

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

13 November 2014

Present:

Councillor Henson (Chair)

Councillors Brock, Branston, Brimble, Bull, Foggin, Lyons, Robson, Wardle and Williams

Apologies:

Councillors Crew and Holland

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Principal Accountant Service (PM), Economy and Tourism Manager, Scrutiny Programme Officer and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Rosie Denham

Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture

Councillor Rachel Sutton

Portfolio Holder City Development

55 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2014 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

56 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Branston declared a discloseable pecuniary interest and withdrew from the meeting whilst Minute 59 was discussed.

57 Parking Places Enforcement

Members were advised that this report was withdrawn and a further revised report would be made to the next meeting on 22 January 2015.

58 Budget Monitoring (2nd Quarter)

The Principal Accountant presented the report, which advised Members of the revised budget in respect of the Economy Services revenue and capital budgets. The current forecast suggested that net expenditure for this Committee would decrease from the approved budget by a total of £182,120, which represented a variation of 74.24% from the revised budget. This included supplementary budgets of £219,560. The capital programme for the Economy Services showed a spend of £912,972 as at 30 September 2014, schemes to the value of £49,850 have been deferred until 2015/16.

The Principal Accountant also provided an update on the main capital variances from the budget which related to the improvement of the athletics track and sports facilities at Exeter Arena, the Canal Basin and Quayside, and the Exeter City Football in the Community project. He replied to a question received from a Member seeking a breakdown of the budget for the renewal of the track at Exeter Arena. The £40,000 overspend was for further work including the installation of new drainage

and additional levelling work which needed to be carried out. He also responded to a request for information and confirmed that there were three fewer members of staff on street cleaning duties than five years ago. The posts had already been removed from the establishment and the impact on the schedule had been negligible. The improved efficiency as a result of the redesign work for Keeping Exeter Looking Good would be in place from April 2015 and would allow for a reduction of staff and provide a more flexible workforce across the city.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

59 **Exeter and Heart of Devon Visitor Research 2014**

Councillor Branston declared a discloseable pecuniary interest and withdrew from the meeting whilst Minute 59 was discussed.

The Economy and Tourism Manager presented a report which detailed the results of the Exeter & the Heart of Devon online visitor survey which was conducted between March and June 2014, with the results informing future marketing activity. She also referred to the annual volume and value of tourism data for Exeter & the Heart of Devon, through the Cambridge Economic Activity Model and the results of the Visit England visitor satisfaction tracker for Devon. The report included details of the reasons why visitors choose to visit Exeter & the Heart of Devon area and Devon compared with other UK destinations. Every effort was needed to encourage day visits to be converted into overnight stays. A full report was available on request. She responded to a Member's comment and their surprise at the relatively low level of overseas visitors to Exeter, which was not her experience. It was noted that overseas visitors made up 2.2% of the 2.2 million visitors to Exeter.

A Member referred to the results of the online visitor survey for Exeter & the Heart of Devon area and suggested that it would have been helpful to include a breakdown of the visitor numbers to the most popular destinations.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report which contained the results of the Exeter & the Heart of Devon visitor survey, volume and value data and the Visit England brand tracker research.

60 **Exeter and Heart of Devon Employment and Skills Board**

The Partnership and Projects Manager for the Exeter and Heart of Devon Employment and Skills Board presented an update on the activities and progress of the Skills Board in promoting the value of skills development, supporting business growth and getting local people into work. She also referred to the report which explored some of the skill issues affecting the local economy, set out the Employment and Skills Board's priorities and plans, and provided examples of where the Board had made a difference since her appointment in May 2014. The Skills Board had been working with Exeter Council for Voluntary Service and the support for the long term unemployed to look at offering better careers guidance for young people, as well as maximising the support for employment opportunities in construction locally, and encouraging apprentice schemes.

A Member enquired if local contractors could be encouraged to employ young local apprentices as they often found it hard to find suitable opportunities. The Partnership and Projects Manager referred to recent efforts to develop a shared service apprentice scheme involving sub-contractors and smaller firms who may not need an apprentice for the duration of a course, to try and match apprentices with work. Members agreed that this mismatch of apprentices with available work needed to be

addressed. She also responded to a Member's enquiry about engaging NEET individuals (Not in Education or Employment) from Exeter in the forthcoming Rugby World Cup, stating that young people from more outlying areas had been targeted to ensure they were engaged. There were a number of such legacy projects to encourage team working and self-esteem and sport was an ideal way to tackle the broader issues.

Scrutiny Committee - Economy noted the report and the progress made and priorities set by the Employment and Skills Board in prioritising, planning and implementing interventions designed to better skill a more productive workforce in support of a sustainable and thriving economy.

61 **Cost of Living Interim Report**

The Chair of the Cost of Living Forum, Councillor Denham, updated Members on the progress of the Forum's work in relation to Exeter University's Research report, the issues identified by the Forum for further investigation and the timetabling of the remaining work. The interim research was originally desk top based, but following on from a survey drawn together by Exeter University, the report now included a more local picture. Following this research, the Forum would explore strategies and possible solutions to a range of identified problems in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders. The report highlighted a number of areas and the affordability of paying staff the living wage was something many employers agreed with in principle, but nevertheless the ability to do so was a consideration in practice.

It was thought appropriate to focus on larger organisations, and not neglect support for smaller businesses. There may be opportunities to work with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership to access funding and an initial dialogue had commenced with it. The report also highlighted a number of areas that could reap benefits including working with young people in schools to provide better careers advice, greater availability of obtaining sound financial advice as well as access to more affordable ethical credit. The Employment and Skills Board was already working with local employers and employees to drive up the skills agenda.

A Member referred to the financial hardship faced by many residents including those who were in work as well as legitimately claiming benefits. He commented on the survey and an issue relating to the undue stress placed on families during the school holidays, who relied on free school meals in term time. He was aware that other authorities were working with Free Schools and Academies to run holiday meal schemes and would appreciate any influence that could be brought to bear on Devon County Council. Councillor Denham stated that the report did recognise the cooperation of Devon County Council and a forthcoming briefing meeting would be discussing a range of such issues.

Scrutiny Committee - Economy welcomed the report and the progress made to date by the Cost of Living Forum and were content with the eight areas identified by the Forum for focused investigation.

62 **Parkwood Leisure Working Group Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2014 were noted.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.25 pm

Chair