

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

21 January 2010

Present:

Councillor Margaret Baldwin (Chair)

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

Director Economy and Development, Head of Economy and Tourism, Head of Exeter Archaeology, Projects and Business Manager 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

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2009 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

5 Declarations of Interest

Members declared the following personal interests:

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Wardle	6 Member of the Devon Archaeological Society
Councillor Coates	6 Friend of Exeter Cathedral
Councillor Smith	8 Chairman of the Barnfield Theatre
Councillor Martin	8 Exeter and Devon Cooperative Party 9 Member of Exeter Vision

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY ECONOMY

6 Archaeological Research Progress

Councillor Wardle declared a personal interest as a member of the Devon Archaeological Society and Councillor Coates declared a personal interest as a Friend of Exeter Cathedral.

The report of the Head of Exeter Archaeology was submitted, advising Members on:-

- Recent changes within Exeter Archaeology;
- Progress with archaeology reports and projects funded from the Economy and Tourism budget; and
- Information relating to archaeological projects carried out in the city for both the City Council and external clients.

The recent restructuring of the Unit now enabled a more flexible and positive response to the changing pattern of work, enabling them to meet the increasing levels of competition more effectively. A presentation included examples of projects that had either been publicly or privately funded from a variety of sources including

the Dean and Chapter, English Heritage and private developers. He referred to a number of publications and circulated drafts of forthcoming works. Although some publications remained primarily for a more academic audience, there were increasing efforts to make them more popular and accessible to a wider audience. In response to a Member request, he would consider exploring the possibility of making some publications available through the City Council web site if costs were covered. Other work included more direct engagement with the public, promotion of open days and outreach sessions with schools.

A Member also welcomed the restructuring of the Unit, but enquired if the reduction in staff numbers would have any impact on their future use of the Customs House. The Head of Exeter Archaeology confirmed that whilst the core structure only totalled 15 staff, there had to be room to accommodate any temporary staff when funded for specific jobs. They were also due to release an external storage facility and the Custom House would provide storage for those artefacts.

Scrutiny Committee- Economy noted the progress being made to establish a financially viable archaeological contractor within a constrained economic environment and noted the progress being made with all these projects.

(Report circulated)

7 Economy Update

The Head of Economy and Tourism provided Members with a brief update on the continuing effect the recession was having in Exeter. A Chamber of Commerce survey has shown that local business confidence remained high, with retail in the city centre showing no signs of any marked difficulty. However despite a small drop in the latest unemployment figures, there was a worrying trend of young people who had been consistently unemployed for over six months. A Member referred to the number of young people staying on at college, and suggested that future funding shortfalls in further and higher education might also have a future impact on their numbers.

The Head of Economy and Tourism responded to a comment on the city's strengths, and referred to a number of factors including the city's hub location, the University, future plans at the Science Park and SkyPark and the relatively low operating costs which had to be a feature. It was important to focus on the longer term prosperity and where the effort still had to be made. He was pleased that Exeter had held its position so far, but no one was complacent as there may yet be longer term issues with so many Government departments represented in the city. Although we might appear less vulnerable, it was important to actively pursue diversification of the economy with the Science Park and Skypark which will present the opportunity to provide new employment as well as training opportunities over the coming years.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

8 2010/11 Budget Estimates

Councillor Martin declared a personal interest as a member of the Devon and Exeter Cooperative Party and Councillor P Smith also declared a personal interest as Chairman of the Barnfield Theatre.

The report of the Director Economy and Development was submitted, outlining the strategic framework within which the estimates had been prepared, changes in accounting practices, which affect all budgets and detailed reasons for any significant changes in the Management Unit estimates. He set out the changes to the individual budget heads including staff changes within Planning. The budget had been constructed on the assumption that the City Council will gain an extra £1.65 million of special grant in respect of the concessionary fares scheme, but this has not yet been confirmed by Government. It was noted that a further update on concessionary fares would be made to the March meeting.

Councillor Stella Brock attended the meeting under Standing Order 44 and drew Members' attention to the proposal for the withdrawal of the City Council's funding for the Vibraphonic Festival from 2011. She proposed that a sum of £7,000 be transferred from the City Centre Events and Promotions budget as a contribution to the marketing costs of Vibraphonic Festival 2011. The Director confirmed that a sum of £5,000 had already been committed to the city centre cycle race, but £10,000 remained in the budget which could be used for a number of possible city centre activities. Members supported the proposal. It was considered appropriate that a staged reduction in Vibraphonic's funding rather than a total withdrawal would be a good way forward, but that further future funding opportunities should be explored.

The Director responded to a comment on the cost of the Christmas lights, which year on year, had become more of a financial challenge due to the lack of contributions from a significant part of the city centre business community. The Head of Economy and Tourism and the City Centre Manager had been working on a Business Improvement District proposal which could be used to administer a more equitable scheme.

Details of the proposed Fees and Charges and the Capital Programme were also presented. A nominal change in the Directorate's Fees and Charges and alterations to the Capital Programme were discussed at the informal Estimates meeting in December.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the draft Revenue Estimates, Capital Programme and proposed Fees and Charges for 2010/11 for further consideration by the Executive, and supported the transfer of a sum of £7,000 from the City Centre Events and Promotions budget to be used in respect of the promotion and marketing of Vibraphonic Festival 2011.

(Report circulated)

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

9 Reducing Carbon Emissions in Exeter: The Role of Planning and Transportation Strategy

Councillor Martin declared a personal interest as a member of Exeter Vision.

The report of the Director Economy and Development included a set of four papers, which summarised a set of actions for the short and medium term, which were proposed for adoption. He also made a presentation outlining the challenges facing the city to reduce carbon emissions over the next two decades and beyond.

Paper One - Reducing Carbon Emissions in Exeter - the role of Planning and Transportation Strategy

This paper provided an overview of the longer term strategy for reducing carbon emissions and set out the national targets, targets by specific sector and proposed options. It defined a range of short and medium term measures in respect of planning and transport issues.

Paper Two - Land Use Planning and Development Management

The report looked at significant changes that are needed in land use policies and actions if the challenges of climate change are to be addressed. These changes include the design of new developments meeting the legal requirements of a zero carbon rating by 2016, as well as maximising more high quality public transport use and creating more efficient energy sources.

Paper Three – Transportation Strategy: Measures to Reduce Carbon Emissions/Proposed City Council input to DCC Local Transport Plan 2011-16

There has been recent progress and trends in the city in terms of transportation and this paper set out a number of major priorities that Devon County Council will consider as part of its preparation of their Local Transport Plan. As traffic has continued to rise, the emphasis on encouraging more investment in public transport and reducing the level of cars coming through the city remained a priority.

Paper Four- City Centre: Carbon Emissions, Air Quality and Traffic

The paper reviewed current conditions in the city centre and set out a framework for the longer term and proposed a range of short and medium term priorities. This will include a city centre traffic management strategy including gateway, Park and Ride and rail enhancements.

Members welcomed the report and made the following comments for the Executive:-

- the importance of improving public transport and of it being available to those who need it, with a realistic pricing structure. He believed that any traffic management scheme taking the traffic out of the heart of the city centre would not have a detrimental effect on future vibrancy.
- the principles of the Agenda 21 initiative from the 1990's were now being reflected in this vision which was exciting.
- the failure to act could have catastrophic consequences and therefore it was preferable to act in a precautionary manner. There should be some caution over following all of the Turner Committee recommendations as new opportunities and innovations might be preferable. There should be the chance to continue to debate any proposed changes at length and not come to a conclusion too soon.
- the need to consider road pricing.

The Director made the following responses to Members' queries:-

- the report had not been shared with other authorities in the area, apart from Devon County Council, whose officers had seen and commented on a draft before Christmas.
- the greater challenge remained to address the existing building stock and there was a need to review the funding framework.
- the Community and Environment Directorate would carry through further work picking up a number of air pollution issues. The Projects and Business Manager stated that there was a link between transport and health particularly in younger people, and the PCT would be a potential source of funding for some initiatives.

The Projects and Business Manager confirmed that they were still awaiting a response to Network Rail's consultation on future investment in the Devon Rail network as discussed at the last meeting of the Committee. Every effort was being made by a range of partners and stakeholders to ensure that rail facilities would be in place for the new community at Cranbrook and proposed developments at Monkerton and Newcourt. The City Council will continue to work to try and help shape the future of the local rail network.

Scrutiny – Economy supported the content of the papers and the strategies and actions and recommended to Executive the following recommendations under the individual headings from Paper One to Paper Four inclusive to :-

(1) *Paper One – Reducing Carbon Emissions in Exeter - the role of Planning and Transportation Strategy*

- (i) note the considerable challenge facing the City and County Councils in securing the major reductions in carbon use that are necessary;
- (ii) support the strategy and measures proposed by the Turner Committee;
- (iii) endorse the actions in the attached papers as the City's contribution to meeting its carbon reduction obligations; and
- (iv) report to Members annually on progress.

(2) *Paper Two – Land Use Planning and Development Management*

- (i) endorse the change in land use planning priorities and design philosophy outlined in Sections 4 and 5 in particular relating to the co-location of uses and adopting higher densities;
- (ii) endorse the development of a sustainable energy supply strategy for the City's growth areas with an implementation plan based on advice from the Centre for Energy and the Environment;
- (iii) lobby the LGA to ensure that:
 - Government provides a comprehensive policy and funding regime for delivering whole house/neighbourhood enhancements to secure substantial reductions in CO2 emissions
 - Government maintains a firm line on the Code for Sustainable Homes

- and for the parallel tightening of Part L of the Building Regulations for commercial premises
 - Government addresses the lack of an effective tie up between Approved Inspectors and the Local Planning Authority in delivering low carbon designs
- (iv) approve the draft responses to the consultations on zero carbon in new non domestic buildings at Appendix 1 of the report and on permitted development rights for small scale renewables at Appendix 4;
- (v) agree the need for appropriate training for staff and, if desired, Members to ensure they are skilled in this new area of work; and
- (vi) ensure that the finalised Residential Design Guide adequately addresses all of those issues relating to sustainable design.
- (3) *Paper Three - Transportation Strategy: Measures to Reduce Carbon Emissions/Proposed City Council input to DCC Local Transport Plan 2011-16*
 - (i) note the core objectives outlined in Section 4.2 of this paper;
 - (ii) support the measures proposed in Section 6 of this paper;
 - (iii) support that a submission based on the above is made to Devon County Council as input to the preparation of LTP3;
 - (iv) note that a joint ECC/DCC city centre transportation strategy should be prepared in the first half of this year;
 - (v) note that a review of the City's Parking Strategy be completed in parallel;
 - (vi) note that a joint ECC/DCC strategy on providing for electric and hybrid vehicles be prepared and the prospect for a City trial be brought to a meeting of Scrutiny later this year; and
 - (vii) endorse that (iv), (v) and (vi) above be the basis for the preparation of a CLEAR zone strategy for the City Centre linked to the designation of a Low Emission Zone.
- (4) *Paper Four –City Centre: Carbon Emissions, Air Quality and Traffic*
 - (ii) submit the transportation element of these proposals to Devon County Council as input to the LTP3; and
 - (iii) note that work proceeds on the draft strategy and key projects with a view to its incorporation into the City Centre Area Action Plan to be prepared later this year.

(Report circulated)

10 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 Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part I, Schedule 12A of the Act.

11 Service Review of Planning

The Director Economy and Development presented the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control, which outlined a number of proposed changes in the structure of the Planning part of the Planning and Building Control Unit. The changes were proposed as a response to the changing context facing the Unit, in particular ongoing reforms to the planning system, the likely cessation of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant, and wider budgetary issues facing the Council. There is also the need to improve the focus on sustainable development and delivery of key projects such as the Local Development Framework, coordination with the New Growth Point and major developments at Newcourt, Monkerton and the Bus Station.

The Director replied to a number of comments stating that the reduced staffing would be sufficient for the present workload but this could change quickly. He added that reduction in the Enforcement resource from three individuals to one could be problematic for Members if they had high expectations. He agreed with a Member suggestion that joint working with other authorities was also an option if the City Council Planning workload picked up and others had spare resources, provided there was budget provision.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the recommendation that Executive approve the following that: -

- (1) the employment of the holder of the Senior Enforcement and Projects Officer (ED07105) and Planning Technicians 2 x 0.5 FTE (ED07113 and ED07141) be terminated on grounds of redundancy on the respective dates of 27 January 2010 (ED07105) and 31 March 2010 (ED07113 and ED07141) in accordance where applicable with the provisions of Regulation 19 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Benefits, Membership and Contributions) Regulations 2007; with compensation being paid to the post holders in accordance with the discretion exercised by the Council under the provisions of the Local Government (Early Termination) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006; a payment of compensation be made in respect of the notice/unexpired period of notice to which the employee would otherwise be entitled under their contract of employment and the selected post be deleted from the establishment of the Council;
- (2) the deletion of the following vacant posts from 1 April 2010: -
 - (i) Implementation Officer (ED07151),
 - (ii) Investigations and Compliance Officer (ED07106) frozen since February 2009,
 - (iii) Landscape & Tree Officer (ED07131), and
 - (iv) Clerical Assistant (ED07156);
- (3) the creation of the following new posts from 1 April 2010:-
 - (i) the post of Enforcement Officer (grade subject to job evaluation) to be filled by existing postholder of ED07162,
 - (ii) the post of Environmental Improvements Officer (ED07154) be amended to Environmental Improvements and Tree Officer, and
 - (iii) the fixed term post of Design Assistant (ED07162) be made permanent.
- (4) the post of Technical Clerk (ED07124) be reduced to 0.8FTE from April 2010 and Forward Planning Officer (Projects) (ED07133) be reduced to 0.6FTE from June 2010;

- (5) the Design Assistant (ED07155) to become supernumerary pending an appropriate vacancy; and
- (6) the transfer of post ED07138 (Conservation Planner) from the Development Management team to the Design Team; and
- (7) the Planning Unit's budgets be amended accordingly

(Report circulated to Members)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.00 pm

Chair