

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY 3 JUNE 2010

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE – UPDATE

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with an overview of the Economic Development Service's activities during 2009/2010 and set out its priorities for 2010/2011.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Exeter's economy lies at the core of the Exeter and Heart of Devon (EHOD) economic sub-region, an area which sits broadly across Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge. Exeter and the sub-region is recognised as a principal economic driver in the region making it an important part of the South West economy.
- 2.2 The Council contributes to the implementation of the EHOD Economic Development Strategy 2008 – 2013 primarily through the activities of the Economy and Tourism Unit, which seeks to sustain and increase the economic well being of the city working in partnership with key stakeholders in a range of roles, in leadership, facilitation, co-ordination, and support.
- 2.3 The priorities of the Strategy focus on promoting and securing the growth of businesses, a better-trained workforce, helping people into work, bringing forward the availability of employment land and lobbying for investment in transportation and the communications infrastructure.
- 2.4 The agreed vision for the sub-region with the city as a major contributor is that: -
- “The Exeter and the Heart of Devon Economic Partnership will promote sustainable economic growth enabling the sub-region to take its place as the third largest focus of high value employment in the Region.”
- 2.6 The Strategy has 3 strategic objectives, which match those of the Regional Economic Strategy, to:
- secure successful and competitive businesses – through higher value jobs and improved turnover and investment
 - build strong and inclusive communities - by improving access to jobs and services through training and other measures
 - become an effective and confident sub-region – through effective partnerships, lobbying and coordinated funding.
- 2.7 This report summarises the strategic context within which the economic development service operates, its activities which are grouped under the priorities of the Strategy and sets out the key actions planned in 2010 – 2011.

3.0 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

- 3.1 Quarters 2 and 3 of negative economic growth in 2008 were harbingers of the UK's longest ever recession, which officially started in September that year. The UK economy emerged from recession in the last quarter of 2009. However, ranges of

contrasting economic statistics paint a picture of a fragile UK economy for some time yet.

- 3.2 Whilst forecasts suggest the UK may see a meagre recovery in 2010, the South West could experience a slow upturn, affected by anticipated cuts in government expenditure. South West RDA forecasts, suggest unemployment will rise over the coming months at least and overall economic output may decline. However, the RDA sees Exeter and its economic area as being relatively resilient and able to recover in response to an upturn in the wider UK and world economy. Economic growth rates for the next ten years are likely to be slower than for the previous decade.
- 3.3 The EHOD sub-region has real opportunities for balanced development based on knowledge intensive industries, building on the city's science base, including the strengths of the University of Exeter, other science-based assets such as the Met Office and the success of the well-established professional and business services sector.
- 3.4 Overall, to secure Exeter and the sub-region's future competitiveness, its strategic priorities lie in maintaining a focus on investment in: infrastructure, business support, research and development, and in the workforce.

4.0 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

- 4.1 The following section summarises the activities delivered or supported by the Service and is set out under each of the agreed strategic objectives and priorities of the Economic Development Strategy 2008-2013.

Strategic Objective 1 – To secure successful and competitive businesses - through higher value jobs and improved turnover and investment

Priority - Provide the right environment for business

Action - Continue to provide support and advisory services to small businesses.

Exeter Business Support

- 4.2 The generation of new business is important to help strengthen and diversify the local economy and assist in replacing those that have ceased trading, to create new or perhaps better employment opportunities and to enable the economy to respond to changing economic circumstances.
- 4.3 In 2008, the City Council established the partnership involved in 'Exeter Business Support'. This partnership has expanded and consists of Peninsula Innovations Limited, responsible for the management of the University's Innovation Centre, Business Link, Exeter College's Business School, and CEU (Community Enterprise Unit) Ltd. It is also endorsed by the Exeter Chamber of Commerce and the Exeter branch of the Federation of Small Businesses.
- 4.4 A joint action plan is being established between the partners to improve separate and combined marketing of activities and events to reflect and coordinate collective support in the city for the start up and growth of small businesses during different stages of their development. The joint activities to which the City Council contributes £42,000 and Peninsula Innovations Ltd, contributes £68,000 have resulted in the following outputs for the financial year 2009 – 2010.

Combined activities of Exeter Business Support 2009/2010

486	pre-start businesses advised
162	Businesses started up jobs created – figures incomplete as no data available from Business Link
82	Link
1273	existing business supported
202	Individuals participated in businesses training event
141	Individuals participated in business advice workshops
23	Networking events for business with 925 participants

- 4.5 In terms of helping struggling existing small businesses in Exeter to survive and having consulted with the business community, the Service established an additional initiative in March 2009 to provide a limited number of hours of focused specialist professional advice to deal with financial, marketing, and legal issues affecting their survival. Over 50 local professional companies supported the initiative and agreed to reduce their normal fees for providing specialist advice by 1/3rd as their contribution to helping small businesses in the city, whilst the Council and the participating businesses each fund half of the remaining cost.
- 4.6 Peninsula Innovations Limited have managed the £25,000 funding from the City Council (up to £250 per each small business) to subsidise the scheme. Business Link have managed enquiries for support through their gateway service of business advisors and also agreed to follow up with aftercare to evaluate the efficacy of support given. It was anticipated that up to 100 small businesses would benefit.
- 4.7 However, despite several marketing activities by the City Council and partners in this initiative at business events and direct to local firms, take up has been very limited; six applications from local businesses were received and approved, each requiring specialist marketing advice and guidance. As a consequence of the low take up it is intended to withdraw the availability of this initiative.

Support for social enterprises

- 4.8 In March 2010, Scrutiny received a report setting out Council plans for a 12 month pilot to enhance the support available to social enterprises in Exeter. The Council has contracted with CEU Ltd., to co-ordinate the delivery of the pilot, which complements the support available through Exeter Business Support.
- 4.9 As of 7 May, the following progress has been made:
- press coverage and email marketing to local networks to raise awareness
 - 17 enquiries handled – 13 from community groups and individuals and 4 from the public sector seeking to develop/explore the starting up of a social enterprise in the city.

Local purchasing and supply

- 4.10 The Service worked with Exeter Federation of Small Business, Exeter Chamber of Commerce and the following public sector partners to help local firms to be aware of and win small public sector supply contracts:

- Devon and Cornwall Police
- Devon County Council
- Exeter City Council
- Exeter College
- Exeter Primary Care Trust
- Royal Devon & Exeter NHS Foundation Trust
- The Met Office
- University of Exeter

- 4.11 A website has been established (www.exeterbuysellprosper.co.uk) to enable local small businesses to raise awareness of their products and services and to provide a sourcing directory for purchasing officers in these organisations seeking to place orders worth less than £25,000. To date, 415 businesses have registered. In addition, the public sector partners have contributed a small amount of funding to help develop the functionality of the website. It is too early to determine whether this initiative has made a difference.

Youth Enterprise Support Service (YESS)

- 4.12 Officers have supported Exeter College's successful bid for external funding to deliver a 15 month project across the sub-region to encourage young people, up to the age of 18 years, to take forward business enterprise activities. The official launch will be on 21st May 2010 and progress will be reported to this Committee. The College has appointed staff to co-ordinate activity and a summary of objectives are set out below:

- provide an accessible, professional and safe business centre in Exeter for young people interested in pursuing business activities
- develop tangible links with all schools in the EHOD area, providing a Board room setting to develop cross-community opportunities
- create a network of experienced business mentors for young people
- promote business enterprise through competitions, seminars and workshops
- raise additional funds to provide non-refundable grants of between £10 to £250 paid on application through a business plan and interview
- provide and signpost young people towards information and guidance on sources of business/enterprise advice
- support over 500 young people and secure at least 20 new businesses to start – up.

Action - Continue to provide an appropriate monitoring and 'aftercare' relationship with indigenous and investing organisations to help secure their long-term future in the region.

Supporting investment enquiries

- 4.13 The Service continues to handle inward and local investment enquiries about sites and premises and supports businesses through the provision of information and statistics about the local economy. High profile and/or substantial employment generating organisations for Exeter can receive tailored help and support including the provision of bespoke information and assistance with site visits. More routine enquiries are handled by the provision of information on the City council's website business pages and are followed up where appropriate.
- 4.14 Overall figures for 2009, during the height of the recession, show there were 776 investment enquires for EHOD, down from 1,068 in 2008. In the period up to March 2010, a further 248 enquiries were received.

- 4.15 In 2009, 55 companies used this service to relocate and / or expand in EHOD, 51 of which were in Exeter. Many of these enquiries originate from 2004 onwards and demonstrate the length of time a business is connected with the Service before being in a position to move or expand. These companies reported over 730 jobs being created and/or safeguarded in the local economy and include, Toys 'R' Us, Jurys Inn and a new HQ for the 'National Coastwatch' charity.
- 4.16 Around 73% of enquiries in 2009/10 came via the internet, down from nearly 90% in 2008/9. This is principally because more enquiries were received through the UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) network, a government organisation that helps national companies trade internationally and assists overseas firms to invest in the UK. Statistics on enquiries for 2009/2010 are set out below, with data for 2008/2009 in brackets.
- 58% originate from within EHOD (58%), including 35% from Exeter (37%)
 - 7% from the rest of Devon (8%)
 - 21% nationally and 13% internationally (29% and less than 4% respectively)
 - 70% existing employers seeking relocation or additional premises for expansion (65%)
 - 30% wanting to start-up (35%)
- 4.17 The breakdown of enquiries can be summarised as follows: -
- 42% light industrial units, warehouse and distribution sectors (44%)
 - 33% office sector (32%)
 - 11% retail (12%)
 - 12% hotels and leisure and restaurants (10%)
 - 2% investment opportunity/other (2%)
- 4.18 In the early part of 2010, the EHOD Commercial Property Register was upgraded to provide a better customer search facility of the 900 plus properties and development sites in the sub-region, enabling users to locate property search results on a map. The Property Register is embedded within the City Council's website on its business pages which are updated and maintained by the Service.

Promotion & Marketing

- 4.19 There is increasing pressure to significantly reduce the cost of government and make on-going efficiency savings, which may include the potential for relocations of some London based departments, agencies and their civil servants.
- 4.20 As part of on-going activity and in the following ways, Officers have promoted awareness of the city and the sub-region as a place for investment and relocation and sought to maintain a national profile with potential public sector employers, which might see Exeter benefit from a re-location:
- placing advertisements and editorial in public sector magazines and websites
 - profiling the city on inward investment sites – www.locations4business.com/uk/south-west-england/devon/exeter-city-council/
 - working with the Office of Government Commerce to review the best approaches to attracting public sector employers to Exeter
 - email marketing campaign between May and November 2010 directed at 35,000 contacts within key public sector governmental departments and agencies.

Supporting Retail

4.21 In June 2009, as one of several responses to the recession, Executive approved an additional £20,000 for Christmas marketing activities. The budget was divided equally between the two following projects, to:

- support the traditional Christmas lights event, which was organised in association with Heart radio, attracting positive media coverage and attendance of around 10,000 people
- boost the annual Christmas marketing campaign for Exeter as a shopping destination, as more difficult economic conditions resulted in a major shortfall in contributions from retailers and others with interests in the city centre. Activities included the production of a comprehensive brochure, web pages, pod casts, and advertisements on bus stops, buses and in a series of publications.

4.22 In addition to this marketing activity and to support the overall retail ambience in the retail heart of the city centre, Executive also approved £10,000 for the installation of display material in vacant units. There has been extensive use of City Council funded displays in City Council units. Take-up by private landlords of the display units was lower than preferred and will continued to be explored.

4.23 The City Centre Manager and City Council continue to work closely with landlords and agents on attracting new businesses in to the City Centre; successes include the recent openings of the Sony Centre (High Street), Rant & Rage (Castle Street), Mountain Warehouse (High Street – former HSBC) and Greggs (High Street and Sidwell Street). Further store opening announcements are expected over the coming quarter, although some additional store closures are considered likely.

4.24 Retail unit vacancies nationally are running at approximately 12%. Within Exeter, the number of vacant retail units has remained relatively static during the last twelve months, with the last survey undertaken in February 2010. This identified 49 vacant units (a percentage vacancy rate of 7.84%); a rate that has remained static since March 2009 through to Q1 2010, apart from temporary decrease to 43 vacant units in November 2009.

Priority - Provide the right workforce for business

Action - Establish the Exeter and Heart of Devon Employment and Skills Board as a driver to ensure matching between employers' needs, target sectors' needs and skills training offered.

Employment and Skills Board

4.25 The Service plays an active role in the private sector led Exeter and Heart of Devon Employment and Skills Board (ESB) and also the training provider based EHOD Workforce Development Group. The ESB aims to identify the sub-region's needs for the development of skills in the workforce and to encourage and influence provision to meet the demand for training from employers and the need to equip a skilled local workforce.

4.26 During the last 12 months a range of activities have been progressed through

partnership activity and successful bids have been made for external funding together with the ESB and Devon and Cornwall Business Council, including:

- a project coordinator has been appointed on a 23 month contract to support the activities and projects of the ESB and Workforce Development Group ensuring agreed projects and actions are tasked, monitored, and finished
- an assessment of the Exeter and East Devon New Growth Point projects to evaluate and forecast employment opportunities and related skills and training issues throughout the duration of the construction phases and when businesses start to establish themselves on the developments. This will be used to inform the activities of the ESB and also assist local training providers to meet forecast demand for training and equip the local workforce to compete for jobs.

4.27 The ESB has chosen to focus on working with providers to take forward the following initiatives; progress on them will be reported as they arise; to:

- help people to be “work ready” prior to entering employment for the first time
- assist the recently unemployed to return to work
- upskill those already in work and enhancing the leadership and management abilities of local owner managers.

Priority - Create a culture of Enterprise and Innovation

Action - Work with the Exeter Science Park Steering Group to establish an appropriate management vehicle for the Science Park, secure planning permission and start development on site

Exeter Science Park

4.28 The setting up of the “Science Park Company” has been delayed due to the complexities of complying with state aid legislation. On 10 May 2010 the company was formed comprising directors from each of the partners including the City Council, East Devon District Council, Devon County Council, the University and the Met Office. The purpose of the company is to provide a vehicle to progress the development of the science park and attract further significant investment leading to the delivery of future phases and the objective of providing knowledge based employment for more than 3,000 people.

4.29 Outline planning permission has been secured and a detailed planning application for the infrastructure has been submitted. In addition to the Project Officer, employed to co-ordinate development of the Science Park, a Business Development Manager has been recruited to develop a marketing strategy to start to raise interest from potential occupiers and major investors.

Action - Ensure incubation units and enterprise centres are placed at strategic points in the sub-region, supported by business advisors and mentors

Innovation Centre Activity

4.30 The Head of Economy and Tourism sits on the Innovation Centre Strategy Board, which governs the direction of business development and support activities arising from the Innovation Centre. As one of the partners in Exeter Business Support the following outputs have been secured in 2009/2010 (these are also included in section 4.4):

- helped to start up 5 businesses, creating 27 additional jobs
- assisted 21 pre-start businesses and 23 existing businesses
- ran 23 business events attracting 925 delegates.

Smart Solutions

4.31 The Service supported the University in securing £554,000 from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to create the Smart Solutions project providing specialist support for businesses and assisting graduates to increase their employability during the economic downturn. Further funding from HEFCE is anticipated for the project operating across the South West. The following outputs of the project, which runs until September 2010, have been reported (as of April 2010):

- 20 business events to raise awareness of access to leadership and management and academic world leading expertise
- 33 businesses within the South West (19 in Exeter) have benefited from free or half-price graduate internships of 8 weeks duration to work on specific projects
- 10 businesses have benefited from access to academic expertise to help progress a significant innovative development project, via funding through an Innovation Award (2 Exeter businesses were supported)
- 100 businesses have benefited from scholarships to develop leadership and management skills including ten £5,000 awards for an MBA course
- 500 graduates and students have benefited from mentoring and the development of employability skills.

Strategic Objective 2 - To build strong and inclusive communities - by improving access to jobs and services through training and other measures

Priority - Improve participation in the economy

Action - Continue to work with the EHOD Workforce Development Group to develop targeted programmes raising the skills levels of those in deprived areas, especially groups on incapacity benefit and the learning disabled using pilot schemes to assist them and other disadvantaged groups into work.

Workforce Development Group

4.32 The EHOD Workforce Development Group mainly consists of training providers and some public sector partners. Since June 2009, the Group has:

- supported a bid which secured around £400,000 of funding to establish an 'EARTH' training hub at Bicton College to train the local workforce and businesses in skills related to 'environmental and renewable technologies'
- included actively supporting Devon wide Future Jobs Fund bids to secure finance to help long term unemployed young people, aged 18 – 24, back into work through employment with local firms. To date around 150 temporary jobs have been created with around 60 in Exeter and the Heart of Devon, over 50 of which are in Exeter.

Action - Develop targeted actions to tackle deprivation in the most deprived areas within the sub-region, defined by the 'super output areas.'

Exeter Positive Steps

- 4.33 The Service continues to work with providers and public and voluntary sector agencies to focus attention on some of the most deprived areas in the city with a view to helping people on the road into employment. As reported in March to Scrutiny Committee, the Service has established a revised approach through the Exeter Positive Steps Fund to secure improved collaboration between active groups in the city. The City Council has committed over £62,000 over 2 years with matched funding from a local charitable organisation aimed at helping 300 people per annum who are affected by multiple deprivation and are a long way from being job ready.
- 4.34 A meeting of relevant groups with Devon Community Foundation was held on 21st April at Exeter YMCA to explore collaborative projects to reach out to the deprived communities mentioned in the previous Committee Report. Projects have yet to be shaped, but the following actions have been agreed:
- led by Exeter YMCA, establish further job clubs to support people into work in some of the communities to build upon on the success of their St. David's Job Club, co-funded by Positive Steps, through which they have already helped over 70 people within Exeter, 15 of which have found employment
 - identify the development needs of the people in the target deprived communities and shape collaborative projects, aiming to develop: confidence, personal and working related skills and if appropriate, support them into the job clubs and assist with finding and sustaining employment
 - identify where possible further funding sources to secure additional finance to enhance the Exeter Positive Steps Fund.

Debt, Benefit and Repossession Advice

- 4.35 Another Council response to the recession agreed by Executive in June 2009, led to the City Council working with Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to deliver a 12 month initiative, known as the 'Trinity Project' which runs until August 2010. The project provides debt management advice and support to those facing mortgage or landlord repossession orders and has provided:
- a full-time Exeter CAB presence in a dedicated branded room in the City Council's Customer First Service Centre
 - a part-time presence across 4 days a week in a dedicated room at the County Courts in the City, working with court officials and clients to reach negotiated solutions in mortgage and rented accommodation repossession cases
 - support for over 350 people (as of February 2010), of which, 64% related to debt problems, 30% to housing repossessions and 6% to welfare benefits and tax credits issues
- 4.36 The Courts appear to be relying on the availability of the service and staff are scheduling hearings in the morning wherever possible to ensure that respondents to repossession proceedings have advice and representation from this project. Exeter CAB is actively looking for funding to secure an extension of this aspect of the service up to the end of the current financial year 2010/2011.

Priority – Promote and enhance what is best about the sub-region

Action - Improve the way the EHOD is perceived by investors, businesses, potential workers.

City of Science

- 4.37 Progress has been made towards presenting Exeter as a 'City of Science' to reinforce the recognition of the city as a successful location for knowledge based businesses and organisations. The initiative also aims to promote higher levels of interest in students to pursue science subjects in schools and the college.
- 4.38 The following is being progressed by partners which include the University, Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry, the Innovation Centre, the Met Office and the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital Trust, St Lukes Science & Sports College and the Devon Education Business Partnership:
- a website which will be launched in September 2010 to provide information and stimulate interest from science based businesses and science based educational establishments
 - a short promotional film on Exeter as a City of Science produced by St Luke's
 - a Science Fair 2011 – coordinated by 'STEMnet' and local schools
 - a Science Week 2011 - (March) providing activities in the city and open to all
 - promotion of a number of local Science Champions who will project the scientific strengths of the partners and other organisations in the city.

New Exeter Marketing Partnership Group

- 4.39 This new group, chaired by the private sector has been established by Officers; its activities will include:
- promoting a coordinated positive image and perception of the City's wider economy and investment prospects
 - minimising negative perceptions or mixed messages that may dilute the important strengths of the economy
 - establishing a communication group to coordinate and promote positive news
 - developing an investment centred website to funnel enquiries and complement the work of the Service's investment enquiry handling activities.

Priority - Improve leadership, influence and partnership

Action - Ensure planning policies in Local Development Frameworks reflect vision and goals of the economic development strategy.

Employment Land

- 4.40 The availability of sufficient and suitable strategic employment land is crucial to economic development in the city and the sub region. The Service has been working with partner local authorities to identify key employment sites and associated infrastructure for their development. A total of about 48 hectares have been proposed in Exeter now included in the emerging Core Strategy of which about 8 hectares have consent and a further 12 hectares was recently approved at Matford. A number of these sites will be challenging to bring forward. The intention is to use these sites as the basis for a collective sub-regional discussion with the Housing and Communities Agency and to lobby for investment and support for their development.

5.0 Economic Development Activities 2010 – 2011

5.1 The current and planned activities of the Service are consistent with the views of the Work Foundation which has been regularly reviewing the role of medium sized cities in supporting economic recovery during the recession. The organisation highlight's four factors which are particularly important:

- strong partnership across sectoral boundaries with public, private and third sector organisations, working to build upon the city's distinctive assets – its university, industrial composition and quality of place – and of that city's place in the wider geography
- working across administrative boundaries to secure investment in economic development and regeneration – cities have to decide how best they can work together with their surrounding sub-region in order to maximise competitiveness
- investing in workforce skills – skills were a key determinant of city success before and during the recession, and will be even more important for recovery. The Work Foundation emphasises increasing the supply of workforce skills and stimulating demand for higher level skills amongst local employees.
- making sure the strategy responds to changes in the economy – it is important to attract and grow private sector knowledge-intensive services, firms, job and individuals, as well as developing retail, leisure and tourism sectors to provide better quality employment opportunities for those with lower skills, and those entering or returning to the labour market.

5.2 The Service's key priorities for the year are summarised as follows:

- Continue to progress the development of Exeter Science Park to encourage the development and growth of science, technology, and research based sectors in the local economy, in particular establish the Science Park Company and undertake initial marketing of the site to potential occupiers and to attract prospective joint venture partners for significant investment in phase 2.
- Undertake a marketing campaign aiming to attract government agencies seeking to relocate prompted by the Government's Smith report.
- Through the Exeter Business Support initiative, secure the starting up of 50 small businesses in the city.
- Through a new Exeter Marketing Partnership establish a public private partnership to promote a positive and progressive image of the city's economy including the New Growth Point projects and encourage inward investment.
- Help local small businesses to secure public sector contracts by working with partners to improve the functionality and awareness of the 'Buy, Sell, Prosper' website.
- Launch the 12 month pilot to boost the start up rate and growth of social enterprises in Exeter, aiming to secure a minimum of 10 new enterprises
- Work with the Employment and Skills Board to promote investment in relevant training provision for employers and identify skills issues relating to potential job opportunities arising from the Exeter and East Devon New Growth Point projects.

- Assist a minimum of 300 people from the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city to take up training and/or employment by continuing the successful activities of the Exeter Positive Steps Fund.
- Work with the business community to prepare a business plan and gain support for the establishment of a Business Improvement District for the city centre seeking to further improve the attractiveness of the city centre to visitors and investment.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Economic Development Service consists of 4 full-time officers, with the equivalent of an additional 1.5 FTE support given by the Head of Service and marketing staff.
- 6.2 The direct operating costs of the service to the City Council including employees, premises and support services and budgets for initiatives in 2010/11 are summarised below.

Revenue (2010/11 budget)

Economy & Tourism Admin including (staffing, operational - £29,660 and support costs - £220,000)	£536,490
City Marketing	£43,630
Exeter Positive Steps Fund	£31,250
Exeter Business Support (EBS) for Small Business	£42,000
Total	£653,370

7.0 RECOMMENDATION that

- 7.1 Members note the report and the economic development activities for 2010 – 2011.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:

1. Exeter and Heart of Devon Economic Development Strategy 2008 – 2013
2. 'Economic Development Update', Scrutiny Committee – Economy, 11 June 2009