

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

30 May 2013

Present:

Councillor Leadbetter (Chair)

Councillors Brock, Bialyk, Bowkett, Branston, Bull, Crew, Pearson, Robson and Wardle

Apologies:

Councillors Crow, Mottram and Prowse

Also present:

Strategic Director (KH) Assistant Director City Development, Assistant Director Public Realm, Acting Assistant Director Finance, Economy and Tourism Manager, Senior Accountant, City Centre Manager, Museums Manager, and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Rachel Sutton	- Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development and Transport
Councillor Rosie Denham	- Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism
Janet Sinclair	- Job Centre Plus
Susan Parr	- Job Centre Plus

23 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2013 were taken as read, and signed by the Chair as correct.

24 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of discloseable pecuniary interests were made.

25 Portfolio Holders Priorities for the Forthcoming Year

Councillor Sutton presented the following priorities within the Sustainable Development and Transport Portfolio for 2013/14. A copy of the report is appended to the minutes.

The following responses were given to Members' questions and comments:-

- Exeter City Council had a strong engineering function, and progress was being made to make those services available to neighbouring authorities. There were no planned changes to the City Council's in-house engineering function.
- the City Council would continue to manage the city's car parks, and although there was no detailed scheme, Pay by Phone was acknowledged as the way forward and would provide more payment choice.
- the first meeting of the Board to oversee the development of the Bus and Coach Station site had been held. It was intended that they would meet on a quarterly basis.
- Discussions are taking place with Devon County Council on the planned works to the public realm outside the Central Library. The Library was a significant public building in the heart of the cultural quarter.

- to record the appreciation of the hard work of the officers in City Development and the St James community in delivering the St James Neighbourhood Plan, which had been held up as a model of consultation.
- parking issues in Topsham were being addressed through the Topsham Parking Member Working Group and separately there were also likely to be future discussions on parking at the RD&E Hospital and car parking hotspots in the surrounding area.

The Assistant Director City Development responded to a question asked by a Member on the safeguards in place following changes to the permitted development under the Town and Country Planning (General Premises Order 1995), and in particular relating to applications for a change of use of commercial premises. This was part of a two year pilot scheme and a report on the position would be made to the next meeting of Planning Member Working Group.

Councillor Denham presented the priorities within the Economy and Tourism Portfolio for 2013/14. A copy of the report is appended to the minutes.

The following responses were given to Members' questions and comments:-

- the City Centre Manager had been working to develop a safer evening economy, and a number of initiatives had been rolled out including encouraging shops to open later into the evening to lessen the delineation between the evening and night time economy.
- efforts had already been made to occupy vacant shop units on a temporary basis. It was important to consider a strategy to set out the expectations of tenants and consider an individual approach in different parts of the city.
- contact would be made with Environmental Health to consider a suitable way to mark Worker's Memorial Day, and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure to raise participation in the Britain in Bloom event.
- a strategy for further support to the District Shopping Centres was being considered, as they were an integral part of the city's economy.
- the Festivals and Events Manager could provide information or offer support on the opportunities for financial assistance for existing or new smaller arts organisations.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the achievements and priorities presented.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY

26 Exeter Cultural Strategy 2013 - 2018 - Progress Report

The Museums Manager presented the report, updating Members on progress with the development of the new Cultural Strategy for the city. The work to date had been led by the Exeter Cultural Partnership with volunteers from this wide membership committing to work as part of the Strategy Steering Group. The Museums Manager emphasised the critical importance of the cultural sectors' involvement in shaping and later delivering the Cultural Strategy. The value of a strategic approach to culture in the widest sense was acknowledged, as well as the importance of its role in supporting local economic development. This point had been underscored by the recently published report by the LGA and Arts Council of England 'Driving Growth through Local Government Investment in the Arts' which gave many examples of good practice.

A Member sought more detail on the consultees and secondly whether funding from community based activities could be considered to broaden the available funding streams. The Museums Manager noted the comment and also recognised the valuable contribution made by smaller groups and individuals to the consultation

process. There would be further opportunities for them to engage with the Cultural Strategy and the actions that will flow from it, as the process moves forward. Members raised the issue of retaining young creative talent in the city. It was explained that this concern had already been identified as one of the three work areas that would be pursued in parallel to the development of the full strategy document. A Member enquired if the Strategy would include other areas and take the opportunity to explore fully the meaning of culture and also drive performance outcomes in areas such as health and include sport.

It was noted that a further report would come back to update Members of the Scrutiny Committee – Economy and Executive on progress. The fact that this Strategy was being produced in collaboration with an external Partnership was noted. The development timetable needed to accommodate the joint working and wider contribution it entailed would also strengthen the strategy, when it came to deliver its agreed actions.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and supported the direction being taken as summarised in the report to develop the Cultural Strategy for Exeter.

(Report circulated)

27 Youth Unemployment

The Partnerships and Projects Manager, Employment and Skills Board introduced the report, which provided current data on levels of youth unemployment and the nature of support available for young job seekers. The report also provided background information in preparation for a presentation from Jobcentre Plus on the support offered to young people (aged 18-24) to move into work.

Janet Sinclair and Sue Parr from Job Centre Plus gave a presentation on the efforts being made to tackle youth unemployment. They covered a range of measures including the Get Britain Working initiative and youth contracts which included a wage incentive and apprenticeship programme. An invitation was extended to Members to visit the Job Centre to see the work on training and employment opportunities for young people. Janet Sinclair referred to the work they carried out in schools and colleges to ensure students were given realistic advice about the jobs market, and to match young people to the most appropriate work experience or apprenticeship placement. Job Centre Plus provided a locally supported framework, but she paid tribute to the voluntary sector, as they also offered a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report and thanked Janet Sinclair and Sue Parr from Job Centre Plus for their presentation on the support available to help young people (age 18-24) move into work.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

28 Low Average Earnings in Exeter

The Tourism and Economy Manager presented the report, raising Members' attention to the potential impact of low average wages on both the local economy and citizens across Exeter. The report provided comparative data with which to gauge Exeter's current position and the degree of deviation that exists from national and other South West authority levels.

A Member sought some further information on the apparent discrepancy between the local and national analysis of full and part-time employees. The Economy and Tourism Manager acknowledged that the hourly rate had not increased at the rate of some other areas. Devon had many small employers and the retail, tourism and hospitality industries had all suffered in the current economic downturn. The report acknowledged that Exeter had failed to keep up with wage rates both nationally or regionally, but that every effort would be made to try and encourage higher wage levels.

A Member considered that an appropriate wage was important, and would be part of a virtuous circle to help stimulate the local economy. It could even reduce the reliance on social payments or boost efforts to reduce youth unemployment. He suggested that a forum of interested groups around Exeter could be a useful way forward. A Member suggested a strategy to ensure a living wage was offered for all employment. The Strategic Director (KH) considered that many Exeter businesses do pay well, with wage levels measured by work place higher than wage levels by place of residence, but a range of job opportunities should be encouraged to retain skilled and well trained employees and stem the flow of graduates leaving for employment opportunities in other areas. Members suggested setting up a task and finish group with a wide economic remit but also to improve the low wage economy and reduce youth unemployment.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the contents of the report and the potential impact on citizens and the wider economy, and agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to look at ways to address the low wage economy.

(Report circulated)

29 **Report of the Christmas Lights Task and Finish Group**

The City Centre Manager presented the report setting out key outputs from the work of the Task and Finish Group, which had been set up to look at the future funding of the City Centre Christmas Lights. The key element was the delivery of a core lighting display funded by the City Council, offering a lead for businesses to follow. This would require a core budget of £14,500 for the financial years 2013/14; 2014/15 and 2015/16. The Task and Finish Group suggested a range of activities including targeting businesses to develop and support a new partnership approach to Christmas Lights funding. It was agreed that the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism should work closely with officers on developing a co-ordinated approach to securing business support for the proposed approach to lights funding.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy supported the proposals from the Task and Finish Group as set out in paragraph 3.7 of the circulated report and requested approval by the Executive for an identified £14,500 budget for 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16 to provide a core display of Christmas Lights.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

30 **Economy Scrutiny Revenue Final Accounts 2012/2013**

The Senior Accountant presented the report advising Members of the overall financial performance of the Economy and Development Directorate for the 2012/13 financial year ended 31 March 2013. The final actual outturn had now been calculated and the report highlighted the major differences by management unit from the approved annual budget after adjusting for supplementary budgets and excluding the variance on capital charges. The total variation for the year shows a surplus of

£811,033 against the budget, with a final surplus of £856,527 after accounting for transfers to and from earmarked reserves and revenue contributions to capital. The main variations by management units were detailed.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the report.

(Report circulated)

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

RESOLVED that, under Section 100A 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 discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Act.

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

32 **Exeter and Heart of Devon Growth Board Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Exeter and Heart of Devon Growth Board minutes held on 30 April 2013 was circulated for Members' information, and to inform them of a number of issues that the City Council will need to consider and take forward as appropriate. The Economy and Tourism Manager updated Members on the broadband position statement for Exeter. She raised a number of issues in relation to capacity, and future progress on fibre connectivity. The Chair advised that he would discuss the matter with the City Council's Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism and make every effort to raise the broadband issue with Devon County Council colleagues.

The Economy and Tourism Manager also raised an issue about Air Passenger Duty and a possible reform of the duty payable in an effort to support regional airports. The Chair agreed to speak to colleagues on the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

Scrutiny Committee – Economy noted the content of the Exeter and Heart of Devon Growth Board Minutes.

(Report circulated to Members)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.40 pm

Chair