Members were suggested as an opportunity to explore the financial resilience of a number of large public sector employers in the city, and help set the economic picture in context. Many of these organisations will be carrying out a Financial Stress Test and it would be helpful to the Council to understand how resilient our economy was from expected public sector cuts. The University was identified as having a significant impact on the city's economy and therefore it would be sensible to begin by inviting the University of Exeter to explain their perspective on the future. It was important to see how the transition from over dependency in the public sector to the private sector could be made and an invitation would also be extended to the Chair of the Science Park Company Board and Chair of the Employment and Skills Board to attend a forthcoming meeting of Scrutiny Economy. In addition a view from the Met Office and the Peninsula Medical School would provide a useful wider prospective.

A Member welcomed the opportunity to take a look at the robustness of the local economy and focus on the specific skills pool for Exeter. He suggested pursuing his previous suggestion of developing an educational bursary for the sciences to foster a keener interest. He also enquired if there was an onus on developers to offer employment to the local trades, or if an apprenticeship scheme with the further education colleges could be cultivated as part of the Section 106 process. The Interim Director referred to a move by local authorities to seek developers to go beyond that to encourage the creation of a more highly trained skilled workforce overall.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

39 **Arts and Media Strategy 2009 - 2012 - Action Plan Review**

Councillor Coates declared a personal interest as a member of the Exeter Arts Council.

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the report, which provided an update on the implementation of the Arts and Media Strategy Action Plan. The report contained a summary of the focus over the last year and the ongoing development of partnership working with a range of organisations. The report also referred to the significant grant of core funding made to collectively sustain those organisations and keep up the basic level of activity.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and the proposed approach for the future development of the Arts and Media Strategy against a difficult economic background.

(Report circulated)

40 **Transportation Initiatives and Issues - Update**

Councillor Taghdissian declared a personal interest as a Member of the Exeter Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC).

The Directorate's Projects and Business Manager updated Members in relation to transport initiatives and issues affecting Exeter. The report also provided progress on the "Transportation Strategy" paper previously presented to this Committee and Executive as part of a suite of papers in relation to reducing carbon emissions in Exeter, as well as highlighting the public finance challenges faced by local authorities to provide a transport system that will be able to cope with the anticipated growth in and around Exeter.

A Member commented on the growth in traffic congestion in and around the city and the likely impact that the continued delay in a high quality public transport system will have on further expansion in around Exeter. The Interim Director Economy and Development agreed that delays in progressing the HQPT system (now known as Project Exe-Press) were frustrating, but the City Council will be involved when Devon County Council reviews the whole project. It was also important to influence the County Council's activity where possible, through the "Devon Metro" rail project to ensure that there will be rail access for future developments at Cranbrook, Newcourt and Monkerton. In the wake of the Comprehensive Spending Review and likely level of public sector cuts, the task for local authorities will be to find other models to deliver the necessary transport infrastructure in a more incremental and innovative way.

The Projects and Business Manager referred to the preparation work for the Rail Task and Finish group and asked Members to approve the terms of reference and note that a programme of meetings with appropriate stakeholders and interest groups will be arranged to study Exeter's rail issues in more depth. It is hoped that an invitation to the region's rail stakeholders, including Network Rail will provide an opportunity for more joined up thinking for the local rail network.

A Member commented on the City Council representation on the County Council's HATOC Committee, and also on occasions a County Council presence at the City's Planning Committee. The Interim Director responded to this, agreeing that cross authority input where appropriate was useful.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and;

- 1) offered their continued support for the initiatives designed to encourage more sustainable travel, and the delivery of an ECC transportation function designed to promote the long term interests of the city;
- 2) supported the circulation of the report to all Members for information; and
- 3) approved the terms of reference for the Rail Task and Finish Group set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

(Report circulated)

41 **Petition in Respect of Open Space at Loram Way, Alphington**

The Interim Director Economy and Development presented the report which asked Members to consider a petition presented to the Council, in respect of the

maintenance of the open space areas at the Loram Way estate in Alphington. He outlined the particular circumstances of this site. It was noted that the usual practice for developers addressing the maintenance of open spaces on new residential development was through a commuted sum paid to the Council. The developers of Loram Way opted to retain ownership and maintain the land themselves.

Members were advised that, in this instance, a commuted sum of £25,238 would be required by the City Council to take ownership, carry out initial works and then maintain the land as public open space. If such a payment were not required this could undermine the position taken by the Council over maintenance of similar sites throughout the city.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the petition and agreed that the petition organiser be advised that the Council could only consider taking transfer of the land if it received a commuted sum for remedial work and ongoing maintenance in the amount of £25,238.

(Report circulated)

42 **Economy Stewardship to June 2010**

The Interim Director Economy and Development presented the report which advised the major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first three months of the financial year up to 30 June 2010. During this period the total of the variances indicate that the overall net expenditure for this Committee will increase by £2,850, which represents a modest variation of 1.75% from the revised budget of £163,000.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.50 pm

Chair