

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

11 September 2014

Present:

Councillor Henson (Chair)

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

Apologies:

Councillor Crew

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Assistant Director Finance, Assistant Director Economy, Events, Facilities and Markets Manager, Economy and Tourism Manager, Principal Project Manager (Infrastructure Management & Delivery), City Centre Manager and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (SLS)

In attendance:

Ian Broadfoot, Destination Marketing Management.

44 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2014 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

45 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of discloseable pecuniary interest were made.

46 Business Improvement District Presentation

Ian Broadfoot, an Associate of Destination Management and Marketing, made a presentation which informed Members of the progress of the work on the Business Improvement District or BID. The BID would cover a given area, and plan, deliver and pay for additional improvements, services or initiatives which would benefit the trading environment and be funded through a levy and approved by a ballot. It would enable stakeholders to invest their money to achieve common goals determined and managed by them. This should enable Exeter's retailers to stay ahead of the competition and help meet the changing face of the nation's high streets and address the challenges of out of town developments and the digital market. Other benefits included providing local businesses with a voice and some real influence as well as a clear mandate for action with guaranteed funds to deliver a plan devised by those who pay.

Destination Management have commissioned a feasibility study to look at what makes a BID successful. As part of this work they also reviewed the previous campaign and a number of areas of concern had been raised, including a differential in the levy rate and other aspects such as a limited consultation and the area covered in the Business Plan. They asked local stakeholders why Exeter needed a BID and received a good level of feedback, and the message was that although Exeter appeared to be flourishing it still might not be reaching its full potential. It was also recognised that it was important to share the benefits of the BID further than the

immediate city centre and High Street to provide a well maintained management for a 24 hour economy.

Progress to date has included an intensive consultation process and contact with over 300 businesses, using the BID champions through one to one and also street meetings. They would be working with One Voice Media as well as in partnership with Exeter City Council. A web site had been established www.exeterbid.co.uk and they also plan to have a newsletter to gather feedback from businesses to develop the Business Plan. Although the dates still had to be finalised it was anticipated that the timeline would include the development of the BID proposal document/business plan and focus on continuing the campaign period from now to February, followed by an issue of the ballot on 15 January 2015. The ballot would end on 28 February and the results are expected to be announced on 3 March.

He responded to Member's comments:-

- he was aware that a comment on improved Christmas lights had been made and also that Exeter City Council had made a significant contribution both in terms of funding and coordination.
- previous consultation work on the Business Plan suggested greater benefit in redefining the area and Phase 1 will include the main retail areas and the key gateways such as Fore Street, rather than the business area of Southernhay.
- they would make every effort not to exclude the fringe areas of the city centre such as Sidwell Street, particularly as there were other areas off the immediate High Street which would benefit, but they had to draw a boundary. The BID area could expand as it became more successful.
- the BID may well include proposals to address the night time economy. He was aware that colleagues from Exeter City Council were looking at gaining the Purple Flag initiative which provided a bench mark of a safe and thriving evening and night time economy and the BID work may wish to build on that in the future.

Members thanked Ian for his attendance and the update.

47 **Transport Initiatives and Issues -Update**

The Principal Project Manager (Infrastructure Management & Delivery) presented an annual report to update Members in relation to transport initiatives and issues affecting Exeter. The emphasis this year was on rail, with new stations opening at Newcourt and Cranbrook and more certainty in relation to the franchising process. The report also included an electric vehicle strategy, promoted by the Low Carbon Task Force to ensure a consistent approach to issues arising as electric vehicles become more widely used.

In response to questions from Members, the Principal Project Manager clarified the following –

- Services provided by Sustrans have included revision of the Exeter Walking Map and inspection and maintenance of the Green Circle signage and vegetation.
- The Council's electric vehicles have prompted positive feedback from drivers, and no particular problems with pedestrians not being aware of their presence. The Equalities Impact Assessment has highlighted that there could be issues

over visually impaired people being aware of the vehicles, but there were potentially significant health benefits from the reduction in harmful emissions. An EU directive for electric vehicles to have synthetic sound would not come into effect until 2019.

- Preparation of the Electric Vehicle Strategy has prompted considerable interest from the business community.
- Electric vehicles will be added to the Council's fleet in cases where they are projected to generate savings. Exeter was leading by example with the Introduction of charging points, which has been funded by grant aid and sponsorship. He added that the current range achieved by the electric fleet was more than adequate for travel around the city.
- The creation of an orbital bus route around the boundary of the city was no longer being considered. The current strategy is to divert some journeys on radial routes to serve employment areas, and this was creating some orbital links.
- The Council is currently lobbying for improvements to the A303 and A30. There may be an opportunity to suggest the inclusion of solar panels along the route as part of the design stage.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy offered their continued support for the Council's involvement in the initiatives outlined in the report, and requested that Executive endorse the Electric Vehicle Strategy, as a strategy for promoting the ownership and use of electric vehicles within Exeter.

48 **Budget Monitoring**

The report of the Assistant Director Finance was submitted which advised Members of any major differences by management unit to 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 for the approved budget by a total of £20,340, which represented a variation of 8.29% from the revised budget. This included supplementary budgets of £219,560. The current capital programme for the Economy Service was detailed in an appendix to the report, and included a forecast spend of £1,844,280 in 2014/15 with £863,340 of the programme potentially deferred until 2015/16.

A Member referred to the New Homes Bonus allocation and in the case of a deferral whether there was a time limit or if it was kept in reserve. The Assistant Director Finance stated that there was no time limit, but there were often challenges relating to the acquisition of further funding or match funding. The Portfolio Holder for City Development advised that if a grant was notionally for three years, it could in effect be 'recycled' if it was not possible for the organisation allocated the funds to spend them in the year. They could then be allocated to an organisation who were in a position to proceed in that financial year.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

49 **City Centre Night-Time Economy**

The City Centre Manager provided Members with an update on the night-time economy and the approach being taken to enhance its attractiveness to all, improve the perceptions of safety and reduce incidents of drink related anti-social behaviour. Members were also asked to note the progress and achievements made by the Exeter Alcohol, Violence and Night-Time Economy Task Group to date and comment on the plan of action for the coming twelve months, and identify any additional areas on which they would wish there to be a focus in the plan.

It was noted that good progress had been made through the implementation of a number of innovative projects, including the H2O project (where self service coolers were installed in a number of larger premises with a view to encouraging customers to drink more water on a night out), extended evening retail opening hours, the establishment of a late night Help Zone and introduction of Taxi Marshalls. Such projects have made a significant contribution to making the city centre feel more welcoming and safer at night. Initiatives planned included working towards the introduction of a Best Bar None Scheme, securing Purple Flag accreditation for the city centre and potential expansion of the Taxi Marshall scheme to Fridays and Bank Holiday Sundays.

A Member submitted a question requesting an update on the city centre footfall in the 6pm to 9pm period and the efforts made to improve both activity and spend. The City Centre Manager indicated that early evening extended opening remained a challenging area with the lack of an extensive 'buy in' frustrating. There had been a slight improvement in Thursday evening's footfall, but it was not yet at the position hoped for. The proposed Business Improvement District (BID) would make a major contribution to the long term success of extended opening hours.

A Member indicated that locations such as the Underground Passages needed to be viewed as part of the early evening city centre offer. In response to a Member's comment on the apparent lack of progress and information on the Guildhall Shopping Centre refurbishment, the City Centre Manager gave an assurance that works had commenced and that further information on the next steps would be forthcoming over the coming weeks. He responded to a Member's question on the timing of the work confirming that it would enable trading over the Christmas 2014/15 and allow completion before the end of 2015.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the progress and achievements to date and on the plan of action for the coming twelve months.

50 **Exeter Commercial Property Register**

The Economy and Tourism Manager presented a report on the new and improved Exeter Commercial Property Register and Exeter City Council's handling of investment and relocation enquiries during the previous 12 months. She updated Members on the progress made in improving the toolkit available to attract and respond to business relocation and inward investment enquiries. The Register covered a five mile radius of Exeter, and there was market confidence by businesses wishing to relocate to Exeter. The report also outlined the intention to progress with the marketing of the Commercial Property Register to sell to other local authorities.

She responded to a Member who had previously submitted questions in relation to there being sufficient vacancies to meet demands. Exeter had a tight boundary and there was a need to work together with neighbouring authorities. The staff member who looked after the CPR had regular discussions with colleagues in the Council's City Development to ensure that plans were in place to ensure adequate employment land supply, although this was inevitably becoming constrained within the tight city boundary and good working relationships with neighbouring authorities were vital on this. A Member enquired how the business search for vacant properties was conducted and the Economy and Tourism Manager explained the process as it was often difficult to judge the identity of the individual or company. She also referred to the benefits of the promotional video which had reached expectation with regards to views on YouTube and other media and they had encouraged businesses to include it on their own website and within presentations. At present there were no plans to

translate it into other languages, apart from Italian which related to work in respect of Rugby World Cup 2015 investment opportunities.

Scrutiny Committee Economy noted the report.

51 Parkwood Leisure Working Group Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2014 were noted.

It was also noted that Councillor Heather Morris had also been appointed as a member of the Parkwood Leisure Working Group.

52 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that, under Section 100 A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Act.

53 Legacy Leisure Proposal

The Events Facilities and Markets Manager presented a report which informed Members of the opportunity to allow Parkwood Leisure to transfer the management of the City Council leisure facilities to their charitable trust model – Legacy Leisure. There have been ongoing discussions with the Council's Legal Department to ensure that all of the proposed arrangements would ensure that the best interests of the Council were protected. It was noted that the charitable trust status principle was now well established as an accepted operational model for leisure facilities.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the following -

- (1) allowing Parkwood Leisure to move the management of the Exeter Facilities to Legacy Leisure pending further clarification in respect of the charitable trust model, and
- (2) requesting Executive to authorise the Assistant Director, Economy, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture, to confirm Council's agreement to the transfer of the management of the City Council leisure facilities to Legacy Leisure. Such confirmation to be dependent on Parkwood Leisure providing requested verification regarding the status of Legacy Leisure.

54 Exeter & Heart of Devon Growth Board Minutes

The minutes of the Exeter and Heart of Devon Growth Board Minutes held on 28 July 2014 were circulated for Member's information, and also 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.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.10 pm

Chair