

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

19 January 2012

Present:

Councillor Natalie Cole (Chair)

Councillors Prowse, Bialyk, Bull, Choules, Crow, Dawson, Morris, Payne, Robson, Ruffle, Thompson and Wardle

Also present:

Director Economy and Development, Head of Economy and Tourism, Head of Operational Services and Transport, Tourism Development Manager, Member Services Officer (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Rosie Denham - Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism
Councillor Rachel Sutton - Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport

Richard Atkins – Principal of Exeter College
Rebecca King – Deputy Principal of Exeter College

1 **Minutes**

Councillor Mrs Thompson indicated that Minutes 49 and 50, relating to a civil parking enforcement matter at a lay-by location in Pinn Lane still required further clarification.

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2011 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

2 **Declarations of Interest**

The following personal interests were declared:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Prowse	5 and 8 (Member of Devon County Council)
Councillor Bialyk	6 (member of Exeter Transport Social Club)
Councillor Wardle	6 (member of Exeter Civic Society)
Councillor Choules	7 (employee of Exeter University)
Councillor Dawson	7 (employee of Exeter University)

3 **Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 20**

In accordance with Standing Order 20, a question from a Member was put to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport in respect of bridge maintenance at Exhibition Way. The Portfolio Holder replied. Copies of the question had previously been circulated to Members. The question and the reply from the

Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport (in italics) are appended to the minutes.

4 **Presentation - Exeter College**

Richard Atkins, Principal of Exeter College and Rebecca King, Deputy Principal of Exeter College attended the meeting and presented details of the latest developments at Exeter College. It was the UK's first tertiary College providing all post -16 education and training for the city of Exeter. It provides education and training for local students enabling them to acquire the skills and qualifications to be able to contribute to and benefit from the growing Exeter economy, as well as supporting local businesses to develop the skills of their employees. The two main sites on Hele Road and Queen Street, offer both vocational and non vocational courses, as well as adult learning and community education. There are also two specialist centres - the Construction Centre on Sowton and the new technology centre at Monkerton which is due to open in September and will be the base for engineering, aerospace and automotive courses. Richard Atkins responded to a comment on the challenges now faced by students following the end of the Education Maintenance Award. He also paid tribute to the dedicated staff who offer both tuition, as well as guidance and pastoral support through a range of student support services.

Exeter College is currently rated as outstanding in terms of quality, student success rates and the financial health of the institution. They work with approximately 12,000 students a year who come from the Exeter travel to work area, and are made up of a variety of students including the 16 – 19 age group, adult learners, over 700 apprentices as well as being involved with many local employers. The College has a particular role for apprentices, with many students on an apprenticeship scheme typically lasting between one and three years. The College takes a keen interest as to where students go after their course, in terms of attending Higher Education or gaining employment. The College has a strong link with the Job Centre and, despite the challenging job market, the employment rate of former students remains high.

The College has an ongoing programme of investment in new facilities and over £40 million has been invested in the last seven years, including the engineering facilities at Monkerton. Further investment is needed for the refurbishment of the Science and Mathematics facilities, Art and Design and Sports facilities. Members commented on the College's current sports facilities. Richard Atkins confirmed there were no immediate plans to make any changes to the sports facilities and particularly the location of the playing fields, but they wanted to update their facilities to match the regional facilities available at other colleges. Rebecca King added that their ambition was to develop a new gym and fitness centre at Victoria Yard. She responded to a comment on the future of the Automotive Training Centre at Marsh Barton, which will close following the opening of Monkerton, and the leasehold site will be vacated. Richard Atkins also responded to Member comments on the Exeter Business School, which has developed their links with employers to offer an integrated business and employer facing team, called Business Solutions, based in the centre of Exeter.

Members thanked Richard Atkins and Rebecca King for their informative presentation.

ESTIMATES, CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND FEES AND CHARGES

5 Budget Estimates 2012/2013

Councillor Prowse declared a personal interest as a Member of Devon County Council.

The Director Economy and Development presented the report on the Estimates for 2012/13. He outlined the strategic framework within which the estimates had been prepared, changes in accounting practices which affected all budgets and gave detailed reasons for any significant changes in the Management Unit estimates. A detailed schedule of the Capital Programme and proposed new schemes for the areas covered by Scrutiny Committee - Economy and the changes in respect of the 2012/13 Fees and Charges were included as an appendix.

The Director responded to a Member enquiry about how archaeological finds would be treated, following the closure of Exeter Archaeology. In practice there would be no changes. Developers would have to employ archaeological contractors to discharge planning conditions. A Member also sought clarification over the additional grant from Government to be paid as compensation for the freezing of the Council Tax in 2012/13. The Director responded to comments about footpath maintenance including weed clearance and he would speak to Devon County Council colleagues about the changes to the Cowick Street exit of the Exe Bridges Retail Park. A Member commented on the possibility that parking income might not be achieved as projected. He referred to the deliberation of the Car Parks Task and Finish Group and what their likely recommendation would be. The Chair advised that a number of proposals would be brought to the next Scrutiny Committee – Economy on 8 March.

The Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the draft Revenue Estimates, Capital Programme and proposed Fees and Charges for 2012/13 for further consideration by the Executive.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

6 Bus and Coach Station Area Development Principles

Councillor Bialyk declared a personal interest as a member of the Exeter Transport Social Club. Councillor Wardle declared a personal interest as a member of the Exeter Civic Society.

The Director Economy and Development presented the report which considered the development principles that had been prepared to guide development of the Bus and Coach Station area and ensure the key principles are delivered. The report also sought Executive approval for the principles for engagement with key stakeholders and the public. Over the last 18 months, the City Council had been working on a series of workshops looking at the principles that will inform the master plan proposals and ensure that any development will contribute to the high quality public realm and the economy of the rest of the city. The Director outlined the main principles of development which will be used to test development proposals for the Bus and Coach Station area.

A public consultation exercise will take place from the 19 March, aimed at both the public and stakeholders. The consultation will include two road show events in Bedford Street and Sidwell Street; two briefings aimed at stakeholders but open to

the public; a static display in the Customer Service Centre at the Civic Centre; an article in the City Council's newspaper, The Citizen and a web site presentation. Following a comment made by a Member, a further report including feedback from the consultation would be made to Scrutiny - Economy before being considered by the June Executive meeting.

Members supported the proposals and made the following comments -

- following the redevelopment of the bus and coach station and the area around John Lewis, would there be any knock on effect at the top end of Sidwell Street? The Director responded stating that a conscious effort would be made to ensure the peripheral parts of the area were protected. The redevelopment of the area will change the character and make the environs around Sidwell Street into a new and very distinct quarter.
- this will be a good part of the city to change and hopefully create a new vibrancy. It was critical to have a strategic development of the entire area and to forge a new identity.
- whether the Bus Station would be adequate for the future needs of the city? It was important to have a welcoming environment to meet the needs of the many vulnerable people who use it, particularly at night when such places would not be staffed to the same level.
- the consultation should also include not only the bus operators but also their staff, the trade unions and passenger groups and engage as many people in the process and be aware of their experiences as members of the travelling public.
- to include the smaller independent bus and coach companies that use the bus station in the consultation. The Member also suggested including conservation groups The Director advised that the list of stakeholders would be emailed to Members of the Committee.
- the prospect of individually designed elements for the site will be exciting for the city. The Member looked forward to the prospect, and reiterated the comments already made that the upper end of Sidwell Street would not be forgotten. The Director advised that, at this stage, it was not clear how much and how the site would be redeveloped, but there would be no development beyond York Road. Two elements of the bus station operation need to be relocated, the bus depot and lay over facility. This will be challenging to achieve.
- whether there were any plans for the Harlequins Centre? The Director was aware of vacant units, but the Harlequins Centre was in private sector ownership. It was important to be clear about the long term vision and lifecycle of the city. In the next decade, he anticipated looking further to other parts of the city, such as Fore Street and the area around the Corn Exchange to meet the next challenges.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported and requested the Executive to approve the Development Principles for the purpose of an engagement exercise with key stakeholders and the public.

(Report circulated)

7 Exeter Visitor Strategy 2012 - 2016

Councillor Dawson declared a personal interest as an employee of Exeter University.
Councillor Choules declared a personal interest as an employee of Exeter University.

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the final draft of the Exeter Visitor Strategy 2012 – 2016. A copy of the Strategy including the proposed Action Plan was circulated with the report, and was also available on the Council web site. The initial draft had been considered by Members at the September meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and followed by a period of consultation. A summary of the consultees and the comments of key industry organisations, relevant partners and agencies were also circulated to Members.

The report set out the Strategy's aims and priorities and the key issue being to maintain and improve visitor numbers to support the employment and businesses which depend on visitor expenditure. The City Council will also continue to work in partnership with neighbouring authorities, and tourism businesses who have also made a significant investment in pooling revenue to ensure there is a concerted effort at effectively promoting the area.

Members welcomed the report and Strategy and made the following comments: -

- although there were aspirations for future Park and Ride sites and the development of the Coach and Bus Station, there were concerns that many visitors arriving by car were adding to the city's traffic problems. The redevelopment of the King William Street Car Park would also temporarily add to the congestion. The Tourism Development Manager referred to the Strategy's action plan and the efforts being made to work with transport providers to encourage visitors to use a range of public transport options including ticketing schemes, such as advanced and joint ticketing.

The Director Economy and Development added that anticipated public transport requirements to meet the future needs of the city would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

- whether the City Council had any influence on Stagecoach services, with reduced services on public holidays which could cause problems for the travelling public? The Head of Economy and Tourism reminded Members that, whilst there were a number of specific initiatives and promotions which benefited the public, ultimately Stagecoach had to operate a commercial business.

Members considered it would be useful to request Stagecoach to attend a future meeting to respond to such issues.

- have the occupancy rates for the city's hotels stood up against the recent increase in hotel developments, and are there plans for more budget hotel chains to increase visitor choices? The Tourism Development Manager confirmed that the business occupancy and weekend visitor levels remained fairly constant throughout the year. Exeter had a range of accommodation but generally provided quality accommodation, which could come at a price. The Director Economy and Development stated that the city's planners received many enquiries from hotel developers and an application was currently being considered for a competitively priced hotel chain in the city centre.

- whether there were any proposals for a large city centre theatre or concert venue? The Head of Economy and Tourism stated that the challenge remained to attract sufficient numbers to make such venues viable. It should also be acknowledged that venues in nearby Torbay and Plymouth received significant local authority and Arts Council contributions towards their operational running costs.
- on plans for any celebrations to mark the 400th anniversary of the opening of Northernhay Gardens, which would be an ideal opportunity to mark the importance of the opening of the first public open space in the country. This could be incorporated into an event in the festival season. The Head of Economy and Tourism would follow up this suggestion.

Scrutiny Economy supported and recommended approval by the Executive of the adoption of the final draft Exeter Visitor Strategy 2012 – 2016.

(Report circulated)

**MATTER REQUESTED FOR CONSIDERATION BY A MEMBER UNDER
STANDING ORDER 18**

8 Refunding of Parking Penalties - Pinn Lane Layby

Councillor Prowse declared a personal interest as a Member of Devon County Council.

Councillor Mrs Thompson requested that an item be placed on the agenda under Standing Order 18, regarding the implementation of the decision taken by Devon County Council to refund parking penalties incurred in the Pinn Lane lay-by. The decision to refund these particular parking penalties had been confirmed by both Devon County Council and Exeter City Council officers and made known to interested parties. Councillor Mrs Thompson's view was that refunds were not carried out as agreed and the County Council subsequently changed its original stance. She was concerned that this was a withdrawal of an agreement, which may have a negative reflection on the credibility of the City Council, and should be brought before Members.

Councillor Mrs Thompson advised that Devon County Council had placed an advertisement in the local press enabling those motorists who had been issued a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) who believed they qualified for a refund to apply for a refund application form. However, Councillor Mrs Thompson felt that this fell short of what she understood to be a decision to refund any PCN issued in this location and found this apparent change unacceptable. Councillor Mrs Thompson referred to a number of emails, which were circulated to Members as background information, which she believed supported her views.

The Head of Operational Services and Transport advised that there was an issue over the ability of the City Council to act independently of the wishes of Devon County Council in this matter and, indeed, generally on matters of highway enforcement and policy. In view of the concerns previously expressed by some Councillors, officers had sought Counsel's advice and will bring a confidential report to the next meeting on a number of issues relating to civil parking enforcement. In response to a Member's question, he confirmed that, in his view, there would be risks in the City Council acting independently of the instructions of the County Council on highway matters and that the financial liability for any PCN refunds made independently of County Council instructions could fall on the City Council.

There has been a great deal of correspondence on the issue of Pinn Lane and the City Council has acted on instructions from the County Council as to how to deal with any refunds. Those individuals in receipt of a Penalty Charge Notice for parking in the disputed location in Pinn Lane who had contacted either the City Council or the County Council have been repaid and any outstanding PCNs, cancelled.

A Member commented on the necessity to obtain Counsel's advice on the matter and asked that Members be informed of the costs of that advice. The Head of Operational Services and Transport confirmed that he would provide that information to Members at the next meeting. The Director Economy and Development advised that Counsel's advice was necessary given the complex and contentious nature of some of the issues that were being raised.

A Member informed the Scrutiny Committee that he had raised a number of questions relating to parking enforcement at a recent Devon County Council meeting and the Chair had given County Council officers ten days to respond. The Member said that those responses may be interesting in relation to some of the matters being discussed by this Committee.

Members noted that a report on a number of parking matters, including the findings of the Car Parks Task and Finish Group, and a confidential report on parking enforcement issues would be made to the March meeting of Scrutiny Committee – Economy.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.10 pm

Chair