

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

5 September 2013

Present:

Councillor Leadbetter (Chair)

Councillors Brock, Bialyk, Branston, Bull, Crew, Crow, Mottram, Prowse, Robson and Wardle

Apologies:

Councillors Bowkett

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Assistant Director Economy, Assistant Director Public Realm, Service Manager (RC), Museums Manager, Projects and Business Manager (RH), Principal Accountant (PM), City Centre Manager and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Rosie Denham - Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture
Councillor Rachel Sutton - Portfolio Holder City Development

33 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 May 2013 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

34 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brock made a discloseable pecuniary interest relating to Item 39 and withdrew from the meeting whilst this item was discussed.

35 Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order 20

In accordance with Standing Order 20, a question from a Member, Councillor Prowse, was put to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture in respect of the progress on sponsorship and marketing for the city centre Christmas lights. The Portfolio Holder replied. A copy of the questions had previously been circulated to Members. The questions and the reply from the Portfolio Holder (in italics) are appended to the minutes.

36 Presentation: Knowledge Economy Consultation Update

The Assistant Director Economy presented the report and updated Members on work undertaken on the preparation and development of a knowledge based economy development strategy for Exeter. Nigel Wilcock, Director of Mickeldore Ltd, the appointed consultants, attended the meeting and reported back to Members on the initial findings and potential opportunities to grow the city's knowledge economy. He considered that whilst Exeter was at the beginning of the process, the city already had many of the critical assets needed for success such as a high quality university, a supportive agency structure, the development of a Science Park and Skypark which would also offer more commercial space. The future strategy would include one to one engagement, further work on the skills agenda, and the development of an action plan with targets to be progressed by the dedicated Steering Group. Nigel

Wilcock confirmed that the consultation and study period still had six weeks to run. A further report would be presented to this Scrutiny Committee and then the Executive later this year.

Nigel Wilcock responded to a number of Members' comments:-

- although there were no elected Members on the Steering Group, there was local accountability with the inclusion of business leaders and representatives from leading institutions, such as Exeter University with a remit to report back to this Scrutiny Committee. Unfortunately he had no influence over national employers using local trades or workforce, or over the University's procurement strategy. However, both of these areas would be taken on as part of the forward strategy.
- Exeter had an urgent need for a faster high quality broadband connectivity which was fundamental to the development of a knowledge economy. He was aware that there was a potential solution being discussed by the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, and details would be included in the final report.
- every effort would be made to support those individuals with lower educational attainment and aspirations as part of work to develop the skills gap to ensure employees could be a part of developing the local economy.

The Chief Executive & Growth Director stated that Exeter's intent to become a knowledge economy was an important objective to drive future jobs for Exeter. Mickeldore had been able to identify the strengths and challenges that will need to be overcome and whilst the City Council had taken a lead so far, others must also now take this forward. The appropriate mechanisms were being put in place to engage the private sector to use local employees and raise skills levels, and the Council had been looking at ways to drive this forward working with neighbouring local authorities including Devon County Council. The Knowledge Economy Strategy would provide the framework, the appropriate level of engagement and ensure the action plan route can move in the right direction.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy Members thanked Nigel Wilcock for the presentation and welcomed the direction and progress of development of the Knowledge Economy Strategy to date.

(Report circulated)

37 **Budget Monitoring**

Councillor Prowse expressed an interest as a Member of Devon County Council.

The Principal Accountant presented the report, which detailed the major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first three months of the financial year up to 30 June 2013, which included a variation of 2.08% from the revised budget. An update on budget monitoring for the Economy and Development Capital Programme and potential areas of budgetary risk were identified and would be the subject of close monitoring. He would send a written response to a Member seeking information on the coinage retained by the Pay and Display machines in the City Council's car parks. Following a further comment on the need for the Council's machines to be Disability Discrimination Act Compliant, the Assistant Director Public Realm would follow up the suggestion that the County Council had surplus DDA stock, which could be used as the need for replacement arose.

The Chief Executive & Growth Director referred to comparison with last year's planning budget success, and any action needed would be taken, to ensure the budget was kept in check. He added that a number of planning consents had been

banked, and although there were two or three significant developments in the pipeline, he was not aware of them being actively pursued at the present time. A Member advised that he had received very positive feedback about the Cowick Street enhancement project and wished to thank all those involved in bringing it to fruition.

Scrutiny Committee Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

38 **City Centre Strategy for Exeter 2013 - 2022 (Draft)**

Councillor Denham attended the meeting and spoke to the Scrutiny Committee under Standing Order 44.

The City Centre Manager presented a report which updated Members on the preparation for a new City Centre Strategy to cover the period 2013/22, and sought their support for the document as drafted. The case for a new City Centre Strategy had previously received the backing of the City Centre Management Partnership Board (CCMPB) in 2012 and, following initial consideration, of a draft Strategy framework in early 2013, there had been an extensive consultation and listening exercise with a wide range of City Centre stakeholders including Devon County Council, the Police, the business community and Exeter Chamber of Commerce. The City Centre Manager referred to the consultation exercise having significantly strengthened the link with city centre businesses, specifically the independent sector, but emphasised the importance of businesses playing an ever greater role in the delivery of the City Centre initiatives during the lifespan of the City Centre Strategy. He added that the Strategy would only be of real value if the Action Plan was used as a framework for regular review on strategy delivery. The Strategy would be overseen by a reconstituted City Centre Management Partnership Board,(CCMPB) and include representatives from the city centre based business community, the Princesshay and Guildhall shopping centres, the City Council, Police and County Council. Once agreed, each body would need to account for progress on those aspects of the Strategy for which they were responsible. Following the Executive, further work would take place to ensure that the final Strategy was presented in a more attractive format.

Councillor Denham considered that this Strategy would set the way for the next decade. The draft document was significantly different to the earlier version, which had left little opportunity for meaningful engagement to shape the process. She welcomed the reconfiguration of the CCMPB membership, which would include a broader range of people and representation of retail in Exeter. It was understood that many of the projects could only go forward with the development of a successful Business Improvement District (BID). The Exeter Chamber of Commerce had taken the lead on this and would provide an update to this Scrutiny Committee later in the year.

The following responses were given to Members:-

- The City Centre Manager reiterated the difference between the early evening and late night economies and referred to the efforts being made through the Night Time Economy Forum to work to progress a number of projects. A shift in the trading hours would make a difference to the culture of the city and the environment.
- The City Centre Manager agreed that many of the potential projects, identified in the City Centre Strategy, were dependent on developing and identifying new and additional private sector income streams.

- The Assistant Director Economy referred to on-going process monitoring and would take on the suggestion for more 'feeling based' monitoring. He agreed this may provide an opportunity to gather and in effect sample new straplines to promote the city. They were currently pursuing a number of initiatives following on from the Food Festival, involving independent restaurants and cafés to seek to promote the quality of eating places in the city, building on its growing reputation.

Members also made the following comments:-

- the burgeoning independent retail sector in Exeter should be acknowledged, as there was an interesting café culture trail, whose businesses were already predominately using local produce and reference in the Action Plan would be welcomed.
- a request that a list of consultees/respondents should be published.
- the particular problem of a lack of treatment of weeds at this time of year in the city was raised.
- a request for the City Council to write to Devon County Council 's Highways Authority requesting a review of signage in the city centre relating to vehicular access, in an effort to address the increasing number of vehicles driving up High Street and Sidwell Street.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy welcomed the final draft of the City Centre Strategy and sought Executive approval, and also for the following:-

- (1) that the City Centre Partnership be asked to oversee the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan, and the City Council work with the Partnership to review its membership to include representatives from the various distinctive areas, types of business and other interests which depend on the City Centre; and
- (2) Scrutiny Committee Economy to receive at least an annual presentation and progress report.

(Report circulated)

39 **Petition - Magdalen Road Car Park Charges**

Councillor Brock declared a discloseable pecuniary interest as a trader on Magdalen Road and withdrew from the room whilst the item was discussed.

The Service Manager, Public Realm and Commercial Services confirmed that a petition, containing 438 signatures had been submitted to Council on 16 July, with a concern that parking charges at Magdalen Road car park were having an effect on the local footfall. He referred to the outcome of the all-party Task and Finish Group, who had considered a number of options to protect and maximise income from the Council's car parks. That Group had considered that the overall tariff structure should be simplified and following a report to Executive, the Madgalen Road and Howell Road car parks were redesignated as short stay parks, in order to generate turnover of space and support local traders.

Councillor Prowse advised that he had been contacted by the petitioner and spoke on the matter. The petition referred to a decreasing footfall and the withdrawal of the use of parking for season ticket holders at weekends which had a marked decline in use. Howell Road car park had seen a similar drop in numbers. He asked officers to consider including weekend parking for season ticket holders to help recoup the lost business spread over the week. A Member considered that Exeter's car parking

charges were quite reasonable compared with some other cities and suggested a number of vacant offices in Southernhay may have been a contributory factor. The Assistant Director Public Realm confirmed that the redesignation of a number of the city centre's car parks had resulted in some displacement, but it was important to look at the relationship between parking tariffs and income in the round as it was difficult to find any correlation between tariff changes (or the lack of them) and income levels in individual car parks. In addition, overall parking income was holding up very well. The Car Parks Task and Finish Group had set out to create more available space on Magdalen Road for local shopping, and he felt this had been achieved. He noted the issues relating to Howell Road and would continue to monitor the levels of car parking in all car parks, and particularly Howell Road.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the petition and would continue to monitor the Magdalen Road and Howell Road car parks usage.

(Report circulated)

40 **Transport Initiatives and Issues - Update**

Councillor Prowse expressed an interest as a Member of Devon County Council.

The Projects and Business Manager updated Members on the progress made in relation to transport initiatives and issues affecting Exeter and the City Council's involvement, both as a planning authority as well as providing transport infrastructure. The report covered all forms of transport available in Exeter, as well as an update on road improvements and other major schemes. It was noted that the funding for major schemes had been devolved to the Local Transport Board, with one omission being the replacement of a Bus and Coach Station. Redevelopment of the city's transport hub was now a top priority, and a number of options were being pursued, including the LEP's future single Local Growth Fund.

He responded to a Member's comment on lobbying for an equality of the Air Passenger Duty, stating that the membership of the Transport Select Committee did not include either of the city's MP's, however they were both very supportive when any such matter was taken up. He provided an update on a number of projects in the city including the forthcoming pedestrianisation of Central Station forecourt, and a future scheme at Liverpool Hill to Kinnerton Way, which would provide an important pedestrian and cycle link for a local school. He responded to Members' comments on the condition of St Clements Lane, and would investigate whether it was possible to secure some funding from Sustrans to look at improving the uneven surface of the tow path by Exeter Canal at Bromhams Field to link with the cycle trail. The Projects and Business Manager also addressed a comment on an apparent inconsistency for cyclists on the arterial routes into the city, referring to the cycle map of Exeter, which gave a number of off-road alternatives. He would make further enquiries on the Heavitree Pleasure Ground's consultation for the new pedestrian and cycle path to provide more information to the ward member.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy offered their continued support for the Council's involvement in the initiatives outlined in their report, with the replacement Bus and Coach Station being a high priority.

(Report circulated)

41 **Exeter Commercial Property Register**

The Assistant Director Economy presented a report which updated Members on the handling of investment and relocation enquiries, and noted the progress made in

improving the toolkit available to attract and respond to enquiries about commercial properties. The Commercial Property Register, available through www.exeter.gov.uk/property provided an unbiased advice service to businesses looking to relocate or expand their existing business in Exeter and the Heart of Devon area. The Economy Unit worked with a wide range of commercial agents and used the system to promote vacant properties to local, regional and national businesses. He responded to comments about developing the service, stating that the available resources were used to continually raise the Register's profile. Members suggested seeking the support of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership to help promote this service.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the following:-

- (1) progress made with the Commercial Property Register and acknowledged the City Council's role in dealing with investment and relocation enquiries;
- (2) progress made in improving the toolkit available to staff for dealing with inward investment / relocation enquiries in the form of a promotional video, the www.investinexeter.co.uk website and the prospectus, and
- (3) suggested that support from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership be sought to help promote this service.

(Report circulated)

42 **RAMM Visitor Research 2013/14**

The Museums Manager presented a report on the visitor research programme and outlined the proposed programme of research for the period 2013/14. The results of this market research helped identify long term trends and captured the contribution made by the RAMM to the city. It also provided useful supporting evidence when submitting future funding applications. A summary of the visitor trends was set out in Section 4 of the report and, of particular note, was the increase in dwell time as well as many positive comments about the quality of the experience. It was gratifying to note that 94% of participants agreed that the RAMM made a vital impact on the city, with the Museum being seen as a flagship of excellence for the city. The Chief Executive & Growth Director responded to a suggestion that the Museum's opening hours be extended, potentially into the early evening and whilst he understood the interest, advised that a sound financial case, including any staff implications would have to be made.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and the positive impact made by the RAMM in attracting visitors and their expenditure to the city.

(Report circulated)

43 **Work Schedule Programme Meeting**

Members considered suggested topics for scrutiny as put forward at a scrutiny work programme on 25 July 2013. They made a number of suggestions including:-

- The Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) - It was agreed that an invitation would be extended to the Chair or Chief Executive to attend the November meeting. Councillor Leadbetter would also be able to contribute to the debate as the Devon County Council representative on the LEP.
- Future delivery of faster Broadband connectivity in the city

- Improving the vitality of District Shopping centres.
- The future direction and promotion of the Quay area
- Youth unemployment

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the topics suggested of high, medium and low priority suggestions for future scrutiny work, noting that a programme of work would now be progressed in conjunction with the Chair of the three Scrutiny Committees.

(Report circulated)

44 Parkwood Leisure Services Working Group - Membership

It was reported that due to the change in the Portfolio Holder responsibility from Environment and Leisure to Economy and Culture, the monitoring of the Parkwood Leisure contract, including the reporting of the Parkwood Leisure Services Working Group minutes would be transacted through Scrutiny Committee – Economy. A revised Terms of Reference was circulated as the membership would now include the Chair of Scrutiny Committee – Economy, Councillor Leadbetter and Portfolio Holder Economy and Culture, Councillor Denham together with a representative from each of the political Groups. Nominations were sought for the Parkwood Leisure Services Working Group.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the nominations of Councillors Robson, Crow and Brock as the representatives. (Subsequent to the meeting Councillor Mitchell took the place of Councillor Brock.)

45 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 paragraph 3, of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

46 Minutes of Exeter and Heart of Devon Growth Board - 8 July 2013

The minutes of the Exeter and Heart of Devon Growth Board held on 8 July 2013 were circulated for Members' information, and referred to a number of issues that the City Council may need to consider and take forward as appropriate.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the content of the Exeter and Heart of Devon Growth Board Minutes.

(Minutes circulated to Members)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.25 pm

Chair

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Scrutiny Committee – Economy 5 September 2013

Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture from Councillor Prowse *(The reply is in italics)*

1. Can the Portfolio Holder give Members an update on the progress to encourage local businesses and sponsors to assist in the funding for the Christmas lights?

Councillor Denham referred to the progress made in seeking sponsorship and marketing to fund the Christmas lights in the High Street. Following on from the discussion at the Christmas Lights Task and Finish Group, a face to face approach had been made to contact a number of city centre businesses. It had also been possible to use some of the results from the consultation carried out for the City Centre Strategy. She hoped to be in a position to provide a further update at Council, and there may be confirmation of a significant sponsor.

2. Can the Portfolio Holder tell Members of any initiatives that would boost the visitor numbers to the city of Exeter over the Christmas period, that would both fill the spare capacity car parking and benefit local business and events?

Councillor Denham outlined the many seasonal activities to promote the city, including 50,000 copies of the Winter in the City, an events brochure, which will be distributed widely in the region, as well as promotion through the website and social media.

Other activities include -

- *The Christmas Lights switch on - 21 November and the start of late night shopping.*
- *The Christmas Market will take place on the Cathedral Green from 21 November to 19 December. Other weekend Christmas markets will take place on Fore Street and Castle Street.*
- *A Santa's Grotto and reindeer visit in the Guildhall Shopping Centre*
- *Exeter City Football Club's Annual Santa Run.*
- *There are also a number of pantomime and children's shows taking place in the Corn Exchange, and the Phoenix, Barnfield and Bike Shed theatres.*

Councillor Prowse thanked the Portfolio Holder for her reply and reiterated his previous offer to help with the face to face approach to local businesses.

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